

Victories to Celebrate

by James Tweedie, Conservation Director

As long-time advocates for protecting the Castle, we have to find occasions to celebrate our successes, even if the Castle Wilderness as a whole continues unprotected.

Small victories

One such small success followed our intervention to Alberta Environment in Castle Mountain Resort's application for water withdrawal for snowmaking last fall, reported on in our last Newsletter. More recently, the follow-up from the Alberta Parks Branch demonstrates that this agency is prepared to take protection of the Westcastle River Wetlands Ecological Reserve seriously, now that they have recovered their administrative control of those lands from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, who had previously acted as land-manager for the Reserve. As the recent "one-pager" from the Parks Branch indicates, they are even prepared to make recommendations for increasing protection of additional lands around the Reserve. This is something that the CCWC has pressed for ever since the Municipal District of Pincher Creek obtained title to 35 acres of public land east of the Westcastle River adjacent to the Wetlands Ecological Reserve. The Department's "One-Pager" is welcome reading for CCWC members (see page 4).

A bigger victory—C5 Forest Management Plan deferred

After taking the lead in mobilizing local groups to recognize the importance of the C5 Forest Management Plan, the CCWC was encouraged to hear Minister Ted Morton announce that the 20 year logging Plan has been put on hold. The C5 Plan encompasses the area of public lands south of Kananaskis Country, and includes the headwaters of the Oldman, including the Castle and also the public lands of the Porcupine Hills.

The Minister's announcement refers to deferring the Plan until the Oldman Watershed Council has come up with a management plan for the whole headwaters region, as part of the province's "Water for Life" Policy. That is all to the good, as the Oldman Watershed Council is still at only a preliminary stage of developing any Management Plan, and has yet to complete a baseline inventory of the water resources of the Basin.

A major reason for the deferral is confirmed in the documents obtained through the CCWC's Freedom of Information Access request: currently the Plan has seriously failed to meet the Province's protocol for consultation with First Nations. The Kainaiwa notified the C5 Coordinator in September 2004 that the consultation process failed to meet the requirements for engaging with the Blood Tribe Council, stating: "It is vital that Alberta recognize the overarching principle that consultation with the Blood Tribe, particularly respecting resource management, must take place in a government-to-government context. Any process or protocol must reflect that principle. While Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework seems to recognize that concept in theory, that approach needs to be applied in practice."

And was it just a coincidence that the Minister's announcement was made on the very same day that the CCWC's Conservation Director was finally allowed to view the 5,000 pages of documents pertaining to the C5 planning process? These reveal a host of other problems, including the failure of the plan to articulate a clear vision for the future of the forested area of the upper watersheds and the failure of the timber supply modelling to incorporate provisions for maintaining old growth forests, for maintaining biodiversity, for maintaining grizzly bear habitat and connectivity, and for ensuring the survival of endangered species. The documents also reveal that the much touted "20% surge cut" that is supposed to be required to address the threats posed by the Mountain Pine Beetle cannot be justified in terms of forestry values alone. •



Silke Gade



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Upcoming Meeting

Members are welcome to attend board meetings.
Contact the office for details.

June 30 – *Riparian Health Workshop for Stewards* – Michael Gerrand

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.***

Dr. Gerald A. Wright – “Gerry”

—by James Tweedie, Conservation Director

On April 5th a number of CCWC members joined the family and friends of Gerry Wright at the Galt Museum in Lethbridge to celebrate a life lived to its full. Active and engaged until only his last few weeks, Gerry died on March 31st at the age of 89. The CCWC has lost one of its original founding members, a stalwart supporter of conservation, the original leader of our ongoing hiking program and an inspiration and friend to many of us who traveled with him through the Castle on many memorable excursions. Our sympathy goes out to Marion and the family. Gerry was always noted as a master of the understatement, but in her Memorial notice for Gerry, Marion has surpassed him:

“Gerald was known for his good-natured humour, his understatement, his unflappability in even the most dangerous situations, his spirit of adventure, and his love and respect for the natural world and in particular his passion for the mountains. He was a conservationist. He enriched many lives. He will be missed.” •

Annual General Meeting

Remember that the AGM this year is Saturday May 12 at 10:30, at the Lebel Mansion in Pincher Creek.

The keynote speaker (note the change) is Lorne Fitch, speaking about “Rocks, grass, trees and critters”, a beautiful presentation.

Lunch will be served. A hike will be arranged following the meeting, according to the weather. Please consider becoming a Director.

Time to Renew

Remember that May is Renewal month. New eggs if you're a chorus frog, new blossoms if you're a shooting star or Calypso, renewed membership to CCWC!

Please note that you can now do donations online. This is a much simpler method than we had before, and much less expensive. Click the button soon to be on CCWC's website, or go to CanadaHelps.org, search “Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition” or just “Castle”, and follow the instructions. Your first \$10.00 will be your annual membership, and you will receive a charitable receipt for anything you donate beyond \$10.00. Remember to post your name and contact info (include email please) so we can send both the receipt and your newsletters.



Thanks again to our excellent supporting members and to our funders, especially Wilburforce, Lethbridge Community and Fanwood Foundations, Yellowstone to Yukon, and the Alberta Stewardship Network.



Groups Welcome the CCWC's Message

by James Tweedie, Conservation Director

As the CCWC's Conservation Director, I participated in a number of public events in Lethbridge in late February and March where the conservation message for the Castle was welcomed by other participants. These included the AGM of the Oldman Watershed Council, the University of Lethbridge's Biology and Environment Group's Environmental Fair and the Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators and Southern Alberta Youth for Environmental Education "Summit".

The AGM of the Oldman Watershed Council was held on March 15th, where the CCWC, in our role as an active Watershed Stewardship Group, participated with a display.

On March 21st and 22nd I set up both our CCWC display and our Andy Russell-I'tai sah kop Wildland display at the University of Lethbridge's Biology and Environment Group's two-day Environmental Fair. I provided a lunchtime presentation to the student group against a background of images from our slide library, eliciting good response and serious questions from the students. I was particularly pleased, even as the CCWC's techno-peasant, to put to good use the new laptop computer and digital projector made possible by the Lethbridge Foundation's 2006 grant.

On March 29th I participated in the Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators and Southern Alberta Youth for Environmental Education "Summit" held at the

new Galt Museum public facility – again providing display materials for participants and making some contributions to the daylong workshop.

On April 17th, Judy and I spoke to the "graduating class" of volunteers at CPAWS Calgary-Banff, who had gone through an entire winter of training sessions. On the 22nd Wendy and I took the full display and materials, including background slides for AWA to project, to the annual Tower Climb in Calgary.

The overall sense of support and endorsement for the CCWC's goals that I brought away from these events was encouraging and stimulating, especially from the University students who were clearly hungry to understand how land use decisions get made in Alberta—not something that falls under any of their curricula. Given that most students' awareness of the Castle comes from skiing at Castle Mountain Resort, I was not surprised at having to field questions on those issues and was encouraged by their clear support for more protection for the surrounding public lands.

The organisers of all these events have to be commended for providing invaluable networking opportunities for Southern Albertans concerned with our collective environmental and conservation agendas. •



Coalition News

by Judy Huntley, Executive Director

Thanks to volunteers and letter writers. Many members have written to Ministers and the Premier over the last months, done phone-outs, distributed leaflets, produced and distributed the newsletter, and helped in the office. **Thanks**—to you all! Your help makes a huge difference.

National Geographic Map. The National Geographic Society is developing a new type of community-based map for the Crown of the Continent region of SW Alberta, SE British Columbia, and northern Montana. They'd like people to nominate any place, event, experience or activity that captures this region's beauty, diversity and unique feel, and are looking for examples of what people in the region are doing to sustain these special values through creative stewardship initiatives. Go to www.crownofthecontinent.net for more info and nominate by May 11.

Summer programs. CCWC is delighted to have hired Wendy Ryan as our summer staff person. Wendy is a founder of CCWC, and knows the land and the issues well. She will focus on recruiting and supporting new Stewardship volunteers, linking with similar programs in other organizations,

arranging workshops, helping with the hiking program, and doing outreach. You can connect with her at the AGM or at the office. She'll be pleased to get your ideas for the Stewardship program, and to sign you up!

Area events – please take part

Environmental science students from the U of C have been assessing the impact of sour gas wells in the Castle Mountain area for the last eight months, and will present their findings at the Pincher Creek Community Hall on April 27, 2–6 PM.

All 4th Fridays through the summer – Pitch In for 20 minutes to clean up your yard, your community, a creek or river bank, or your favorite spot.

The Crowsnest Forest Stewardship Society Annual Stewardship Day is Saturday, June 2. **Free** sponsored breakfast and supper. Meet at Blairmore SRD Forestry Office 7:30 AM. Bring water, lunch, gloves, boots, hand tools, hat, suntan lotion. More info: 627 2796 or 564 4242. •



Alberta Parks Interests in West Castle Valley

— a “backgrounder” by Alberta Parks Branch

Early in the new year of 2006, Alberta Parks identified a number of data management issues and resource knowledge deficiencies that needed to be addressed to better manage the West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve (WWER). As a result, during the spring, summer and fall of 2006 and winter of 2007 Alberta Parks carried out the following activities to address management needs:

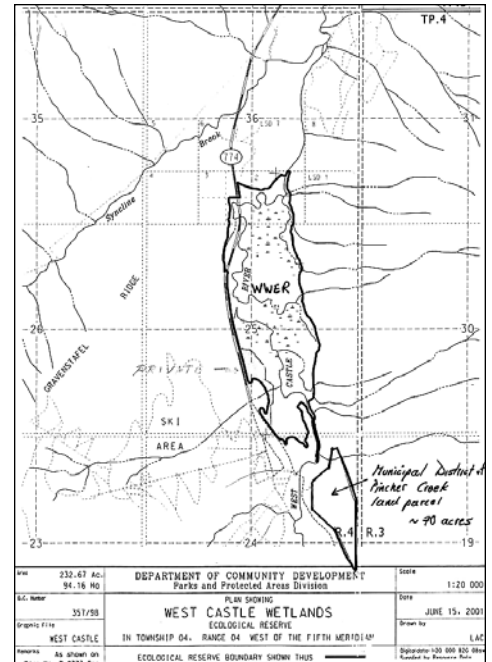
- A large volume of biophysical information pertinent to the West Castle River Valley above Syncline Brook was obtained from a number of organizations (e.g., Natural Resources Conservation Board, Private Consulting Companies, Crown Castle Wilderness Coalition, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Alberta Natural Heritage Information Center, and Castle Mountain Ski Hill). This information was reviewed, summarized and archived in the Alberta Parks South West Area Lethbridge Office.
- A vegetation and rare plant survey of the WWER and Municipal District of Pincher Creek Lands was carried out in the summer of 2006.
- A summer and fall fisheries inventory, bull trout redd surveys and winter (2007) fish use survey were conducted at the Westcastle River within the WWER.
- Annotated species lists for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and fish were compiled for the WWER, MD Lands, and West Castle River Valley. Species lists for vascular and non-vascular plants for the WWER and MD lands were also compiled.
- Vertebrate species of special interest and their critical habitats have been identified with reference to seasonal and life cycle habitats contained within the WWER.

Significance of Recent Parks Management Activities and Studies

- Parks has a comprehensive database that will allow for better management and protection of WWER.
- Two rare vegetation communities have been documented at the WWER, e.g., Forest Swamp Vegetation Community – *Picea engelmanni* / *Calamagrostis canadensis* Forest (Engelman spruce / Bluejoint Forest) has a limited distribution in Alberta and a Tall Willow Swamp Community – *Salix drummondiana* / *Calamagrostis canadensis* Shrubland (Drummond’s willow / Bluejoint shrubland) is vegetation community of Global interest and a new finding for the province.
- As per ANHIC rankings, 11 rare vascular plant species and 7 rare bryophyte species have been documented at the WWER and 1 rare vascular plant species and 8 rare

bryophyte species were documented at the MD Lands.

- Vegetation communities and rare plants contained within the WWER and MD lands are vulnerable to changes in land use in the West Castle Watershed.



- Fisheries work initiated by Alberta Parks in 2006 and 2007 has reaffirmed the conclusions of previous fisheries investigations carried out in the early and late 1990s that identified portions of the Westcastle River within the WWER and upstream of the WWER as being critical (spawning and overwintering) fisheries habitat for bull trout and cutthroat trout. Critical fisheries habitat is closely associated with groundwater inputs and is vulnerable to land use changes in the West Castle Watershed.
- Within the annotated list of vertebrate species for the West Castle Valley the 2000 Alberta Wildlife Status Report lists 4 species as being “At Risk”, 6 species as being “Maybe at Risk” and 38 species as being “Sensitive”.
- Three sensitive species of amphibians (e.g., long-toed salamander, Columbia spotted frog and boreal toad) breed within the WWER and it is highly probable that each of these species also utilize habitats outside of the WWER at different times of the year and at different stages of their life cycles.
- The WWER and MD Lands provide movement corridors for carnivores (including grizzly bears and wolves) and ungulates.

In summary, work initiated by Alberta Parks has substantially increased our knowledge base of resources contained within the WWER and has highlighted the importance of protecting other lands in the West Castle River Watershed, e.g., MD Lands. Consideration should be given to pursuing transfer of lands from the MD of Pincher Creek back to Alberta government and then providing a high level of conservation protection. •