



**“There is another world,  
but it is in this one.”**

**Paul Eluard**

**June 2011**

**SAGE Meeting** June 2nd,  
7 p.m. (bylaw review)

**OWC AGM** June 9th, reg-  
istration at 11:30 a.m. at  
the Coast Hotel.

Vote for the **OWC Wa-  
tershed Legacy** project  
for a Shell grant of  
\$50,000

**Prairie Urban Garden**  
tour, June 26th.

**Maude Barlow** speaking  
on water markets and  
fracking at the Yates,  
June 1st at 7:00 p.m.

**Globe & Mail review** of  
“Shaping Alberta’s Fu-  
ture”.

## **Lower Athabasca Integrated Regional Plan (LARP)**

The recently released  
**Lower Athabasca Inte-  
grated Regional Plan** has  
underwhelmed environ-  
mental groups in the prov-  
ince.

**Ecojustice** has stated that  
the draft is ‘woefully inade-  
quate and will not ade-  
quately protect the region  
from the cumulative effects  
of industrial development’.  
The report fails to address  
greenhouse gas emissions  
from tar sands, and has no  
framework for sustaining  
biological diversity and  
managing land distur-  
bances, surface water, and  
tar sand tailings.

The **Sierra Club** notes that  
the draft plan fails to ad-  
dress the local social and  
environmental impacts of  
expanded tar sands exploi-  
tation. Significant caribou  
habitat remains vulnerable  
with only 16% of the region  
being proposed for protec-  
tion (mostly areas without  
underlying bitumen). Fur-  
thermore, the report ig-  
nores ecological thresholds  
for water quantity and the  
further deterioration of  
water quality.

Indigenous rights in the  
region remain despoiled.  
The Athabasca Chipewyan  
First Nation (ACFN) are or-

ganizing a **petition** noting  
the irreversible impacts of  
tar sand expansion includ-  
ing the loss of biodiversity,  
a reduction of water quality  
and quantity, and the de-  
struction of the Boreal For-  
est. The ACFN notes the  
‘deliberate, blatant, and  
systematic infringements of  
Aboriginal & Treaty Rights  
and Culture’.

These groups are lobbying  
for a moratorium on tar  
sands development until an  
independent review of cu-  
mulative impacts is con-  
ducted and an adequate  
plan is proffered.

## **A Future for an Un-Albertan Activities Committee**

The Premier of Alberta re-  
cently published the docu-  
ment titled “**Shaping Al-  
berta’s Future**”.

Future energy will be  
‘constrained’ by regulations  
for greenhouse gas emis-  
sions, so electricity produc-  
tion will move to more natu-  
ral gas, ‘clean coal’ tech-  
nologies, and long-term sup-  
port for large-hydro and  
nuclear development.  
Unmentioned was a com-

mitment to developing re-  
newable energy sources.

There will be more empha-  
sis on water monitoring with  
a long-term plan (by 2040)  
to create an Alberta Water  
Authority managing ex-  
changes of water allocation  
and establishing a water  
market.

There was also a significant  
focus on business-as-usual  
resource exploitation, em-

phasizing how much our  
current prosperity is de-  
pendent upon non-  
renewable resources while  
noting the risk of ‘disruptive  
technologies’ that might  
threaten the future demand  
for oil.

And, finally, with a wagging  
finger the report says: “we  
are disturbed about the  
damage done to our reputa-  
tion as ‘dirty oil from Al-

berta tar sands’ grabs head-  
lines in respected publica-  
tions, well known compa-  
nies announce boycotts and  
environmental groups  
launch anti-Alberta cam-  
paigns” (p.12).

This unwarranted sully of  
our reputation must be  
eradicated at the source  
**... are you, or have you  
ever been, a member of an  
environmental group?**



## Exploring the Castle (2008)

## (Book Review)

I bought Robert Kershaw's *Exploring the Castle: Discovering the backbone of the world in southern Alberta* mainly for the trail guides that make up the last half of the book. And they are very good: complete with maps of the region, descriptions of the routes, and details of the level of difficulty and expected times for hiking. It is up to date and captures the main hikes from the Crowsnest to Waterton Lakes National Park.

What I didn't buy the book for was the text that precedes the trail guide. Like a coffee table book, I had expected it to be a glossy romp through some beatific vision of nature. Instead, I found a well written exploration of the region - a mental exploration of the history and natural significance of the Castle that complements the physical exploration of the trails described later on.

Kershaw begins by relating the place of the Castle, the assortment of habitats from alpine, through subalpine, to montane, to foothills parkland. He notes the "estimated 824 different vascular plants, 160 of them rare provincially and 38 that are rare nationally" and its significance for wildlife as well as a water storehouse, with "the Castle's watersheds and sub-basins contribut[ing] upwards of 30 per cent of the water needed to keep

the arid ranchland, farmland and thirsty towns downstream thriving" (p.19).

The text traces the history of human use and impact on the region from the First Peoples, to the arrival of fur traders, early European settlers, and to society today. And our impacts are significant: "By the early 1940s logging throughout the Castle was beginning to have noticeable impacts on the rivers and resident trout populations. Even though hunting had been banned, certain wildlife populations were declining while other fluctuated wildly. Meanwhile oil and gas wells were once again being drilled. Grass was being over-grazed. Horse trails that once followed indigenous trails were turning into roads while seismic lines were become the new routes in the Castle's backcountry" (p.81).

It is a story of exploitation and political ineptness that we are familiar with: "In between the implementation of each Act, policy and plan there were the endless studies, public round tables and stakeholder meetings, even small pockets of active resistance. People were tired. The land was tired. Expansion, contraction, extraction had taken their toll on the Castle" (p.85). He goes on to say that "the largest threat to the Castle today - to its watershed, its vege-

tation and wildlife - is an intensive 20-year logging plan for the southern Eastern Slopes. ... the C5 Forest Management Plan sets a course to log Crown forest from Longview to the Waterton Lakes National Park boundary, including the remaining old growth in the upper South and West Castle Valleys" (p.129).

*Exploring the Castle* makes one feel that the region is the center of the world - that the history of the earth and the history of mankind have converged here to presage an uncertain future. More importantly, it makes one feel a sense of duty to sustain this important ecosystem for both its intrinsic value and for our own unquenchable need for clean water released dependably over the summer. Kershaw concludes: "If we are facing a wilderness conservation, protection and restoration crisis, it is not because of how ecosystems function, but rather because of how our ethical systems dysfunction." (p.137).

The book is available through the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society ([CPAWS](#)) - Southern Alberta Chapter.





## Letter to the Editor (submitted to the Lethbridge Herald)

Dear Editor:  
Government, Science and Democracy

The process of land management in the Castle Watershed by the Department of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) and the state of democracy in Alberta is the issue.

Non Government Organizations (NGOs) have been communicating the ecological values of this watershed between Waterton and Blairmore for some 40 years. The identified ecosystem services provided by these Public Lands have justified the call for its protection for the long-term benefit of Albertans. Government departments, however, responsible for the management of these lands have, over the years, always taken a short term approach in the form of multi-use.

Science based assessments are needed to provide predictions of the consequences of specific policy options. Alternative policy options provide the opportunity for the selection of the best strategy of land management (The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Science - Policy Interface, Science, March 4, 2011, 1139). To date only one science-based assessment of this watershed has been conducted. This was done by the Natural Resources Conservation Board in 1993, and the Decision Report recommended protection for 90% of the area. Unfortunately, this report as any other science based study, has been and is being ignored by SRD. Consequently the area is suffering in its biodiversity resources and is in urgent need for restoration and protection.

Instead of seeking a science-based best management strategy, SRD has sanctioned the destruction (clear cutting) of some 60 km<sup>2</sup> of forest west of Beaver Mines to commence in June of this year. With this indifferent decision SRD is demonstrating a blatant disregard for the democratic process by:

1. not informing the public of the need for this destructive treatment of public lands,
2. not releasing the results of a scientific assessment of the project, if indeed one was done (economic, ecological, social, environmental - carbon foot print, energy use),
3. ignoring the reasoned pleas by NGOs over the last 40 years, and
4. ignoring two recent public surveys which convincingly opposed destruction of the watershed and called for protection instead.

Why would elected officials insist on destroying critical habitat for vegetation, animals and humans without a scientific assessment? This project is an opportunity for SRD to move its land management into the modern age by conducting a scientific assessment and help restore public confidence in the democratic process as practiced in Alberta.

Klaus Jericho

cc: MLA Berger, Minister Knight, Premier Stelmach



Letter to the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) on April 26th.

RE: Oil & Gas Exploitation on the Kainai Reserve

The Kainai (Blood) reserve, located directly west of Lethbridge, has become the target of interest for oil & gas exploitation. Murphy Oil and Bowood Energy have negotiated leases with the band council (albeit without appropriate consultation with the membership) which, apparently, have been granted approval from the IOGC. It is my understanding that the ERCB regulations will be used to govern practices of drilling and completion on this land.

**Question 1:** What is the exact accountability of the ERCB on land under federal purview, like Reserves? (i.e., are ERCB regulations legally enforceable?)

It has been said that the oil & gas companies will use horizontal drilling at 2800 meters, and use hydraulic or gas fracturing stimulation methods to enhance production. As I'm sure you are aware, there are growing concerns worldwide about the negative environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing – particularly with shallow formations. Furthermore, there is research that suggests that gas migration can be significant for abandoned wells due to the deterioration of casing and cement, with a potential to contaminate groundwater aquifers.

**Question 2:** Is the ERCB working on a regulation that addresses contemporary stimulation techniques? (i.e., water and air baseline before exploitation; higher standards for well casing and cementing materials and techniques; more stringent geological evaluation to identify formation stability including natural faults and fractures; limits on the pace and scale of exploitation in order to monitor affects over time; managing the disposal of fracturing chemicals (40 to 60% of injected fluids); sufficient bonds to cover the costs of remediation and compensation for damage over the long term; corporation-paid but independent oversight and enforcement of regulations for these projects).

**Question 3:** What authority would be responsible for establishing baseline data: for the current quality of groundwater aquifers, for surface water, and for air quality as they relate to the long-term impacts of horizontal drilling with intensive fracturing, including the exploitation of shale gas and coalbed methane?

**Question 4:** What regulations are in place or in progress that address the consumption of clean water (as much as 400 m<sup>3</sup> per event) from surface or groundwater systems? Is this type of consumption limited by current water rights (i.e., is this not similar to an interbasin transfer of water, as the water is not returned to the hydrologic cycle)?

In summary, our concerns include the growing intensity of drilling / well spacing; surface disturbances caused by noise, dust, traffic, and to wildlife and local ecologies; the use of scarce fresh water in the region; surface impacts to air quality (fugitive emissions and flaring) and water contamination; and the handling and disposal of toxic fluids (through deep-well injection or as solid waste). The many concerns over hydraulic fracturing have largely been dismissed by industry and the provincial government, but I am sincerely concerned about the sustainability of our health, our lifestyle, and our economy if we were to damage the environmental services we rely on. I would very much appreciate your candid thoughts on these concerns.

Sincerely,

Braum Barber

Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

cc. Kainai Lethbridge Earth Watch (KLEW)