

Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp

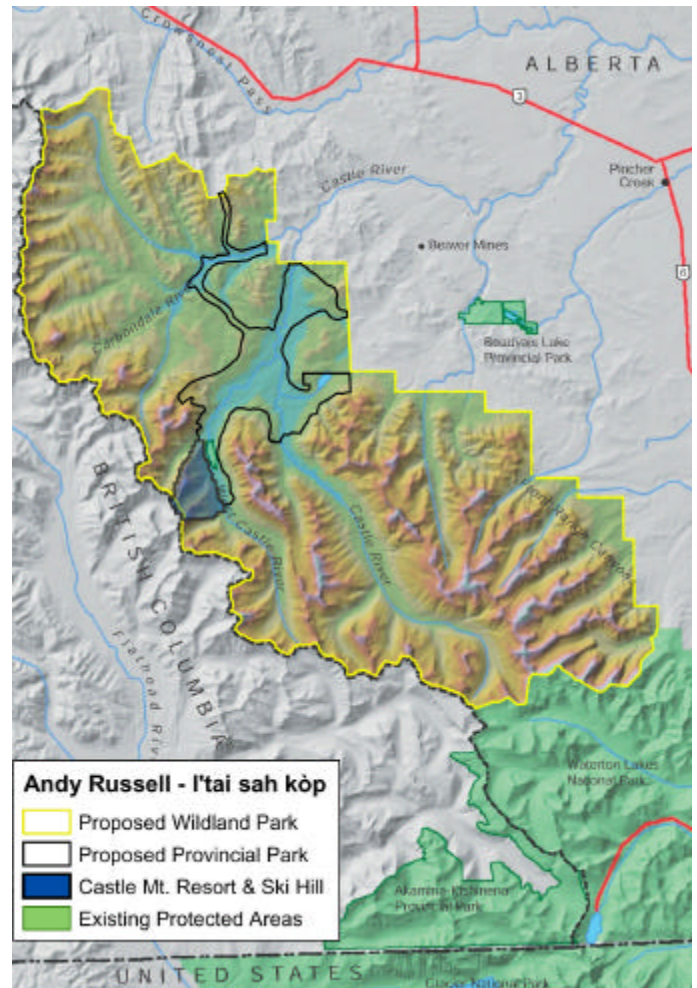
Proposed Wildland Park & Provincial Park for Southwest Alberta

Location: The proposed legislated protected area encompasses the 1040 km² (400 mi²) Castle Special Management Area Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) in southwest Alberta. It is a natural extension of the internationally renowned landscapes of Waterton Lakes National Park and together with Waterton is the most biological rich area in Alberta.

Commonly known as the Castle, Castle Wilderness or Castle-Carbondale, these lands are the headwaters of the Castle River. Known as I'tai sah kòp to the Piikani (Peigan) First Nation, it is part of their traditional lands. It is within the Crowsnest District (C5) of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve, which is provincial public land.

This is part of the international Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, which includes Waterton and Glacier National Parks and other contiguous, environmentally significant wildlands in northern Montana and southeast BC. So valued is the US portion of the Crown of the Continent that it is almost entirely protected by Glacier National Park and three contiguous Wilderness Areas.

Proposal: That the Castle FLUZ be established as an integrated wildland park and provincial park in tribute to Andy Russell and his wife Kay, and in recognition of the Piikani First Nation, to be known as the Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp Park.



The backcountry of the Castle, amounting to about 90 % of the FLUZ is proposed as a wildland park.

The provincial park portion is about 10% and roughly corresponds to the Castle-Carbondale Corridor (Resource Management Area C) in the 1985 Castle Mountain Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan. At its widest point it is no more than 3 kilometers (2 miles) from a public road and the majority is within a mile. With the exception of the Castle Mountain Resort (residential lands and ski hill License of Occupation) and the one existing protected area (West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve), the provincial park would encompass the existing campgrounds, staging areas, organization camps and corridors of the public roads; what people commonly refer to as the front country. It would be at the discretion of Castle Mountain Resort if they would like the resort to be included within the provincial park, similar to the ski hills within the national parks or the Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park.

A Backlogged Site for Protection

- 1968: Local residents and the Pincher Creek Fish and Game Association request legislated protection for the Castle.
- 1974: West and South Castle watersheds placed under Consultative Notation indicating government intent to proceed with a protected area.
- 1977: The provincial Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes notes that the Castle "has been identified as having considerable park potential."

- 1993: Alberta's Natural Resource Conservation Board finds the area has deteriorated and stipulates protection is needed.
- 1993: Government appointed Special Places 2000 Committee recommends the backlog of sites for protection, such as the Castle, be established by the end of 1994.
- 1998 Parks Canada study finds ecological health of Waterton Lakes National Park threatened and cites activities on adjacent lands, including the Castle, as an important reason.
- 2000: The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, set up under the free-trade agreement identifies the Castle as one of fourteen of North America's most biologically significant and threatened areas.
- 2005: An independent report that is a synopsis of current scientific knowledge for the Castle finds its ecosystem health and sustainability has been diminished.

Legislated Protection Instead of Discretionary

As an integrated wildland park and provincial park, the Castle would be a legislated protected area where protection is legally binding, as opposed to the current multiple-use area where policy and the integrated resource plan (IRP) do not have the weight of law and have not provided adequate protection for this nationally significant wildland. Under the status quo, the Castle has continued to deteriorate. Protection of the natural ecosystem and the type and intensity of use have long been at the discretion of government departments, most recently Sustainable Resource Development.

Provincial Park legislation, (legally binding) states that wildland parks and provincial parks,

“shall be developed and maintained

- (a) for the conservation and management of flora and fauna,*
- (b) for the preservation of specified areas or objects in them that are of geological, cultural, ecological or other scientific interest, and*
- (c) to facilitate their use and enjoyment for outdoor recreation.”*



Pack trip coming out Yarrow Canyon

Murray Anderson

As stated by the government's Natural Resources Conservation Board in its 1993 decision:

“... the Board has reviewed the state of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem and its subregions with particular emphasis on the Waterton-Castle Area. The Board reached a qualitative conclusion that the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem is at risk and that the Waterton-Castle Area in particular has deteriorated. It also concluded that without coordinated action on the part of the numerous agencies with jurisdiction over parts of the Crown Ecosystem, the deterioration would continue to the detriment of the ecosystem and those who use it.

In the 13 years since the NRCB decision, ongoing management of the Castle under the Forest Act and the Castle River Sub-Regional IRP (1985) has not abated the deterioration. The 2005 report, *Selected Ecological Resources of Alberta's Castle Carbondale: a Synopsis of Current Knowledge* (prepared by Arc Wildlife Services Ltd. for Shell Canada and CPAWS Calgary/Banff) concluded:

“It is evident from this assessment that ecosystem health and sustainability have been diminished in the Castle-Carbondale as a result of the cumulative effects of human activities.”

For example, the bighorn sheep population and native trout fisheries have not recovered. The area is regarded as a “sink,” a place of net loss for the southwest portion of the Alberta grizzly bear population. One-third of the Castle would naturally be old-growth forest, but as of 2000 less than one-tenth (8.9%) remained as such. That in turn harms the plants and animals that depend on those forests and the quality of the watershed.

The 2005 report concludes:

“... legally-binding management objectives, indicators and thresholds should be established for the Castle-Carbondale.”

Establishment as an integrated wildland and provincial park provides that legally-binding framework, with the objective of sustaining the natural ecosystem. Wildland park legislation did not come about until 1996 and thus, was not available at the time of the NRCB decision.

Significant Values that Would be Protected

Watershed

- The Castle has the highest recorded annual precipitation and snowfall within Alberta’s entire Eastern Slopes region.
- 34 lakes and alpine tarns and 26 headwater streams and rivers that feed the Castle, Oldman and Waterton Rivers. By comparison, Waterton Lakes National Park has 11 streams and rivers.
- Provides an important portion of the water used downstream in one of the driest regions of Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Intact forests act like a sponge holding back the winter snow-pack from the effect of Chinooks and releasing quality water into the summer season.
- Intact forests and riparian (stream-side) vegetation buffer the region from floods and provide the conditions for productive fisheries habitat.
- About one-third of the Castle would naturally be old-growth forests, but as of 2000, less than one-tenth remained as such, reducing the Castle’s biological diversity, its buffering of floods and its production of quality water.
- Without park protection which rules out commercial logging, significantly more clearcut logging will occur in the Castle, as planned with the Forest Service’s C5 Forest Management Plan.
- As a wildland and provincial park, the watershed would be protected and restored.



“The Gate,” Carbondale River

Murray Anderson

Sacred Lands and the Most Biological Rich Area of Alberta

- An indicator of the exceptionally high biological diversity of the Castle is that half of all the vascular plant species found in Alberta occur in the Castle. There are 132 rare plant species, including 15 for which the Alberta occurrences are only in the Castle.
- The Front Range Canyons are a landscape unique in Canada.
- Most extensive stands of alpine larch and whitebark pine trees in Alberta.
- Essential habitat for rare species and the recovery of endangered wildlife, such as grizzly bears.
- Critical range for mountain goats, bighorn sheep, elk, moose, and white-tailed and mule deer.

- Sacred lands for First Nations and also embody part of the history and pre-history for the Piikani (Peigan), Ktunaxa (Kootaney) and Nakota (Stoney) First Nations.

Sustainable Communities

- Under the status quo, the Castle has continued to deteriorate and the adjacent communities are bypassed by the substantial, sustainable economic, recreation and conservation benefits that those adjacent to the wildland and provincial parks of Kananaskis Country have benefited from for almost 30 years.
- The provincial report, *Parks and Protected Areas: Their Contribution to the Alberta Economy* (Alberta Environmental Protection 1996) found that provincial parks and other such legislated protected areas on average, directly contribute as much economic activity (gross domestic product) to the Alberta economy as did logging and agriculture when compared on a hectare by hectare basis. They also generated as much employment per hectare as did the logging and energy sectors.
- Using data in that report (not adjusted to 2005 dollars), it is roughly estimated that the Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp Park would contribute around \$19,760,000 annually to the Alberta economy and 458 person years of employment.

Current Management

The Castle is part of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve administered by the Alberta Forest Service primarily under the Forest Act, the focus of which is the “sustained yield” of timber. The Forest Service is part of the Sustainable Resource Development Department. In 1998, the Castle was zoned as a Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) and named the Castle Special Management Area FLUZ. FLUZs are a regulation under the Forest Act. The regulation allows the designation of defined areas and trails as either open or closed to public off-road vehicle use, snowmobile use or random camping. It has no effect on industrial activities or other forms of development nor is protection of the natural environment defined as a purpose of the Act and regulation.

There is no legislation establishing or governing the management of “Special Management Areas.” It is a name. Thus, for example, the Castle Special Management Area FLUZ does not protect the Castle, including the wildlife habitat and headwaters there from the further clear-cut logging proposed in the Forest Service’s C5 Forest Management Plan.

There is presently one protected area within the Castle, the 94 hectare West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve located immediately downstream of the Castle Mountain Resort. All provincial protected areas, no matter the classification, are under the jurisdiction of the Community Development Department. Overall management of wildlife (including fish and plants) remains with the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division of Sustainable Resource Development. Like the Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Division does not have legislation under which it can establish protected areas, even for the protection of critical wildlife habitat. That ability rests with Community Development.

Establishing Protected Areas

Protected areas are those designations for which legislation specifies protection of the natural and /or cultural environment as the purpose.

Unlike the federal national parks system, the provincial protected areas system in Alberta does not include the interim step of establishing a “park reserve” prior to final designation as a protected area. Alberta Government interest in an area for future designation is usually conveyed through the placement of the area under a Consultative Notation or Protective Notation. The West Castle and South Castle watersheds of the proposed Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp Park were first placed under such a Consultative Notation in 1974.

Once the government has made a commitment to move forward with a protected area, the Community Development Department consults with the public and the current disposition holders about the

establishment of that protected area. After designation, there is a further round of consultation to develop the management plan for the protected area.

With the exception of wilderness areas and Willmore Wilderness Park, all provincial protected areas, including wildland parks and provincial parks are established by Order in Council, and thus, do not require passage by the Alberta Legislature. An Order in Council is issued by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is the Alberta Cabinet (the Premier and Ministers) and the Lieutenant Governor. Establishment of wilderness areas or changes to the boundaries of the existing ones and of Willmore Wilderness Park require passage by the Alberta Legislature.

Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp and the Protected Area Classifications

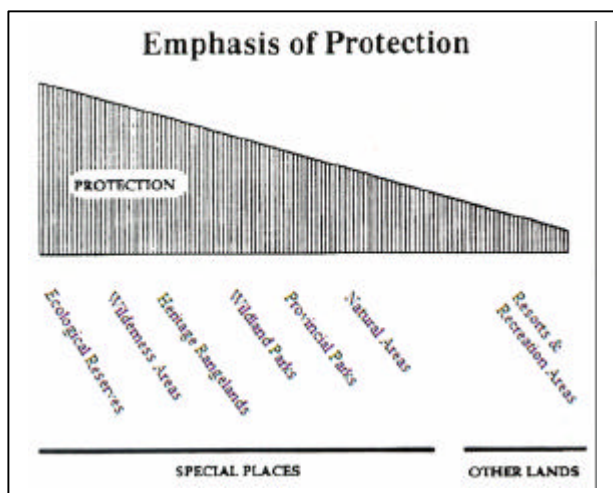
Protected areas in Alberta consist of a spectrum of protected area classifications. These classifications are in the table below, with national parks being the oldest classification in existence (since 1885) and Wildland Parks (1996) and Heritage Rangelands (2003) being the most recent additions.

For more information on the provincial classifications, including uses and management see <http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/parks/managing/flashindex.asp>. Regarding national parks and historic sites see http://www.pc.gc.ca/progs/np-pn/index_E.asp and for national wildlife areas see <http://www.mb.ec.gc.ca/nature/whp/nwa/df06s00.en.html>

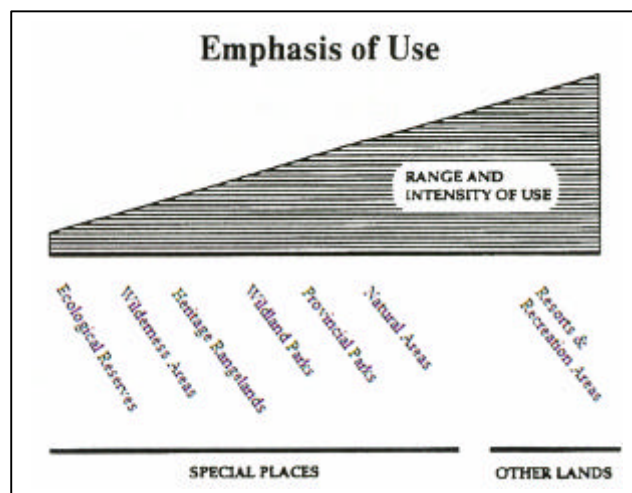
Protected Area Classifications	Legislation
National Parks & National Historic Sites	National Parks Act (federal)
National Wildlife Area	Canada Wildlife Act (federal)
Ecological Reserve, Wilderness Area, Heritage Rangeland and Natural Area	Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act (provincial)
Willmore Wilderness Park	Willmore Wilderness Park Act (provincial; does not provide for establishment of more wilderness parks.)
Wildland Park, Provincial Park	Provincial Parks Act
Historic Sites	Historic Resources Act (provincial)

A Spectrum of Protection and Use

The diagrams and captions below are from the province's Advisory Committee 1993 report, *Special Places 2000: Alberta's Natural Heritage*. (Heritage Rangelands have been added.)



In categories on the left, management policies, programs and plans are based on retaining the long-term ecological integrity. Categories on the right are managed to maintain pleasant surroundings for high levels of recreation and tourism.



The range of activities and the level of use that is permitted increase from left to right. This not only applies to recreation and tourism activities, but also to the use of natural resources.

Summary of Selected Activities in Alberta Protected Areas
According to Legislation, Policy and Management Guidelines

	National Parks	Ecological Reserves	Wilderness Areas	Willmore Wilderness Park	Wildland Parks	Heritage Rangelands	Provincial Parks	Natural Areas
Average Size to Date*	10,813 km ² (4,175 mi ²)	18 km ² (7 mi ²)	337 km ² (130 mi ²)	4,597 km ² (1,775 mi ²) one	542 km ² (209 mi ²)	78 km ² (30 mi ²) one	31 km ² (12 mi ²)	9 km ² (3 mi ²)
Access Fee	Yes	none	none	none	none	none	none	none
Outdoor Recreation & Education								
Use by Foot, Paddle	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Camping - Backcountry	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1
Horse use	1	3*	4	1	1	1	2*	1
Fishing	2*	4	4	1	1	1	1	1
Hunting	4	3	4	1	1	1	3	1
Cycling, Mountain Biking	2*	2*	4	4	2*	2*	2*	1
Power Boating	2*	4	4	4	1	1	1	1
Off-Road Vehicles & Snowmobiling	4	4	4	4	2*	2*	2*	2*
Motor Vehicles & Auto Touring	1 in front country	3	4	4	3	3	1	1
Outdoor Recreation Facilities	1 in front country	4	4 except trails	4 except trails	4 except primitive	4 except primitive	1	4 except primitive
Camping - Auto Access Campgrounds	1 in front country	4	4	4	4	4	1	4
Aircraft Landing	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Commercial Activities								
Trapping	4	3	4	1	1	1	3	1
Livestock Grazing	4	2	4	4	2	1	2	2
Oil & Gas Exploration, Development	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
Commercial Tourism Facilities	1 in front country	4	4	4	2	4	2	4
Mining – Subsurface Minerals	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3
Cultivation	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Timber Harvesting	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Mining – Surface Minerals	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Other Developments								
Roads & Utility Corridors	New, 4	4	4	4	3	3	3	2
Telecommunication Towers		New, 4	4	4	New, 4	New, 4	New, 4	
Mainline Pipelines	New, 4	4	4	4	3*	3*	3*	3*

1 = Permitted

2 = May be permitted or grazing permitted as part of ongoing management for lands in Montane, Parkland or Grassland Natural Regions.

2* = May be permitted on specific routes or waters designated for this purpose.

3 = Not permitted except for wildlife management or permitted for dispositions in existence at the time of designation of the protected area.

3* = Discouraged or permitted with strict conditions when no alternatives exist.

4 = Prohibited

* As of March 3, 2006. The City of Calgary, for comparison is 722 km² in size.

Protected Area Classifications in Southwest Alberta

With the exception of national parks and provincial historic sites, descriptions of the classifications below are copied from <http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/parks/managing/spectrumsites.asp>. Consult that Alberta Government site for descriptions of the other protected area classifications. The national park information comes from http://www.pc.gc.ca/progs/np-pn/intro/index_e.asp, the Parks Canada website. Although there presently is no wildland park in the southwest, it is included here because it is proposed.

National Parks are established to protect and present outstanding representative examples of natural landscapes and natural phenomena that occur in Canada's 39 natural regions. National parks protect the habitats, wildlife and ecosystem diversity representative of - and sometime unique to - the natural regions.

Parks Canada is responsible for both protecting the ecosystems of these magnificent natural areas and managing them for visitors to understand, appreciate, and enjoy in a way that doesn't compromise their integrity.

Ecological reserves preserve and protect natural heritage in an undisturbed state for scientific research and education.

- Ecological reserves contain representative, rare and fragile landscapes, plants, animals and geological features.
- The primary intent of this class is strict preservation of natural ecosystems, habitats and features, and associated biodiversity.
- Ecological reserves serve as outdoor laboratories and classrooms for scientific studies related to the natural environment.
- Public access to ecological reserves is by foot only; public roads and other facilities do not normally exist and will not be developed.
- Most ecological reserves are open to the public for low-impact activities such as photography and wildlife viewing.

Wildland parks preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation.

- Wildland parks are large, undeveloped natural landscapes that retain their primeval character.
- Trails and primitive backcountry campsites are provided in some wildland parks to minimize visitor impacts on natural heritage values.
- Some wildland parks provide significant opportunities for eco-tourism and adventure activities such as backpacking, backcountry camping, wildlife viewing, mountain climbing and trail riding.
- Designated trails for off-highway vehicle riding and snowmobiling are provided in some wildland parks.

Provincial parks preserve natural heritage; they support outdoor recreation, heritage tourism and natural heritage appreciation activities that depend upon and are compatible with environmental protection.

- Provincial parks protect both natural and cultural landscapes and features.
- They are distinguished from wildland parks by their greater range of outdoor recreation facilities, the extent of road access, and the interpretive and educational programs and facilities that are available to visitors.
- Outdoor recreation activities that promote appreciation of a park's natural heritage and cultural features are encouraged.
- Provincial parks offer a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and support facilities.
- Interpretive and educational programs that enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of, and respect for, Alberta's natural heritage (without damaging natural values) are offered in some provincial parks; these programs serve visitors of diverse interests, ages, physical capabilities and outdoor skills.
- Automobile access is typically provided to staging areas and support facilities.

Historic Sites are designated and protected where an historical resource is immovable in nature or cannot be disassociated from its context without destroying its value. In Alberta, an historic resource is any work of nature or of humans that is of value for its palaeontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic, cultural, natural, scientific or aesthetic interest including a structure, natural site or object.

With the exception of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Frank Slide Interpretive Centre and the Tyrrell Field Station, the designation of historic sites in Alberta has largely focused on human-made structures ranging from the Carmangay Tipi Rings to the Leitch Collieries.

For More Information:

- Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp Park initiative <http://www.sierraclub.ca/wilderness>
- Castle attributes <http://www.castlewilderness.ca>
- Cultural and natural heritage summary <http://www.centennialwilds.ab.ca>

To Take Action:

- Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition <http://www.cwc.ab.ca>
- CPAWS-Calgary <http://www.castlewilderness.ca/calltoaction.html>
- Natural Resources Defense Council <http://www.savebiogems.org/castle/>
- Sierra Club of Canada <http://www.sierraclub.ca/national/getinvolved/takeaction.shtml>

Prepared by Dianne Pachal, Alberta Wilderness Director, Sierra Club of Canada for:

Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition
CPAWS – Calgary/Banff Chapter
Federation of Alberta Naturalists
Natural Resources Defense Council
Sierra Club of Canada

Suggested citation: Pachal, Dianne. 2006. Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp: Proposed Wildland Park and Provincial Park for Southern Alberta. Sierra Club of Canada, Ottawa, ON.