

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS

CLICK THE TITLE AND JUMP TO A TOPIC THAT INTERESTS YOU

BVN PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Recent Programs and looking forward to more...

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- Banff Community Plan and Public Hearing
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WHO DO YOU CALL WHEN THINGS ARE AMISS?

CONTACTS – We Know Who to Call

Please let land managers and planners know you want protection for ecosystems. Call them, write them a letter, or drop a note to journalists. If you need help finding contact information, or help understanding a particular issue, please drop us a note and we will help you send a message to the appropriate desk.



Bow Valley beauty to come...Striped Coralroot
(*Corallorhiza striata*). Blake Gordon Photo.

ECOSYSTEM EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

1967-2025

BOWVALLEYNATURALISTS.ORG

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

BVN presents programs on natural history and ecosystem management issues. Our 2024-25 program series is finished but be sure to mark your calendar for 7:30 pm on the fourth Tuesday of every month from October to April next season. Remember in December that the usual presentation is replaced by the annual Christmas Bird Count and potluck supper, where you are also welcome. Below are some quick links to our most recent programs for those coming rainy days in the Rockies.

January 2025

John Pomeroy on *Changes in Mountain Snow, Ice and Water around the World - Local Implications and Global Prospects*.

[Video](#) (Originally presented to the Red Deer Chapter of the Council of Canadians)

February 2025

Annie Loosen on *Balancing Outdoor Recreation and Wildlife Conservation: Insights from Collaborative Recreation Ecology Research*.

[Video](#) [Slides](#) [Audio](#)

March 2025

Jamie Farr on *Menu of the Mountains: Food Web Ecology of Bison, Elk, and Bighorn Sheep in Banff National Park*.

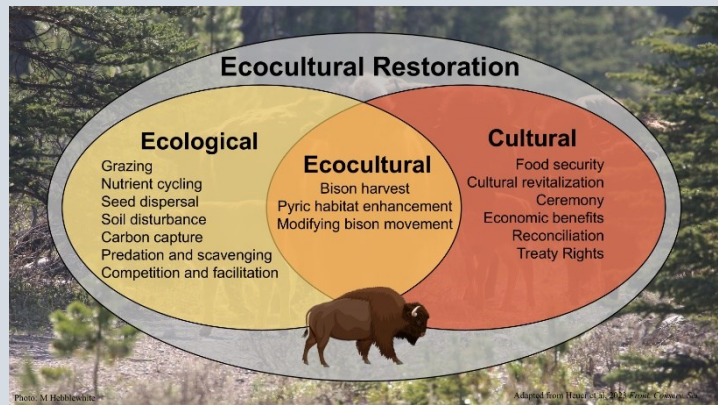
[Video](#) [Slides](#) [Audio](#)

April 2025

Clayton Lamb on *Crossing Lines: Grizzly Bear Connectivity, Source–Sink Dynamics, and Highway Mitigation in the southern Canadian Rockies*.

[Video](#) [Slides](#) [Audio](#)

Recordings of many more past programs are available on our [Public Programs](#) web page. Please be sure you are subscribed to our updates to receive notifications of programming information and to register for any online presentations.



PhD candidate Johnathon Farr explained the case for Ecocultural Restoration to our audience during his March talk on Bison, Elk, and Bighorn Sheep food webs. *Graphic courtesy of M Hebblewhite, adapted from Heuer et al. 2023 in Frontiers in Conservation Science.*

NEWS AND ISSUES

Banff Railway Lands Area Redevelopment Plan

This proposal, approved by the Town of Banff and motivated by private commercial interests, is based on the eighteen-year-old Community Plan and is inconsistent with the Ecosystems section of the Town's own environmental management plan (EMP). See more details of our concerns in BVN's recent article on this project in our [Fall newsletter](#).

In January, BVN submitted comments on the draft terms of reference for a strategic environmental impact assessment (SEA) of the Railway Lands Area Redevelopment Proposal (ARP). These comments were submitted in addition to BVN writing a [letter to the federal Minister](#) making the case that strategic assessment is the wrong mechanism for assessing the impact of this project proposal and that the federal

process for strategic assessments was not even being followed. For example, there is no provision for participant funding and there has been no national notice of the project posted, according to the requirements of the Impact Assessment Act of Canada (IAAC), as there is for routine smaller projects. BVN is not sure why Parks Canada is trying to fly this project under the national public radar. We asked that this development project be considered as a "designated project" under IAAC. Our letter also asks the Minister to pause any federal consideration of this project until the new Banff Community Plan is available to guide this proposal.

[Town of Banff Railway Lands ARP Information page.](#)

[Text of BVN's Verbal Railway Lands Presentation to Council](#)

[Full BVN Submission to the Railway Lands ARP municipal public hearing.](#)

Banff Community Plan

BVN participated as the environmental sector representative on the Town of Banff Community Plan Advisory Committee. The review of the plan is entering its later stages and an opportunity for public comment on a draft of the revised community plan is now ongoing. It is expected to get first reading at Town Council in the coming weeks with a public hearing scheduled for late June. [The plan may be found here.](#)

It is important that this plan is creative in finding ways for economic, social, and environmental values to interact in a way that promotes a healthy community and defines Banff as a "national park town". BVN remains concerned that traditional economics gave rise to the social and environmental problems the community faces. But the draft plan does not encourage exploration of a more ecological economic model that is appropriate for a national park community facing real limits to growth. Balancing economic values with social and environmental values is the sort of thing any town in Canada might aspire to. But, is balance the right approach as the community faces difficult social challenges and a need to recover from the harm that development of the townsite has done to ecosystems for 140 years?

BVN's initial reaction is that the draft Community Plan falls short on many of the major environmental issues facing our community. The Town is working hard on waste management and, to its credit, has tried to tackle the complex issue of a warming climate through renewable energy and transit innovations. But it falls short on reinforcing environmental commitments, especially those made in the Environmental Management Plan such as committing to wetland restoration and forest cover. Proposals such as the railway lands ARP promote turning a wetland ecosite into a parking lot.

Within the draft Community there are many lofty phrases such as the "foremost priority is to restore ecological integrity" but no examples of what or how, and the mention of the "objective to be sustainable" with no clear definition of what sustainability would look like. With little progress on the Ecosystems section of the Environmental Management Plan we are skeptical the overarching community plan includes a meaningful commitment to finally deliver on ecosystem understanding and protection within the town site.

Where the Town continues to fall down in the draft Community Plan, is with the oft-repeated comment to be a model park community in harmony within a national park setting or to model national park values. Unfortunately, many of the objectives within the Draft Community Plan could have been written for any town in Canada. BVN is also concerned that the Draft Community Plan includes what we interpret as a vaguely worded desire to reopen the Canada National Parks Act (CNPA) for the rezoning of commercial development in the town. On top of this there does not seem to be a recognition of the importance of maintaining natural green spaces within the town boundary versus considering undeveloped land an invitation to increase the built environment.

An additional serious concern includes the continued push for more intercept parking and visitor centers at both entrances to the town, regardless of the impact on existing wildlife corridors. The Town's failure to address the thorny issue of on-street commercial development and the commercial cap is also disconcerting.

Overall, there is a sense that the Town of Banff does not recognize that the environmental impacts of the Banff townsite already extend far beyond the townsite boundary through forest management, intensifying visitor and town based commercial use and maintaining drained wetlands. In effect, the area outside the town over which the town extends its environmental impacts is larger than the area of the townsite. There is talk of restoration but these impacts are increasing and specifics of what the Town believes it should restore are missing.

On the topic of community health and social issues, the draft plan has landed in a good place if, during its life span, it delivers on the commitments it makes.

The following thoughts can be considered when reviewing the draft. Please consider which of these are important for you and whether the plan gives you confidence that any specific goal or objective will be acted on and achieved. If not, let the Town know what measures you think should be specified in the plan to ensure the Town is accountable for taking action.

1/ Do you think the draft Plan commits to balancing needs of visitors and residents? Do environmental, social and economic interests receive attention in the proper proportion? Do you think any of these should be given more emphasis to reflect your concept of a national park community?

2/ Environmental stewardship is listed as a key priority in the Draft Banff Community Plan and the document puts forth the vision of Banff as a model for "sustainable" tourism. Are there components of the draft plan that contradict this vision? How do they need to be handled? Does the draft Plan match your understanding of "sustainability" for the community?

3/ Housing availability, accessibility and affordability are discussed in the Plan with a commitment to eliminate the current housing shortfall by 2035. Do you think measures in the plan address housing needs of the community in the future? Do you think the Town's economic plan will actually bring a stop to the growing demand for housing making the 2035 goal achievable? Do you think the Town proposes to commit enough of the remaining developable land in the townsite to accommodate those needs or is available land being committed to other, more discretionary, non-housing land uses? For example, consider how the railway lands are being proposed to be developed in the context of the Draft Community Plans bold commitment to eliminate the current housing shortfall by 2035.

4/ How is housing affordability being addressed within the draft plan?

5/ The Draft Banff Community Plan envisions a prosperous economy with social and economic equality along with environmental protection and restoration. Do you think the current approach to the Banff economy is sufficient to achieve this? Or is there perhaps some alternative economic approach more suited to addressing these commitments? Should there be a written commitment to explore an economic model that aligns more with community needs and ecosystem protection? [Learn more about ecological economics here.](#)

6/ Are issues related to food security, seniors' services, childcare and housing adequately addressed within the draft plan?

7/ For the first time, health is directly being addressed in Banff's Community Plan within the Community Wellbeing section. The municipal level of government has jurisdiction over certain public health measures (e.g. noise, lighting, alcohol policy, smoking/cannabis by-laws, fluoridation of water, traffic speed limits, etc.). Are you satisfied with the commitments made to community health within the plan. If not, what needs to be changed or added?

We are grateful that Town staff have kindly responded to our initial concerns, especially those relating to limits to growth of the Town boundary and potential opening up the Canada National Parks Act. The Town has provided us with the following points of clarification about the purpose of the Community Plan.

What is NOT the purpose:

- Expanding the area of the townsite.
- Increasing the legislated commercial cap or commercial gross floor area.
- Creating a parking lot outside the townsite on Parks Canada managed land.

What IS the purpose:

- A discussion/conversation with Parks Canada and the public on rezoning certain areas, which necessitates a change to the map in the CNPA.
- Potentially rezoning a portion of the CS Commercial Service District to make the land northwest of Hawk Avenue (Parks Canada and Town of Banff compounds) PS Public Service district rather than a commercial district.
- Potentially rezoning a portion of the east side of the 200 Block of Banff Avenue from CD Commercial Downtown District to PS Public Service district.
- Rezoning sensitive ecological areas along the railway line to EP Environmental Protection rather than CR Railway Commercial.

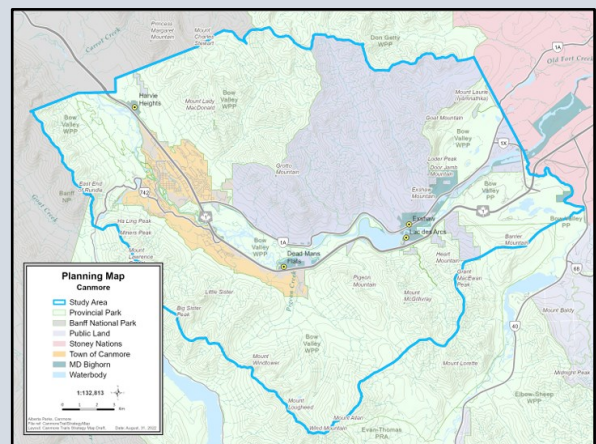
The nuances are found in the details of how things play out on the ground. For example, the CNPA does not specify protecting only sensitive ecological areas. It speaks to protecting ecological integrity and natural processes. We encourage our members to review the plan carefully and be sure your community values are represented and ecosystems are protected, both within and beyond the Town boundary.

Here are the public information panels that were presented at the one public information session in April. Information on the community plan review process may be found on the Town of Banff website.

(Correction/Disclaimer: The above panels refer to participants in a Community Plan "steering committee". In fact, the committee functioned in an advisory capacity only, with no obligation by the Town to incorporate the advice provided. The Draft Community Plan is a product of the Town of Banff and does not represent any endorsement by committee as a whole or its individual members.)

Canmore Area Trails Strategy

According to the Government of Alberta the Canmore Area Trails Strategy is designed to address growing demand for trails in the Canmore area, providing world-renowned recreational opportunities while protecting local wildlife and conserving habitat. Public engagement on the proposed strategy will contribute to a Crown land trails plan for the area and support an update to the trails plan for the Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park. The Canmore Area Trails Strategy study area, the blue boundary on the adjacent map,



Government of Alberta image.

covers a large area of interconnecting valleys in the front and back country around Canmore.

BVN has been participating in the development of the strategy over the last year or so and it is now getting close to the secondary engagement phase of the process which will provide the public an opportunity to comment on the draft strategy. BVN, along with other groups, is becoming concerned that the strategy will not be well founded on ecosystem management science. As always, we hope our members and followers will watch for opportunities to advocate for science-based ecosystem management, such as applying wildlife corridor and secure habitat science, as this draft strategy is made public. Be sure to watch our updates for any announcements about public engagement and visit the Alberta Government's [Canmore Area Trails Strategy](#) website for announcements and background information.

To Park, or Not to Park Underground

The Town of Banff is currently proposing more surface parking lots to address its visitor parking problem. But there is also an undercurrent discussion in Banff about whether it is better to provide multi-level parking structures, above ground or below ground, if private vehicles are going to continue to arrive in Banff, or possibly arrive at transportation hubs located elsewhere in the Valley. To be efficient with the very limited space it is obviously best to have multi-levels than parking sprawl in sensitive ecosystems. BVN advocated in our presentation to a Banff Council public hearing that above ground, multi-level structures can provide a variety amenities to the community beyond parking (see our railway lands ARP submission above). At the time, sports spaces, roof-top picnicking, solar panel, and community garden space came to mind. But there may still be a desire to install underground parking which requires concrete structures and that is not so suitable to these accessory advantages of above ground structures. It is also interesting to read a recent CBC news story that suggested that concrete structures, above or below ground, are no longer a good idea in a time of climate change. Read the article "[How Eliminating Underground Parking is Helping the Climate](#)" and consider how parking developments in your community are being designed.

Got Too Many Reusable Bags?

Do you have a stash of reusable bags accumulated from years of responsible retail therapy? Give them a second life! The Town of Banff is launching a "borrow a bag" pilot program that will offer Banff residents the opportunity to borrow a reusable bag for groceries or other needs around Banff. Please donate your unwanted clean, in good condition, bags at the drop off station in Banff Town Hall.

Lots of Good People Doing Good Work for Ecosystem Protection

Learn about other important ecosystem protection topics from organizations that are also active in protecting the Bow Valley and surrounding region.

[Alberta Wilderness Association](#)

[Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative](#)

[Ecojustice](#)

[Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society](#)

[Wildsight: Columbia Valley Newsletter and Issues](#)

[Bow Valley Engage](#)



DONATIONS & THANKS!

BVN is grateful for the numerous donations that allow us to do the things we do. Funds we receive pay for ongoing administrative expenses such as website maintenance, support for our program series expenses, and bird banding operational expenses. These donations also allow us to pool funds to support other individuals, projects, and organizations. All BVN's routine advocacy and administrative tasks, including Board activities, the annual Christmas Bird Count and preparing the newsletter, are done by volunteers. Please use the donation button at the bottom of our web pages if you wish to support the work we do.



Special thanks to the Paddy Mulloy Foundation for ongoing generous donations.

WILDTHINGS

Coyotes – There is No Science by Colleen Campbell

In various parts of Alberta, bounties are offered for dead Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) and dead Wolves (*Canis lupus*). There is no science to support such programs which have random outcomes.

Killing all the Coyotes within an area will not solve the challenge of Coyotes on the land. Others will move in to settle the vacated areas and take advantage of the (still present) resources. Wolves will follow a similar pattern.

Unlike domestic dogs, Coyotes and Wolves reproduce only once each year. The senior mated Coyote pair, leaders of the family group, remain mutually faithful as long as they are both alive. Their strong bond is forged through courtship, renewed each year during late autumn and early winter. Breeding occurs in mid-to-late winter and pups are typically born any time during mid-April to early May. The mated pair suppresses reproduction by other family members and, importantly, teaches the family group how to live, ideally without getting into trouble with people.

When Coyote and other wild animals become “problematic” it is nearly always due to human behaviour, intentional or accidental such as leaving petfood on a deck. Intentionally offering food, perhaps to get an animal to face a person for a photo is equally coercive. Walking with your dog off-leash when it seems no one is watching is also problematic. A Coyote who lures one dog successfully is likely to try again. They learn easily.

Randomly killing Coyotes fractures the learning and the social cohesion of the family group and causes turmoil and higher rates of conflict for the younger generations.

Persistent disruption of a local population, such as through bounty hunting, interrupts learning and contributes to social chaos amongst and within Coyote family groups. The chaos may lead to smaller family groups and, thus, more pups within an area where Coyote families have been disrupted through culling.

Additionally, mange (sometimes an excuse for hunting Coyotes) is due to a parasitic infestation. Killing mangy Coyotes will not rid a population of the parasite. Not all Coyotes or wolves carrying the parasites appear to have mange.

Coyotes are rodent specialists and opportunistic about other prey. Every kind of agricultural operation from grain farmers to cattle ranchers and sheep farmers can benefit with Coyotes in the local habitat to reduce unwanted rodent populations.

For a couple of decades, I worked (as needed) for an Alberta sheep farmer who learned about and tried to understand Coyotes. The rancher knew that killing the local Coyotes never solved the problem of Coyotes going after lambs. No matter what methods were used (poison, shoot, trap) there were never “no Coyotes” and lambs, especially, were at risk. Coyotes learned how to cross electric fences when tasty tiny lambs were in the paddocks. Llamas, which have a natural antipathy to canine creatures, were not as effective as hoped.

Eventually, guardian dogs were introduced to the operation. A couple of Abruzzi Maremmas (a guardian dog breed) who responded quickly to any general threat. They hung out together near the house, surveying the paddocks from a slight elevation. There was also a guardian dog living most of its time with the rams and another two or three that lived persistently with the ewes and lambs.

The guardian dogs worked well. Not a single lamb was lost to Coyotes after they were added to the team. And Coyotes, wisely, know that a mature ewe can be formidable.

Coyotes are smart. The resident family did not want to tangle with the guardian dogs and left the sheep alone. As rodent specialists they found enough food to maintain the small family and control of the rodent population was also good for sheep who found healthier and safer grazing in the paddocks. Importantly, the relevant guardian dogs stayed with the sheep in the paddocks.

The rancher also visited every neighbour and explained the approach of having Coyotes that knew the “rules” in the area. “Leave the domestic animals alone and all will be fine. We will leave you alone, too.”

It was a negotiated détente that worked. The guardian dogs protected the sheep. The resident Coyotes were wary of the dogs and did not hunt the lambs. The pastures were healthier because the Coyotes were controlling rodents. The consistent Coyote family learned to live with the conditions imposed by the presence of guardian dogs and other consistent conditions in the patch where they lived responsibly husbanded domestic animals and no human-sourced attractions available to the Coyotes.

The farmer’s role was to ensure that the interplay of all the parts was reasonable and predictable. Significantly, the ways the local Coyotes behaved was due to behaviours of the local ranchers. The border collies brought all the sheep (from various pastures) into the corrals every night, the guardian dogs stayed with the sheep, the fences were kept mended, the dogs were kept healthy with good food and places to shelter and they were friendly with those of us who worked around the sheep.



Bow Valley Coyote. P. Duck Photo.

Each operation will be different. However, a respectful and consistent relationship with your local Coyotes is easier to maintain than trying to suppress/control the populations with guns, traps, and poisons...over and over and over.

Life is a lot easier getting along with neighbours (humans and wildlife) than living in conflict with them. There is a lot of “rancher experience and wisdom” that contradicts hunting Coyotes (or wolves and other carnivores) for the wistful aim of “population control.”

During the early 1980s, Oregon rancher Dayton Hyde intentionally chose to protect predators, especially Coyotes, and prey species on his ranch, thinking that a healthy intact ecosystem would be better for his domestic stock. This was in contradiction to the local “ranching practice” and the actions of his neighbouring ranchers. “Don Coyote: The Good Times and the Bad Times of a Much Maligned American Original” (1986) relates his stories, challenges, distractions, and successes. Dayton Hyde’s experiences could inform and encourage alternative ways to live with wild species, while ensuring the well-being of livestock and health of the land.

Maybe not randomly killing Coyotes will yield better outcomes for everyone.

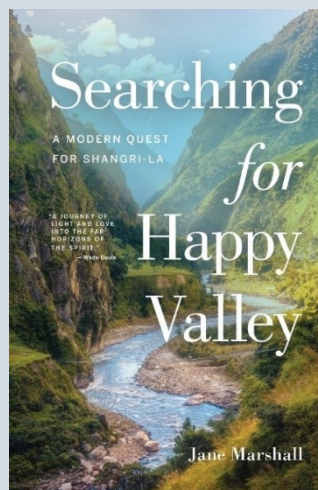
Maybe not randomly killing any wild carnivores without good reason will yield better outcomes for everyone.

(Editor’s note: This article leads one to wonder if [Alberta programs](#) to hunt problem bears and elk may be similarly misguided.)

MEMBERS READ, WATCH, AND LISTEN

The Alberta Government’s [Bugs and Diseases Newsletter](#) from the Forest Health team has an interesting article on Forest health and Wildlife Risk in Alberta.

Local writer Jane Marshall undertook a global quest to comprehend the meaning of “Happy Valley” on three continents and how these mountain communities continue to survive in a world that constantly challenges the very notion of “happiness.” Perhaps [Searching for Happy Valley](#) is a timely read as our Bow Valley municipalities ask for comments on community plans and other difficult decisions that affect whether we are happy in our own home valley. Available at [Rocky Mountain Books](#).



RESPONSIBLE NATURE WATCHING

BNV cautions all readers to not use publicly accessible social media style applications to post the locations of sensitive natural features, plants or wildlife that will attract people to that location. It's good to know nature is out there but in these days of social media such sharing of sensitive information will put the nature we love at risk of being loved too much.

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.

For Emergencies such as Ambulance, Fire Department, Police (RCMP): 911

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

Banff Park **Non-emergency**: 403-762-1470, (bear or large carnivore sightings, human-wildlife conflicts, injured animal, illegal park activities such as fire, feeding wildlife, camping, drones etc.)

Kananaskis: Call 310-5263 for bear, cougar and problem wildlife sightings, illegal activities or to help report damage to public land, noise complaints and general land-related inquiries and information requests. To report a poacher, call 1-800-642-3800 or fill out an [on-line report](#). If you wish to remain anonymous while reporting a crime, phone 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).