

CASTLE WILDERNESS NEWS

Vol. 15, No. 2, May 2005



Executive Director's Report

by Judy Huntley

Four months have zipped by since I came back as executive director of CCWC. It has been a thoroughly busy and interesting time and the next months look at least as interesting, with a fine set of hikes and hopefully a number of restoration weekends, as well as the important judicial events.

April 16 we brought CCWC's display to the Tower Climb in Calgary, April 24 took in the Earth Day celebration at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton, and on April 25 we displayed and spoke to a large gathering of environmentally keen students at the Calgary Science Centre. Be sure to pass on suggestions if you know of other places our story should be told.

In late April, we hosted Dr Brian Horejsi's presentations in Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton on the grizzly bears of SW Alberta. In Lethbridge he spoke to an enthusiastic crowd of 90. His report, *Grizzly Bears in Southern Alberta, a Vision and Plan for Population and Habitat Recovery, 2004*, is available on the CCWC website. Thanks to the many volunteers who helped make the events happen, and to Alberta Ecotrust, NRDC and Calgary Foundation who provided support for the research.

Strategic Partnerships

The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has taken the lead on strategic planning for the Castle Wilderness this year. The Castle Working Group brings together lead people from AWA, CCWC, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), WildCanada.net, and Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y), in order to provide each other with updates on their Castle-focused work, design campaign materials, and ensure that future strategies are coordinated and efficient.

What you can do for the Castle Wilderness

Tell the Castle Wilderness story yourself! This is a fine time to write your local paper and remind others in your community that the Castle needs proper protection. It is at the top of most lists of Alberta areas needing more protection, and is on the Natural Resources Defense Fund list of international Biogems. Be sure people know that the Castle has the most biodiversity of any part of Alberta outside Waterton. Please send us, and ideally your MLA, a copy of your letter. We also welcome small

reports (or stories, or poems) from your trips into the Castle. Some of these will be printed in the newsletter or posted on the website.

The photo library always needs updating, as well. If you have good images of the Castle area that you are willing to share, we would welcome them. If you have pictures of the same place taken several years apart, that would be particularly interesting.

We encourage you to take on a stewardship area or do a stewardship report, or to work on a restoration project. You might want to take part in the Alberta Water Quality Awareness (AWQA) Day. The program provides free test kits for participants to learn about the water quality of any lake, stream or wetland of interest. The findings will be pulled together to create a snapshot of water quality in the province. More info at <http://www.awqa.ca/AWQA/home/awqaIndex.asp>

E-mail

Please let me know your current email address, and tell me if you prefer to receive newsletters by email only.

Welcome back, Jeff!

We are all delighted to have Jeff Emmett, with his energy and expertise, on the CCWC Board.

Thanks

To all of you who continue to be members, and who support CCWC's work with your donations of time and money, we extend sincere thanks and hope your summer will include at least one trip into this beautiful place. •



Kimberley Pearson

Salamanders in the Castle. See article on page 3.

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Upcoming Meeting

All are welcome at the Annual General Meeting,
 Saturday, May 28, 10:30 – 4:30, Lebel Mansion, Pincher Creek
 See newsletter announcement or the website

Newsletter

Editor: Judy Huntley.
 This newsletter welcomes comments and/or submissions from
 members and others. Please send submissions by mail or e-mail to
 the office. Please check with the office for submission deadlines.

The opinions, evaluations, claims and assertions contained in articles
 appearing in the Castle Wilderness News are the responsibility
 of their authors, and may not reflect the policies of the Castle-
 Crown Wilderness Coalition. The office takes responsibility for
 articles, notices, etc., for which an author is not identified.

Production: Murray Coppold. Thanks to Rosemary Coppold,
 who addresses, stamps, stuffs and mails the newsletter to you.

*Donations to CCWC are tax creditable
 and greatly appreciated.*

Annual General Meeting

**Saturday May 28, 10:30 to 4:30
 Lebel Mansion, Pincher Creek**

Agenda

10:30 Gather and greet
 10:45 Business meeting
 11:30 Discussion of future plans
 12:15 Potluck lunch
 1:30 Hikers leave for Carbondale
 (see hiking schedule)
 1:45 Afternoon speaker



Coming Events

- May 14 First CCWC hike of the season, to Antelope Butte. See the hiking schedule enclosed with this newsletter.
- May 19 The appeal hearing of the Judicial Review is scheduled to be at the Court of Appeal (26th floor, TCPL Building, 450 1st Street SW, Calgary). The hearing will be 3 hours long and will probably commence at 10 AM.
- May 28 The Annual General Meeting starts at 10:30 AM at the Lebel Mansion, at 696 Kettles Street in Pincher Creek.
- June 3–5 The Third Annual Crowsnest Pass Birding Festival. For details please visit <http://www.crowsnestconservation.ca>
- June 4 11th annual Crowsnest Stewardship Day. More info: <http://www.cnpquadsquad.com/StewardshipDay.htm>
- July 9 Restoration/weed blitz day. Volunteers are needed by the Pincher Creek Watershed Group to clear the entire Pincher Creek Watershed of blueweed. We hope you can join the crew! You can register on their website, wcvwg.org, or by calling me at the office. This day connects public and private lands restoration work, and needs energetic volunteers.

For more information on any of these events check the website www.ccwc.ab.ca, or contact Judy Huntley at the office



Stewards Needed

Stewardship is one of CCWC's key roles, and stewards reports from around the Castle Wilderness are crucially important. Individual reports have drawn the attention of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Alberta Community Development and Shell Canada to particular issues of concern. Through our Stewards we have addressed illegal ORV activity and trails, overgrazing or trampling of springs and streambanks, identification of, and remediation work on, high erosion areas or areas of weed infestation, seemingly inappropriate logging activities, and a variety of issues related to Shell Canada's infrastructure in the Castle (roads, pipelines and wellsites).

We urge you to embrace this important task of monitoring the State of the Castle for your favorite area. You don't have to be a botanist or any other specialist to report your impressions. We welcome your input/reflections/photographs in whatever format you choose. To register, contact the office and we will provide you with useful resources to assist your reporting. •



Fish Versus Salamanders in the Castle

by Kimberly Pearson

Throughout the world, introduced species are recognized as one of the top threats to biodiversity. The Castle Wilderness is no exception. Besides dozens of species of non-native vegetation, introduced animals are also upsetting nature's balance. From 2002 to 2004, I researched the effects of introduced fish on the long-toed salamander in Waterton Lakes National Park and the Castle Wilderness. Fish appeared to have had a significant impact on the salamander in the area.

Looking back a century ago, approximately 95% of the area's ponds and lakes were fishless. Fish could not access lakes at high elevations due to their remoteness and steep stream gradients. Most low-elevation ponds that lacked connections to fish-bearing rivers or creeks were also fishless. The fishless nature of most standing waterbodies meant that amphibians such as the long-toed salamander and Columbia spotted frog evolved in the absence of major aquatic predators.

This situation has changed greatly over the past century. Brook, golden, rainbow and cutthroat trout have been introduced to the majority of the area's waterbodies, in order to create recreational angling opportunities. Introduced trout now remain in approximately 40% of the Castle Wilderness high-elevation (>1500 m above sea level) lakes. The naïve salamander larvae fall as ready prey to the trout. Of the 30 high-elevation sites that I surveyed, 14 (47%) contained trout and nine (30%) contained salamander larvae, while none contained both. None of the lakes with trout contained larvae, whereas nine (56%) of the 16 lakes without trout did contain salamanders.

These numbers tell a sad story for the salamander. At high-elevations, cold waters slow the salamander's development, so they require up to three years at the aquatic stage. In order to survive the winters, they need lakes of sufficient depth. Unfortunately, most of those suitable lakes are the ones where trout are thriving. A U.S. study predicted that, due to the continued presence of trout in a large proportion of the salamander's most suitable habitats, long-toed salamanders are slowly being extirpated from entire high-elevation basins.

I also examined the situation at 27 low-elevation ponds located within a few hundred metres of fish-bearing rivers. There I found that 10 (37%) of the sites contained trout and 21 (78%) contained salamander larvae; four (15%) of the sites contained both. I expect that salamanders were able to coexist with trout at some of these low-elevation sites because of more complex habitats that reduce the efficiency of predation. That salamander larvae were present in all low-elevation sites that did not contain trout strongly suggests that trout are a significant limiting factor in the distribution of low-elevation salamander populations.

I followed my field surveys with a series of experiments that confirmed that trout predation was the main mechanism responsible for the pattern I observed in the field. Through these experiments, I also identified that minnows, commonly introduced into waterbodies as bait fish, also have the potential to negatively impact amphibian populations. •



FireSmart Logging at Castle Mountain Resort

by James Tweedie

Following the scare of the Lost Creek wildfire in 2003, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) has thrown millions of dollars into the FireSmart program aimed at protecting Alberta communities adjacent to the public forest lands. Castle Mountain Resort (CMR) was immediately identified as a high-risk community and in August 2004, ASRD issued a permit to CMR to harvest and thin forest to the south of the resort on the west (ie.skihill) side of the Westcastle River, in the area proposed for their Haig Ridge expansion. This permit was issued a month after the Judicial Review decision that had quashed the Minister of Environment's decision not to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) at CMR.

The CCWC was alerted to the actual logging taking place by one of our members from Calgary who was skiing in the valley over the Christmas holiday. Our Conservation Director

made enquiries to ASRD and obtained details of the permit and a map of the proposed cutblocks and thinning areas and made a field trip to the site. Access to the area was prohibited by signage at a newly built bridge over Gravenstafel Creek at the edge of CMR's townsite. Accessing the cutblocks from the south, he observed and photographed some of the cutting and registered a complaint with ASRD, both with regard to the logging itself and with regard to the Judicial Review decision on the EIA.

ASRD has subsequently initiated an investigation of the logging that was carried out, but they assert that: *The FireSmart operations were reviewed by SRD to ensure that they did not have any linkage to proposed resort expansion as per direction provided in Madam Justice Kenny's ruling of July 2, 2004.* What that seems to tell us is that the silo approach to *see FireSmart on page 4 ...*



Are We Just a Bunch of Whiners?

by Gord Petersen

At a February conference in Exeter, U.K., called Stabilisation 2005, climate scientists warned that the risks from climate change are “more serious than previously thought,” and that we may be getting dangerously close to several “tipping points” that would trigger irreversible changes like the melting of polar ice caps.

Then in early April, the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment were released. The Assessment, backed by the UN, the World Bank, and the World Resources Institute, pulled together the work of over 1,300 scientists from 95 countries. It concluded that we’re changing and destroying the world’s ecosystems at an unsustainable rate. For example, it argues that both fisheries and fresh water have already been degraded to the point where they will be unable to sustain existing demand, let alone provide for any increased use.

Closer to home, the Castle continues to be abused, and its condition continues to deteriorate. Are your eyes already glazing over? Should any of this be cause for concern, or is it just more whining by environmentalists? Yawn ...

What got me thinking about this was a comment made by a friend of the CCWC. She said that we come across as being “whiny.” And even if we don’t think we’re a bunch of whiners, we’d better pay attention to how we’re perceived in the community.

To be honest, it’s easy to understand how we could be viewed as doing a lot of whining. While we do have a positive vision for the future—“A world in which wilderness survives so that wild lands and wildlife may thrive, and future generations can know their natural beauty and diversity”—we seldom get to speak to that vision. Instead, we find ourselves spending most of our time reacting to the actions of others, whether it’s CMR’s expansion plans, more drilling by Shell, or increased off-road activity. Being on the defensive most of the time, and saying “No!” so often, probably does make us sound a little whiny.

... *FireSmart* continued from page 3

permits and approvals surrounding CMR’s development is still alive and well, at least in ASRD.

The permit also identifies areas to be cleared on the east side of the river—an area that has long been identified as the key wildlife corridor through the valley. That clearing has yet to be carried out and SRD’s letter to the CCWC’s Conservation Director states: *It is our hope that any relevant information from the impending legal review will be available for consideration prior to that time.*

That comment seems to indicate that SRD does not understand the appeal, as the issue before the Court of

Of course, there are other forces at work here as well. Whether through inattention on the part of environmentalists, or through the skill of the right wing, those of us who are concerned about the environment have been painted as a special interest group that is simply looking after its own self-interest. Similarly, much of the public has ceased to see the environment as the source and sustainer of life, and instead sees it as something that is external, and that can be paid attention to, or ignored, as we see fit.

These are some of the issues that Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus discuss in their controversial and thought-provoking essay *The Death of Environmentalism, Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World* (see www.thebreakthrough.org/images/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf). They argue that “If environmentalists hope to become more than a special interest we must start framing our proposals around core ... values and start seeing our own values as central to what motivates and guides our politics.” Further, Shellenberger and Nordhaus argue that environmentalists need to provide a “positive, transformative vision” rather than simply focusing on the problems. As they observe, “Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ‘I have a dream speech’ is famous because it put forward an inspiring, positive vision that carried a critique of the current moment within it. Imagine how history would have turned out had King given an ‘I have a nightmare’ speech instead.”

Should we abandon our zero-tolerance policy, and shift to a policy of focusing on values and possibilities? I don’t think the Castle could stand that, but our efforts would probably be well-served if we tried a little harder to promote our positive vision of a vibrant, healthy future for the Castle. •

Appeal is the Government’s Appeal of Justice Kenny’s ruling, and is a matter of law, not environmental information. ASRD need look no further than its own Fish and Wildlife Division to obtain the **relevant information** regarding the wildlife corridor on the east side of the river. That is information that the Public Lands Division of SRD attempted to prevent the Director of Regulatory Assurance, in Alberta Environment, responsible for the EIA decision, from seeing back in 2001/2. *In consideration of the current human use levels in the valley, it is necessary that a significant portion of the entire valley bottom should be designated as a wildlife corridor.* (our emphasis, F and W Division Assessment, Nov 2001). •