

News Release

July 7th 2003, for Immediate Release

Castle~Crown Wilderness Coalition Launches Second Year of Restoration Project

The Castle~Crown Wilderness Coalition (CCWC) is proud to launch the second year of its restoration pilot project, *Restoring the Castle Wilderness*. Restoring the Castle Wilderness is an on-the-ground project that puts staff and volunteers to work in the field to help restore the ecological integrity of the valuable Castle Wilderness in southwestern Alberta. The project is made possible through the support of Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program.

Guided by the thoroughly researched scientific work "Bringing it Back: A Restoration Framework for the Castle Wilderness" invading noxious weeds are pulled, trail erosion is controlled, and the re-vegetation of unlawful, inappropriate trails is helped along. All restoration work is approved by the land managers of the area, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

"It feels great to be outside and actively helping the environment. We are working toward the goal of ecologically sound and secure public lands; this will help native plants and animals, all of us who drink and use the water that flows from these beautiful headwaters and the neighbours of the Castle Wilderness in Waterton Lakes National Park, B.C. and the U.S. Give us a call to come on out and help us give nature a hand!" said Jeffrey Emmett, Executive Director of the CCWC.

"It is very encouraging to see that the work we did last year is making a difference," said Chris Wutzke, Program Coordinator for the restoration work. "This year, we will build on last year's work. We are set to make some real progress on invading noxious weed infestations with two seasons of strategic weed control. By setting the weeds back we are helping the native plants establish themselves again, and helping the downstream farmers and ranchers control weeds on their land."

Restoration has been noted by scientists as one of the most environmentally important tasks of our time.

Backgrounder

The Castle Wilderness is a 1040 sq. km area of provincial public land that stretches along the Rocky Mountain's Eastern Slopes from Waterton Lakes National Park to the Crowsnest Pass in southwestern Alberta. The area is noted as having among the richest mix of biodiversity in the province. Over half of Alberta's 1600 plants can be found in the Castle, including many rare plants and trees. The area is also crucial to wildlife migration for many large mammals, including Grizzly Bears. Dr. Chris Servheen, director of the U.S. Interagency Grizzly Bear Recovery Team, has stated flatly that if the Crowsnest Pass is lost to conservation, grizzly bears will be lost to the United States. Clearly, the protection and restoration of the Castle Wilderness is a very important step in sustaining biological diversity in Alberta.

Roads, Off-Road Vehicles, industrial and commercial development all fragment habitat, provide a means for invasive weeds to establish themselves in the wilderness and contribute to erosion that damages fisheries. Restoring the Castle Wilderness is a pilot project that seeks to demonstrate how we can begin to restore the damaged areas of the Castle Wilderness to preserve and protect the area's immense ecological value for generations to come.

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For more information contact: Jeffrey Emmett, ph. 403-627-5059, email: office@ccwc.ab.ca

"Bringing it Back: A Restoration Framework for the Castle Wilderness" is available in pdf at: www.ccwc.ab.ca

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Natural Resources Defense Council * Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Calgary/Banff Chapter Wildcanada.net * Sierra Club of Canada

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Energy Exploration in Alberta's Castle Wilderness Would Threaten Wildlife

Conservation Groups Call on Provincial Government to Legislate Protection

WASHINGTON (April 15, 2003) – Shell Canada's plan to survey for gas reserves in southwest Alberta would threaten wildlife and could open the region to further drilling, according to a coalition of Canadian and American environmental groups. The groups today called on the Alberta government to pass a law protecting the Castle Wilderness, a critical link in the Yellowstone-to-Yukon wildlife corridor for bears, wolves and other large mammals.

Shell made the announcement that it plans to begin the seismic gas survey on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains in today's edition of the Pincher Creek Echo, a weekly newspaper in Pincher Creek, Alberta. The company said it plans to start the survey this summer on land zoned for prime protection and critical wildlife in the Front Range Canyons. Shell also said it would not drill in a limited number of specific places, but it did not rule out development in many sensitive areas.

"Shell would have the public believe that it can expand its activities in this area without threatening the environment. It's just not so," says Dave Poulton, executive director of the Calgary/Banff Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "What the area requires is a law that would protect the region."

The Castle Wilderness contains some of the richest mix of biodiversity in Alberta. It lies on the northern edge of the U.S.-Canadian border "Crown of the Continent" ecosystem, providing a bridge for wildlife migrating between this region and the Central Rockies ecosystem to the north, and between Alberta's eastern slopes foothills to the Flathead Valley to the west of the Great Divide. (For a map, see <http://www.castlewilderness.ca/mapcastle.html>.)

"The value of the Castle Wilderness as a North American wildlife pathway cannot be overestimated," said James Tweedie, campaign manager at the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition. "Grizzly bears travel through the South Castle and West Castle valleys and the region is on a major migration route for bald and golden eagles, providing an abundance of nesting habitat."

Both Canadians and Americans are concerned about the fate of the Castle Wilderness. "Since March, our supporters have sent more than 4,000 letters asking Shell to support a wildland provincial park in the Castle," said Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, a senior attorney at NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), a U.S.-based

environmental group. "NRDC recently named the area an international BioGem." (For more information about NRDC's BioGem campaign, see [http://www.savebiogems.org/.](http://www.savebiogems.org/))

The coalition of Canadian and American conservation groups, including Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Calgary/Banff Chapter, Wildcanada.net, Sierra Club of Canada and NRDC, are proposing that the Alberta government protect the Castle Wilderness as a "wildland provincial" park. A wildland park would allow non-motorized recreation – fishing, hunting, dogsledding and hiking – but ban industrial development.

"The Alberta government has received thousands of letters requesting legislated protection of the Castle," said Nadine Reynolds, campaign coordinator with Wildcanada.net, host of the Castle Action Centre at <http://www.wildcanada.net/castle>. "It is time that the government listened."

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The Natural Resources Defense Council is a U.S. non-profit organization of lawyers, scientists and environmental specialists engaged in advocacy to protect the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has more than 550,000 members. For more information, visit NRDC's Web site: www.nrdc.org.

Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition is a Canadian non-profit organization located in Pincher Creek, Alberta concerned about the future of the Castle region. For more information, visit CCWC's Web site: [http://www.cwc.ab.ca/.](http://www.cwc.ab.ca/)

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society is Canada's grassroots voice for wilderness. With thousands of members from coast to coast to coast it is dedicated to the preservation of Canada's native biodiversity and wilderness in a network of parks and similar protected areas. The Calgary/Banff Chapter of CPAWS is responsible for this work in southern Alberta. For more information, visit CPAWS-Calgary/Banff Chapter's Web site: [http://www.cpawscalgary.org/.](http://www.cpawscalgary.org/)

Wildcanada.net is a Canadian non-profit organization working to protect wildlands and wildlife by combining grassroots outreach with sophisticated on-line action tools. For more information, visit Wildcanada.net's Web site: [http://www.wildcanada.net/.](http://www.wildcanada.net/)

Sierra Club has been active in Canada since 1969, working on matters of public policy and environmental awareness. The organization has local chapters and working groups across Canada, including the Sierra Club Chinook Chapter in southern Alberta. For more information visit Sierra Club of Canada's Web site: [http://www.sierraclub.ca/.](http://www.sierraclub.ca/)

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Provincial Departments Contravene Freedom of Information Act over the West Castle Development

For Immediate Release, January 20, 2003

Alberta's Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has found that the Provincial Government's departments of Environment and Sustainable Resources Development have contravened the province's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. So far, the departments have refused to respond to a citizen's request made in early July 2002 for information relating to Alberta Environment's decision to not require an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of Castle Mountain Resort Inc.'s development at West Castle, located north of Waterton Lakes National Park.

On December 19th, the Commissioner recommended that the information request "be processed immediately without delay if it has not been done so already." Environment Minister, Lorne Taylor, was copied on the report. The applicant, Dianne Pachal, has yet to receive the information.

"A new town's being built in the West Castle headwaters, directly affecting public water, wildlife and lands, including Waterton Lakes National Park," explains Pachal. "We all cherish the Eastern Slopes and any citizen has the right to see what information the government used to make its decision to not require an EIA. "After repeated enquiries of the departments as to why her July 5th and 8th applications for the information had not been answered, on October 8th she formally asked the Commissioner to conduct a review.

Public bodies have 30 days to respond to a request for information and Pachal agreed to a 30-day extension, but no response was received. The letter from the Commissioner's office concludes that, "the public body's failure to respond to a request within the 30-day period was a decision to refuse access to the applicant."

"I'm astounded that they've refused to make the information available," notes Pachal. "It makes you wonder if they're trying to hide something," she added. Pachal is hopeful the information will be provided now, given the Commissioner's report and recommendation, albeit five months late.

Pachal has long been an advocate for wilderness and wildlife protection in Alberta. On the occasion of the 125th Anniversary of Canada, the Government of Canada awarded her a Commemorative Medal, "in recognition of significant contribution to compatriots, community and to Canada".

"Castle Mountain Resort is proceeding with their plan to add 137 housing units (single and multi-family dwellings) to the present 88 units and to expand the West Castle ski-hill. The Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition has recently launched legal proceedings against the government over its failure to require an EIA of the development. Years earlier, the province's Natural Resources Conservation Board ruled that a similar development could only proceed if most of the remainder of the Castle wildland was protected as a type of Wildland Park to mitigate the impacts of such a major development. In essence, they required protection of what was once part of Waterton Lakes National Park. The government has not established the new park and the development is proceeding.

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