

WINTER 2019 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS

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COMING BVN PROGRAMS & EVENTS

BVN's evening speaker series continues February through April, 2019. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Mark your calendar and join us for conversation and natural history presentations. Until then, click the topics below that interest you...

NEWS AND ISSUES

Ecosystem Softball - Sunshine
Bighorn Country
Banff National Park Management Plan

WILD THINGS

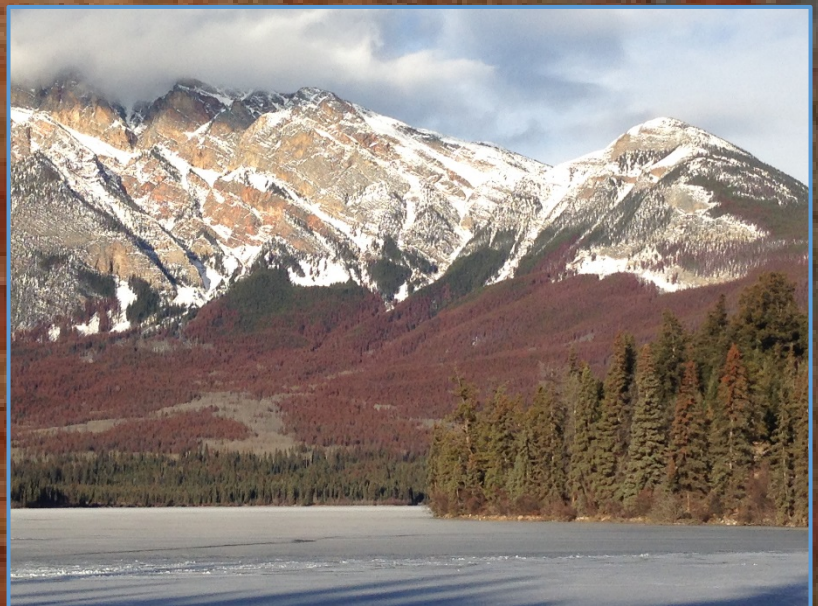
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Useful Incident and Emergency
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Mountain Pine Beetle affected forests on the slopes of Pyramid Mountain in Jasper National Park November 2019.

Photo: P. Duck.

LET THEM KNOW YOUR MIND...

Contact information for letting politicians, governments and land managers know what you're thinking. Give credit where credit is due and remind them that they work for you.

ECOSTSEM EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG

1967-2019

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Our October to April program of free presentations occurs on the 4th Tuesday of every month at the Banff Seniors Centre starting at 7:30 pm. Watch the “[Events](#)” tab on the BVN website for the beautiful posters advertising these special social and informative evenings. Admission is free. Donations at the door. Mark your calendar and join us for a season of natural history presentations.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Integrating Genomics Into Conservation As Illustrated in the Banff Springs Snail

Brenna Stanford

As habitats continue to change largely due to human impacts, there is an associated loss of biodiversity at the level of genetic, species and ecosystem diversity. This loss, in part, has resulted in an increase in the number of threatened and endangered species necessitating the design and implementation of timely and effective management plans. But how do we decide what species or populations of species to prioritize for conservation? Brenna’s presentation will discuss how genomics can be applied to conservation with highlights from research on the endangered Banff Springs Snail (*Physella Johnsonii*).

Brenna Stanford is a PhD student at the University of Calgary. She recently completed her MSc in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology investigating genetic factors influencing persistence of the endangered Banff Springs Snail in partnership with Parks Canada. This project sparked her passion about the inclusion of genomics into conservation management. When not in the lab or staring at her computer screen she loves to run, climb, backcountry ski.



Cave and Basin national Historic Site and home of the Banff Springs Snail. *Photo: P. Duck.*

Visit the BVN website for some background information about the [Banff Springs Snail](#).

Notice of Annual General Meeting: Our AGM will be held at 7:30 prior to the commencement of this evening’s program in the Banff Seniors Centre.

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

Taking The Scientific Pulse of the Yellowstone to Yukon - *Aerin Jacob, Y2Y Conservation Scientist.*

TUESDAY, APRIL 23

An Update on Wolverine research in the Canadian Rockies - *Tony Clevenger.*

NEWS AND ISSUES

SUNSHINE HARDBALL - Threat or Leadership?

Reg Bunyan

Much has been said in the media lately about how Parks Canada did not negotiate in good faith by suggesting to the Sunshine ski resort that if it could not accept the guidelines negotiated with Park Canada then a new tenant for the lease and could be found. While we do not know what happened behind closed doors, decades of fruitless negotiations spanning more than five Park Superintendents, a host of bureaucrats and the efforts of outside mediators would all seem to indicate that Parks Canada has put an enormous effort into the Sunshine planning process.

In any negotiation some issues are negotiable and some are not. Rather than discuss truly negotiable issues important to Parks Canada, Sunshine's long game appeared to be to rile up its base and play the victim blame game hoping for yet another political outcome. Acting Parks Canada Agency CEO Michael Nadler's position that the lease can be cancelled when it expires soon may seem harsh when viewed in isolation. But when viewed in the context of years of negotiation efforts and Sunshine's inability to let go of demands that were ecologically and politically impossible to meet, it seem less like a threat and more like long overdue leadership.

Historical Note: The current challenges in managing Sunshine's impact on park ecosystems are not new and come with more than a hint of déjà vu. BVN has been documenting negotiations between Sunshine and Parks Canada since the 1970s. Our records show that in 1977 the federal environment Minister raised skier capacity at Sunshine to 6,000 skiers per day when the Canadian Parks Service had recommended a limit 4,740. But the Minister denied hotel expansion because it was contrary to Parks policy and stated that parking lot expansion should be scaled down because of environmental reasons and that public transportation should be encouraged. We encourage our members to write a note to Parks Canada to show appreciation for the current decision that holds the line on parking expansions beyond the current leasehold. Please remain involved lest politics override ecosystem protection as more time goes by without an ecologically sound solution to access.

BIGHORN COUNTRY

Courtney Burk

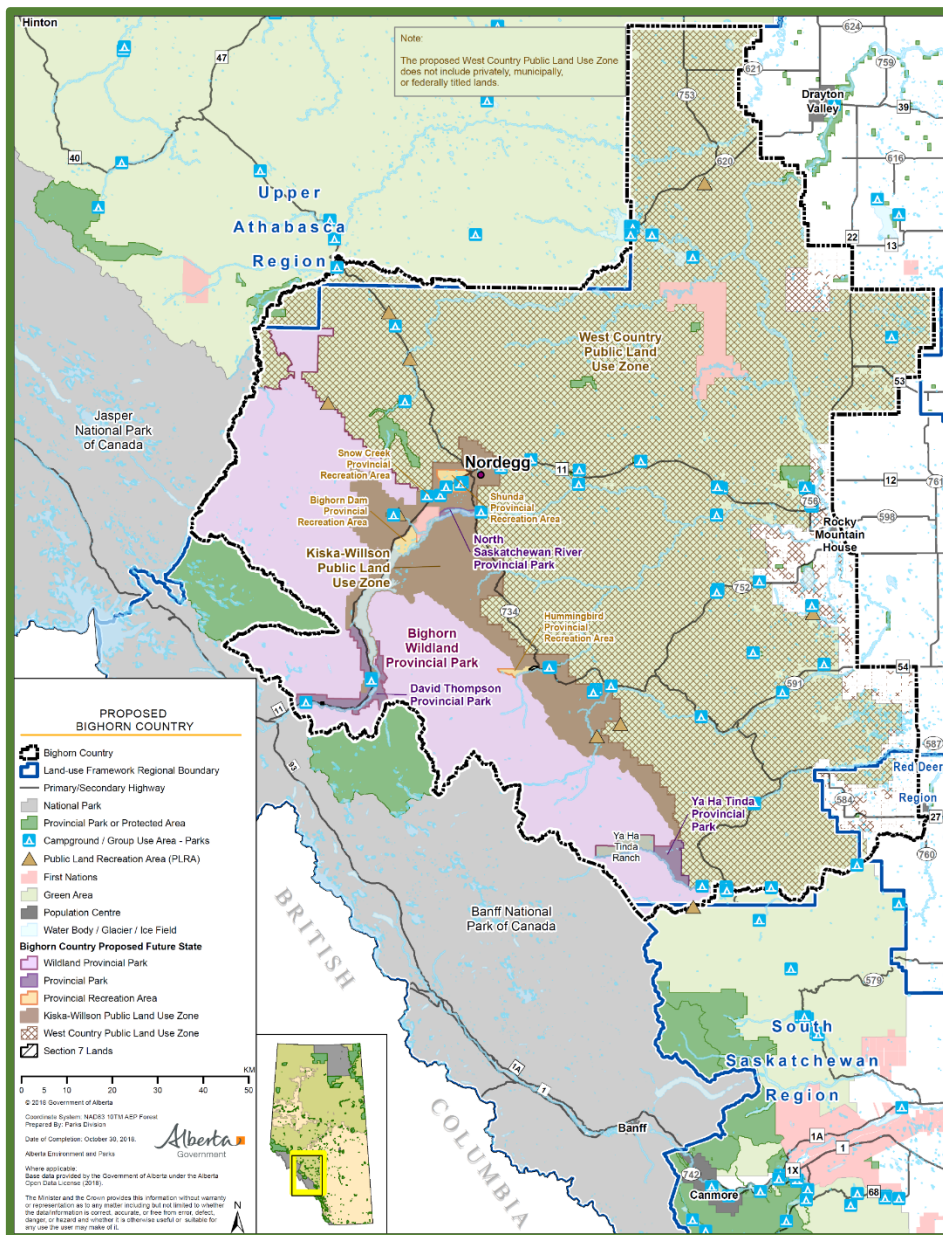
On November 23, the Government of Alberta announced Bighorn Country – a series of parks and protected areas including one Wildland Provincial Park, two Public Land Use Zones (PLUZ), three Provincial Parks, as well as four Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs) (See map). Overall, this designation (not including the PLUZ) could add about 4,000 km² of new protected areas to Alberta's Eastern Slopes, bringing Alberta's total land protection up to 15.2%.

This proposal is a great step toward protecting a significant portion of land between Jasper and Banff National Parks for wildlife, water, and wilderness. The recent trapping of a wolf that was an important component Banff National Park's ecosystem in this area points to the need for better management of adjacent provincial lands if BNP is to serve its role as a protected ecosystem.



Parking has been an issue at Sunshine since the 1970s with public transit being recommended as a solution for more than 40 years ago. *Photo: P. Duck.*

The Bighorn is not protected yet. Please take a few minutes to voice your support for the proposal by February 15, and ask your friends and family to do the same. Learn more from [CPAWS](#) and the Government of Alberta's [Bighorn](#) websites and complete the survey.



BANFF NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN:
 Opportunity For The Public To Submit Initial Comments Closes April 30, 2019

Parks Canada has begun the process for developing the next Banff National Park Management Plan. Phase 1 of public involvement is under way. Visit the [BNP Management Plan](#) web page for background to complete the brief survey and/or use the “submit comments” button to send a few paragraphs about what is important to you. Please encourage your contacts all across Canada to do the same! Contact [BVN](#) if you would like some assistance in understanding the issues that are important to us and that we will be taking into any more focused consultations that we may be invited to participate in.

OF WILD THINGS

2018 BANFF-CANMORE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Heather Dempsey

It was generally a warm but windy day last December 15, which made it challenging to find the birds, especially the many seedeaters in the tops of trees and forest. We had 95 participants join the fun, (38 in Canmore and 57 in Banff) our best turnout yet.

Forty-five different species were seen the day of the Count. A further 4 species were reported during the week surrounding the actual Count Day. This is one less species than counted last year; both slightly above the average of 43 species. The all-time low is 36 species in both 1989 and 2008; the high is 54 species in 2003. We have also added at least one new species to our list. A Marsh Wren was photographed by Kevin Barker at the Cave & Basin marsh on the day of the count, plus he reported a Lincoln's Sparrow in the same area 3 days later on the last day of Count Week. Unfortunately the sparrow wasn't as cooperative in getting its photograph taken, so we will have to leave it to the experts at Bird Studies Canada to determine from our report whether that sighting will be counted.



Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) seen at the Cave and Basin marsh area during the Christmas bird count. Photo: Kevin Barker

We also have a new high for the number of individual birds seen on our count at 5,958 birds. This number beats the earlier high count of 4,581 in 2015. The two years previous to this year's count had low numbers (2,014 in 2017 and 1,854 in 2016).

Some Further Highlights:

Beyond everyone seeing ravens and magpies, most areas reported high numbers of seed eaters. We had our highest or second highest ever counts for Mountain Chickadees (407), Red-breasted Nuthatches (201) Common Redpolls (410) White-winged Crossbills (1,257; 1,618 in 2015) and Brown Creepers (30, 52 in 1995). You just have to look at the red "wave" of cones on top of the spruce trees in the valley to see this tremendous food source this year.

We had a preponderance of Bohemian Waxwings totally 1,769 in groups numbering in the hundreds, probably feeding on mountain ash berries. This is a new high for our count, surpassing the 1,264 waxwings counted in the year 2000.



Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

There were some disappointments, no Killdeers, and very few waterfowl on the Bow River and especially no owls seen on the day of the Count. Neil Denton was lucky enough to see and photograph a Great Horned Owl the following day.

No matter the results, every year nearly every participant remarks, it is a lovely way to enjoy a wintery day outside. To learn more about previous Bow Valley counts and the larger context for North America and beyond, go to: bowvalleynaturalists.org

The Christmas Bird Count has been conducted throughout North America for well over 100 years (go to birdscanada.org for details). Bow Valley Naturalists have coordinated the Banff-Canmore count since 1975.

Many thanks to our coordinators Heather Dempsey (Banff) & Ethan Denton (Canmore)

BVN 2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (Number Of Birds /Count Week)					
SPECIES	#/CW	SPECIES	#/CW	SPECIES	#/CW
Mallard	164	Clark's Nutcracker	29	House Sparrow	228
Common Goldeneye	5	Black-billed Magpie	246	Pine Grosbeak	10
Common Merganser	5	American Crow	2	Red Crossbill	26
Ruffed Grouse	3	Common Raven	231	White-winged Crossbill	1257
<i>Grouse species</i>	<i>1 sp</i>	Black-capped Chickadee	90	<i>Crossbill species</i>	<i>8 sp</i>
Rock Pigeon	142	Mountain Chickadee	407	Common Redpoll	410
Wilson's Snipe	3	Boreal Chickadee	71	Hoary Redpoll	1
Bald Eagle adult	1	<i>Chickadee species</i>	62	<i>Redpoll species</i>	28
Great Horned Owl	CW	Red-breasted Nuthatch	201	Pine Siskin	271
Belted Kingfisher	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	1	American Tree Sparrow	2
Downy Woodpecker	4	<i>Nuthatch species</i>	<i>1 sp</i>	Song Sparrow	2
Hairy Woodpecker	3	Brown Creeper	30	White-throated Sparrow	7
American Three-toed Woodpecker	7	Pacific Wren	CW	Harris' Sparrow	2
Northern flicker	1	American Dipper	24	Dark-eyed Junco	65
Pileated Woodpecker	CW	Golden-crowned Kinglet	24	<i>Sparrow species</i>	<i>3 sp</i>
<i>Woodpecker species</i>	<i>1 sp</i>	Townsend's Solitaire	2	Rusty Blackbird	1
Northern Shrike	3	American Robin	1		
Gray Jay	21	European Starling	62	NEW: Marsh Wren	1
Blue Jay	17	Bohemian Waxwing	1769	NEW: Lincoln's Sparrow	CW

Colleen Campbell would like readers to be aware of New Scientist, which she says is a terrific weekly science news magazine that presents daily on-line stories. Bird related content is frequent and is always interesting. See Colleen's book review below to fill your time until next CBC - happy birding!

MPB - COMING TO A VALLEY NEAR YOU?

Residents of the Bow Valley may want to take note of the extent of the Mountain Pine Beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) outbreak in the Athabasca River Valley in Jasper National Park. The extent of the dead pine is overwhelming and is changing the viewsapes while creating a wildfire hazard that is unprecedented. MBP control efforts continue in the Bow Valley in Canmore and surrounding lands but if the outbreak reaches similar proportions as it has in Jasper Park then Bow Valley residents and visitors may have to adjust their expectations about our valley's forests.



These trees were cut as part of a logging project to control fire hazard created by the Pine Beetle outbreak adjacent to the Town of Jasper. Will this be a Bow Valley scene in the coming years? *Photo: P.Duck.*



Valley Of The Five Lakes Trail with extensive beetle killed trees, Jasper National Park November 2019. *Photo: P.Duck.*

COVER PAGE BACKGROUND

Thanks go to Paul Sylvester for this photo of a colourful stone from the Cambrian formations that were deposited approximately 500 million year ago in what is now the Mt. Robson area. The stones-within-the-stone or "breccia" are resting at various angles and likely evidence of turbulent waters that had mixed different stones and finer particles together at the time this sediment settled. Do you have more insight into this rock to share with us? Or do you have your own interesting nature photo you would like to share with BVN members? Send a note to us at info@bowvalleynaturalists.org and we will work it into our next issue.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE ANIMAL DIALOGUES: Uncommon Encounters with the Wild

Craig Brown, Little-Brown, 1997

Colleen Campbell

Though published in 1997, the stories in *The Animal Dialogues* are timeless. They are beautifully written, each one sharing a distinct encounter and are not chronologically linked. Some are thrilling, filled with tension; some are quietly visual, sharing the intimacy of watching an animal who does not know that it is being observed. The variety of story length means the reader can squeeze in a short piece while waiting for an appointment or sit and linger with something longer.

Craig Brown is an observant naturalist with personal ease in the wilderness. His writing illustrates a persistent sense of awe in all that is around him. Additionally, he seems to have an innate sense that sharing with others will also inspire them to love and respect nature as much as we all should.

Brown is a prolific author with many books in his resume. *Animal Dialogues* is available on-line and likely available through local libraries.

WHO DO YOU CALL?

You may come across situations or observations that you want to tell the authorities about. We recommend you have these phone numbers handy. Remember, cell phone coverage is spotty in the mountains so take notes if you need to move on to make a call.

Ambulance, Fire Department, Police (RCMP): 911

Banff Dispatch: 403-762-4506 for Park-related emergency only (avalanche, forest fire, mountain rescue, etc.)

Banff Dispatch: 403-762-1470 for Park non-emergency (e.g. bear or large carnivore sightings, human-wildlife conflicts, injured animal, illegal park activities such as fire, camping, drones)

Kananaskis Emergency Services 403-591-7755 for emergencies, bear, cougar and problem wildlife sightings, illegal activities. This is also the number to report a poacher. If you wish to remain anonymous while reporting a crime, phone 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

CONTACTS

(Please let us know if you find any of these contacts need to be updated)

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ALBERTA

If your call to your MLA, or any Alberta government office, is long distance then please dial 310-0000 then the area code and the phone number for toll free access.

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