

**BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
NEWSLETTER, Fall 2013
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PROGRAMS/EVENTS

*******MARK YOUR CALENDAR*******

BVN MEETINGS WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE 4TH TUESDAY OF THE MONTH DURING 2013/2014 INSTEAD OF THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH.

BVN meetings:

7:30 pm., Banff Seniors Centre.

Tuesday, OCTOBER 22

Between a Rock and a Dark Place with Flying Mice: Karst, Caves and Bats with Greg Horn.

Tuesday, NOVEMBER 26

The Zen of Fish and Watersheds with Lorne Fitch.

**“The Times, They Are a Changing”:
BVN to Change Bylaws**

Dwayne Lepitzki

What – BVN has bylaws?

Yes, when BVN became a not-for-profit organization with charitable status way back in 1994, official bylaws were drafted and approved. These bylaws, 2 pages plus a bit in length, help govern the society. As part of some recent changes, the Federal Government passed a new Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act that covers organizations such as ours. The rules under the new Act, to quote the government, “are modern, flexible and more suited to the needs of the not-for-profit sector”.

One of the things societies like BVN must do in order to maintain status is to update their bylaws to ensure they are in compliance with the new Act. For BVN the transition process means that replacement bylaws need to be circulated amongst the members at least 3 months before the Annual General Meeting. At the February 2014 Annual General Meeting of BVN, the replacement bylaws then need to be approved by a Special Resolution that is passed by at least a two-thirds majority of members attending the AGM.

The current Board of Directors is therefore tasked with creating updated bylaws. The plan is to have these updated bylaws ready by our November 2013 meeting. Stay tuned.

Editor's note: The BVN Board is continuing to work on a transition strategy with the McIvors stepping back in the new year. We'll stay in touch on this.

**Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, December 14**

Potluck supper and compiling of results will follow at 6:00 p.m. in the Banff Seniors Centre

For details, contact Diane or Mike McIvor at 762-4160

or Colleen Campbell at 678-2051

Participants no longer need to pay the \$5.00 fee.



photo: A. Athwal

ISSUES

Alberta Land Use Planning:

Karsten Heuer

A draft land use plan for the southern part of the province (South Saskatchewan River Basin) was released last week and the comment period is now open until the end of November. A public information session will be held on Nov 7 at the Canmore Raddison Hotel from 4:30 to 7:30pm. This is the biggest opportunity in decades for Albertans to better protect our public land but the draft falls far short of what the final version needs to be. Specifically, we need mountain-top-to-valley-bottom protection for the entire Castle River watershed, follow through on Alberta's grizzly bear recovery plan, protection of endangered sage grouse habitat, an end to clearcut logging on the Eastern Slopes, and new conservation initiatives that address connectivity between protected areas. Be sure to visit the Alberta Land Use Planning website (www.landuse.alberta.ca) or attend the Nov 7 session in Canmore to voice your concerns.

Trouble in Jasper National Park

A large banner with an important message has been seen recently at 2 sites in Jasper National Park where Parks Canada either has approved a ridiculous development or is seriously considering it.

At Maligne Lake where overnight commercial accommodation has been prohibited for decades, Parks Canada senior management now has declared its willingness to consider it despite the compromises to long-standing policy and ecological values it represents. The other banner is much more self-explanatory. For more information on these issues check out the website of our friends with the Jasper Environmental Association.

www.jasperenvironmental.org



ONE DAY AT THE MINISTRY

Parker Knot

Recently, the Ministry of Oxymorons quietly referred a proposal for a Wilderness-Based Tourism concept to the Ministry for Doing Something. Perhaps you can imagine the scene. There is an administrator sitting with a straight back and hands folded on an immaculate walnut desktop that frames a single, blank sheet of paper. An excited and confident proponent sits across the desk twitching with a crazy, confident smile.

Administrator: "Thank you for coming in to explain your

proposal. There is very little on your paper here."

Proponent: "Yes, well, that's it exactly."

Administrator: "That's not a proposal."

Proponent: "Yes it is."

Administrator: "No, it's not."

Proponent: "Yes it is. I propose...to do nothing in a National Park."

Administrator: "You don't need our approval to do nothing."

Proponent: "Yes I do".

Administrator: "No you don't. Our role is to do something."

Proponent: "Well. It seems every time a developer comes in here with a proposal the government in fact does nothing to stop it. I thought if I actually proposed to do nothing you would once again do nothing to stop it. Perhaps then everyone would see how easy it was to actually do nothing in a National Park. Perhaps there would be a movement to stop at - nothing in a National Park. And that would be quite something."

Administrator: Perhaps, but I have to have something to approve and you have nothing.

Proponent: Perhaps, you could see your way to an amendment to my proposal?

Administrator: Ah ha! Now we might have something. Do you have something to propose?

Proponent: Perhaps the proposal could include eliminating some human activities in sensitive areas. Then the proposal would, in fact, be doing something. But that something would really be more of nothing. It could then be called the "Wilderness-Based Tourism Proposal: Doing Nothing With Less".

Administrator: "But then we would not have wilderness-based tourism."

Proponent: "But we would have wilderness."

Administrator: "No we wouldn't."

Proponent: "Yes, we would."

Administrator: "We wouldn't because nobody would be there to see its wild."

Proponent: "Yes, that's it exactly!"

Administrator: "What's it?"

Proponent: "That's it."

Administrator: "What?"

Proponent: "We propose to have the wild things tell us its wilderness."

Administrator: "What wild things?"

Proponent: "The wild things that make it wilderness. We propose to have an annual wild things wilderness report. Once a year the wild things will send a message to our places where there is something instead of nothing and tell us how nothing is better than something."

Administrator: "Wild things can't talk."

Proponent: "Can."

Administrator: "Can't. I've never heard of such a thing."

Proponent: "So, it's fair to say you have heard wild things call for nothing?"

Administrator: "Yes."

Proponent: "That must be quite something to hear."

(PS - At last report we heard that the administrator did sense that there was something to be said for nothing and forwarded the amended proposal for further review by the Minister of Enough. We remain hopeful.)

Editor's Note: we understand the author feels very strongly about Park – YES! Product for Development – NOT!

THREE SISTERS: AN UPDATE

Colleen Campbell

The history of Three Sisters (TSMV) is complicated. The Stewart Creek Golf Course was approved in 1990, before the invocation of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, which met and listened to submissions for most of the summer of 1992 and submitted its decisions a few months later. Key points included that no building be permitted in Wind Valley and that wildlife corridors would cross the TSMV lands in “as undeveloped a state as possible”. . . . The developer is granted only “reasonable certainty of use”. Area Structure Plans (ASP) are scrutinized locally; final approval, which includes phasing and population densities, rests with the Town of Canmore. Proposals for Three Sisters have passed before council for years, shape-shifting with every new cast of corporate owners, some of whom arrive with a sense that their vision should shape the character and quality of our town regardless of local values.

Since 1992, the property has changed hands several times, three due to bankruptcy. Every time the property changes hands, the development applications and related processes such as environmental assessments, public hearings are renewed. In 2007 East-West Development Partners of Denver Colorado purchased the property, only to declare bankruptcy in 2009. The primary creditor, Hong Kong Banking Corporation (HSBC) appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to act as receiver general with direction to sell the property for as high price as possible.

For the local community, two concerns are critical to successful planning proposals: a respectful and sufficiently generous multi-species wildlife corridor that will function well into the distant future and appropriate designation and planning for undermined areas of the property. Three Sisters property includes many abandoned coalmines that tunnel through convoluted rocky geologic formations. The potential for slumps and sinkholes is clearly understood. Canmore has dealt with many already. **(look for: Learning from Experience – A History of Development on Three Sisters by Glen Crawford on YouTube/23 minutes).**

Two important documents prepared by the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG) and Golder, 2002, underlay wildlife corridor designations. The need for a substantial corridor that is a critically important link between Banff National Park and Provincial lands to the southeast is not questioned. Effective wildlife corridors function as places for cover, shelter and browsing. In a multi-species corridor some animals may try to avoid (or seek) encounters. The ultimate length of the corridor and the varied terrain are additional characteristics to take into account in the process. Completing the corridor with sufficient width and buffer zones continues to be a stumbling block.

In June 2012, a Canmore by-election replaced mayor Ron Casey (newly elected to the provincial legislature) with John Borrowman, and councillors Borrowman and Russell (who both resigned council to run for mayor) with two new councillors. Shortly after the new mayor and council members were elected, PwC (after three years) set in motion their proposal for an ASP. In anticipation, locals (with years of experience and armed with determination to ensure that functional wildlife corridors were a clear concept in the minds of councillors and the public) made presentations to council and in public sessions about essential qualities of wildlife corridors and the history of corridor assignments on the Three Sisters properties. Public participation at every opportunity was energetic and informed. Historic voices (many of whom presented to the NRCB in 1992) and new voices (Three Sisters residents), from different perspectives echoed similar ideas, principles and concerns about the PwC process and proposed ASP.

PwC’s ASP appeared to disregard historic examples related to TSMV and clearly expressed considerations from the Town of Canmore. The proposal included residential development on the undermined land formerly approved as a golf course and reduced wildlife corridors with minimal widths on steep terrain compensated by fencing the corridor from residential development. The costs of installation, monitoring, maintenance and mitigations for both development on undermined land and the fences would (of course) burden, in perpetuity, local citizens of Canmore and/or Alberta.

Council denied the ASP as presented, anticipating that PwC would rework their application and reapply. PwC abandoned the process in June 2013. For a month or two we heard “mystery” rumours that PwC wished to sell the property. In September it was announced that Don Taylor and Blair Richardson, both former owners (and secured creditors owed money by East West Partners) have purchased Three Sisters out of receivership for an undisclosed price. Another former “player” Chris Ollenberger is acting as their spokesperson.

Now – we await election results and presumably the new mayor and council soon will see “Three Sisters ASP” on their agendas. Can we (town administration, mayor and council, citizens) proceed (this time) with anticipation that the new/former owners “get” Canmore, understand that the community is a constant and has social, environmental and financial interest in the future of our community?

IN DEFENSE OF DE FENCE

Peter Duck

Among the many issues addressed at the recent Canmore election environmental forum one thing was especially interesting to a Banffite. There seemed to be an almost universal rejection of the idea that fences may be used to protect wildlife corridors adjacent to the town. Voices on the floor and Council hopefuls made it clear that this approach is a tool best left in the box.

From the perspective of a Bow Valley resident who has been blocked off from some favourite short walks for more than ten years by a fenced corridor just beyond my kitchen window this is somewhat odd. Why should people in Banff be restricted from favourite places so wildlife can move past Banff to Canmore and beyond while people in Canmore are reluctant to make the same commitment so wildlife can securely more around their town?

The Sulphur Mountain wildlife corridor has been closed and fenced from human activity for more than ten years. It is even signed as being under electronic surveillance. Before that time, this was a place deep in my heart where I enjoyed some early moments with my daughters as they took their first wild steps. I fondly remember wandering through that forest and seeing Barred Owl chicks lined up on a limb. Once a mallard hen wandered through the pine needles. Behind her, a clutch of her own waddling ducklings stumbled toward the wetlands half a kilometer or more away.

After a few years humans were found to be able to adapt their movements to the presence of this fence protecting the integrity of the Sulphur Mountain wildlife corridor.

Now when I do the dishes I see a corridor fence and passing human and wildlife users. In time people and wildlife have adapted to the fence, responding to it in their own ways. The fence has been

adapted to be more effective. This short stretch of wire is used strategically in a specific location to do a specific job - and it seems to work.



photo: P. Duck

There once was a park management mantra that special places cannot be all things to all people. The confines of the Bow Valley and the Three Sisters Lands are clearly demonstrating that the landscape cannot be all things to all species. Good fences can make good neighbours for a variety of species on a variety of levels. If what was said about a special place at the forum, living with wildlife etc. etc. and then some more, is true, it is hoped that Canmore keeps fencing in the corridor management toolbox.

A poor workman blames his tools, a good one learns when and how to use them. There is a standing offer to my neighbours down the Valley to come on up and walk the Sulphur fence, see how it works and discuss observations on what is good and what could be better. Might this approach have some value, in some adapted form, on the TSR lands? Some amber thinking fluid is offered as bait.

Of Wild Things...

Canmore Birding Walks – definitely “for the birds”

Alex Mowat

As an avid birder who lives in Canmore and attends at least one Banff Community Bird Walk each spring, I have often wondered if Canmore birders would attend one or two walks during the spring and fall migration periods. The Banff walks visit highly productive, diverse and concentrated birding habitat and are absolutely inspiring.

Canmore walks would complement the Banff walks and likely have more wandering routes. Cliff Hansen, the Coordinator of BowKan Birders, and I discussed this and he was very supportive of the idea and lent his expertise to the project with some good routing suggestions - and birding ears that are a mite better than mine! Cliff and I agree that Canmore has diverse bird habitats but pure numbers and consistency of sightings are less dependable than Banff.

Nonetheless, we felt Canmore deserved a trial run. I am sure group walks in Canmore happened long before I happily become a "bird-

nerd", but ours was an attempt at a 2013 re-incarnation, with walks June 4th and June 18th. Our first walk was promoted to fewer than ten people. The only yawning birders who met at daybreak were Cliff and I, looking at each other and listening and watching for birds. We had a great reconnaissance excursion, recording 35 species, including Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Rufous Hummingbird, Ruby Crowned Kinglet, three kinds of warblers and Warbling Vireo. The day was light on waterfowl, a Canmore reality compared to Banff.

We also figured out a good route. We met at Policeman's Creek and Main Street, followed the creek to the engine bridge path and then to the river, went out past the point on Larch Island, then returned to the berm path and headed back down the river, a little past Millennium park and across to Spring Creek on a rock step path through the creek. We walked through Spring Creek Mountain Village until we could follow the boardwalk along Policeman's Creek back to main street. Of course, many other routes are possible.

Our second walk was promoted in email to approximately 100 people (thanks Jim P!) and we had a turnout of six with 4 others expressing wishes that they "would have loved to attend/please keep me in the loop." All were linked to the Bow Valley environmental community in one way or another so at this stage we didn't draw from the general public. During our second outing we saw 39 species and did a shorter loop due to high water in Spring Creek. Conversation focused on sharing and learning and some discussion of possible regular Canmore birding walks. The Flood of 2013 arrived five days later; it took away my species list and notes and changed the focus for most in Canmore for the rest of the season.

Overall, my summary thoughts of Canmore birding futures are as follows: 1) It makes sense for Canmore to have 2-3 walks in the spring and 1-2 walks in the autumn with all walks on different days from the BCBW walks; 2) The Canmore bird walk offerings might include field trips to Bow Valley Provincial Park, Exshaw, and other nearby destinations; 3) Personally, I hope Canmore bird walks would start as a word-of-mouth, slowly evolving email connected group to keep it small and local as we work out the kinks; 4) and lastly, my hope is for small groups that can focus on sharing knowledge easily

The Canmore Birding Walks of June 2013 were an exploratory introduction hosted by Cliff and Alex. We don't know exactly where this will go or not go, but we would love your input; if you have ideas, thoughts, a bold vision or expertise to share, please email Alex (grizzlyspirit68@yahoo.ca) and/or Cliff (cm_hansen@shaw.ca)

HELS Project Report

Mike McIvor

We are close to reaching a total of 350 observations submitted so far this year. Many thanks to everyone who shared sightings on our website. But keep in mind there is 2 months remaining in 2013 so let's try for 400 entries by the end of the year. Be sure to enjoy getting out and looking around.

Bluebird of Happiness

Shelley Mardiros

If, as Doug Chadwick has written, the mountain goat is “a beast the colo(u)r of winter”, then the mountain bluebird is a bird the colour of the sky. The bluest of blue skies, that is.



photo: M. Shuster

On April Fool’s Day this year, a flock of 8 or 10 mountain bluebirds arrived in the meadow beside the Minnewanka Road between Cascade Ponds and the Johnson Lake turn-off, heralds of spring. Brilliant blue males and more subtly hued females perched on the tops of little spruce trees, hawked for insects, and hovered in mid-air – a display of aerial prowess and flashy beauty. Could there be a more thrilling embodiment of spring?

Interestingly, unlike the red of a cardinal, or the black of a pelican’s wingtips, the blue in feathers is not a pigment. Grind up a blue feather and you will get gray dust. The blue of feathers – all blue feathers, from jays to herons to macaws – is produced not by a pigment but by the feather structure, which reflects blue light. Different patterns of air pockets and keratin in the feather’s cells create different blues.

The brilliance of the male bluebird’s colouration, as is common in the avian world, serves to attract the (admittedly dowdier) female. His pretty plumage perhaps compensates for him being a bit of a slacker. According to research by Cornell University: “Only the female builds the nest. The male sometimes acts as if he is helping, but he either brings no nest material or he drops it on the way.”



photo: M. Shuster

The mountain bluebird’s range extends from Central America (in

winter) as far north as Alaska (in summer), and they are found year-round in several central western states. As the days shorten, they migrate south and out of Banff National Park. This year, my summer was bookended as I spotted a flock of (slightly duller-looking) bluebirds in Sunshine meadow on September 16th, already fleeing winter.

Should there be a Flathead National Park?

Brenda Lepitzki

I had the good fortune this year to explore some of the wild Flathead valley in southeastern British Columbia when Dwayne and I took part in a “bioblitz” there in June just after the flood rains. The bioblitz was part of an ongoing effort by a number of conservation groups to document the biodiversity of the valley and peaks, to prove the value of protecting at least some of the area which joins the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and B.C.’s Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park. For a review of the area and the effort to protect it, see www.flathead.ca



photo: B. Lepitzki

The current thinking is to lobby the Canadian government to create a new national park encompassing part of the Flathead valley southeast of Fernie. What a great idea, right? Well, now let’s just think about how well Parks Canada is looking after its current responsibilities, and the direction the government is pushing national parks in this country. We have all experienced what happens when Parks Canada tries to accommodate the burgeoning ambitions of the tourism industry in Banff and Jasper National Parks. The recent establishment of Toronto’s Rouge Urban National Park should also stand as an example of what Parks Canada intends to do with all national parks—increase visitation and commercialization, in a misguided effort to make these areas “relevant” to the population. Conservationists who worked hard to help protect the Rouge area now are dismayed at Parks Canada’s plans to increase visitation without providing appropriate environmental protection.

Logging roads – a symptom of encroaching industry- already cut through some of the Flathead area, which was one disappointment for me. But, in place of mining and logging in Flathead National Park, will there be brand new campgrounds, picnic areas, better roads, viewpoints chiseled out of the hillsides, and a host of marketing gurus to make it all relevant to your wallet? There, isn’t that better?

I remember the night before we left the Flathead, other bioblitz participants laughingly said we should tell all our friends just what we'd heard about the place - how hard a place it was to get to, and how wild and dangerous it was - in order to keep it as we found it. We all agreed that we'd love to see the Flathead Valley left undeveloped, as a beautiful, complex natural landscape with as few campsites, picnic areas, viewpoints, roads, and trails as possible. Only then will it have a chance to remain wild. I believe that the Canadian Flathead area deserves the highest standard of protection, and whichever form of conservation area can provide that is the one to strive for. National Park status may no longer be anywhere near good enough.

Book Review

Jim Pissot

Why NOT Wilderness? A plea for wild places in the Canadian West. Dave Sheppard. Friessen Press 2013.

The definition of wilderness is relative. And so is one's personal experience. So, is the need to protect wilderness completely arbitrary? Take a walk through the pages of Dave Sheppard's Why NOT Wilderness to test your own understanding, responses and hopes.

When I began to read this comprehensive text, I was camped along the Kicking Horse River. The Trans-Canada Highway and the Canadian Pacific main line passed within earshot. A small tourist lodge was across the road, and a hostel between us and Takakkaw Falls. A fleet of motorhomes and camping trailers was moored nearby. Tourist buses debouched throngs at the falls, and eager hikers turned their backs on parked conveyances to approach the Iceline, or Burgess fossil beds, or somewhere beyond the farthest ridge.

But we were on the edge of "wilderness." And the travellers we met from Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany were in awe of the landscape, the vistas, the retreating glaciers, and the chance that they might happen upon mountain sheep, an elk or marmot, or even a grizzly. They repeatedly told us, "we have nothing like this at home." So, what is "this?" Rugged Rockies? Untrammelled scenery? Mother Nature in her own element? Freedom from crowds? A repository of biodiversity for study, awe, and for our own security in an unknown future? Wilderness for its own sake?

Dave Sheppard investigates these and other questions in his provocative and timely "plea for wild places in the Canadian West." The author celebrates the beauty, solitude, natural wonder and political miracle of Canada's protected wild places. He takes us to, but does not fully reveal, some of his own favourite places. But the result of Dr. Sheppard's decades of exploring is not some pleasant polemic and mild plea for more protection. No, he has been around too long, kept his eyes too open, and is far more committed and critical than that.

Why NOT Wilderness examines the state of wilderness protection in the Canadian West and compares it to our nearest neighbour, the American West. And he finds Canada wanting on nearly every front. Unwinding of a long history of un-even playing fields, institutional bias, false starts, empty promises and outright betrayals regarding wildland protection, Sheppard's chronicles inadvertently pay tribute to Canadian heroes who actually managed to secure our existing national park and wilderness protection against staggering odds. We all should honour their efforts as we

camp, amble, or hunt across these treasured landscapes. And, Sheppard insists, we must commit to follow their lead.

America's wilderness (and other environmental protections and public oversight opportunities) were won at a time of long-forgotten can-do enthusiasm and bi-partisan cooperation. Some might say unprecedented naiveté. Americans had the perfect storm of understanding what we had lost, envisioning what we might save, and realizing that conservation and public empowerment did not mean economic suicide. America's Wilderness Act, NEPA and other environmental legislation were among the planet's first. International activists—including Canadians—were inspired and encouraged to follow suit. But I would suggest that Canadian forces of darkness acted first, sensing a cautionary tale that could be avoided north of the Medicine Line. So far, they have succeeded.

Why NOT Wilderness proposes three sources of Canada's failure to protect our wilderness treasures, particularly when compared to our cousins to the South. These causes address fundamental aspects of our public land management schemes, our political system, and our Canadian character. Perhaps Sheppard begs the question. Must we take on the very fundamentals of our political governance and personal behaviour before Canada can deserve, fight for, and win wilderness protection?

Aldo Leopold observed, "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot." Dave Sheppard throws down a gauntlet before his fellow Canadians that is nothing short of revolutionary:

We are too nice. Until enough of us loudly and angrily challenge corporate and political greed and dishonesty, and take on the sharks face to face, we cannot change societal values, and the wild will continue to be disgracefully undervalued...and lost.

Let the revolution begin!

Editor's note: Dave Sheppard will have a book signing at the Willock & Sax Gallery on Bear St. from 3-5:00 pm, Saturday, October 26.



Black Elfin Saddle (*Helvella lacunose*) photo: D. McIvor
Near trail below Cirque Lk in September. Our first in Banff N.P.