



STORM BREWING ON THE PRAIRIES – PUBLIC LANDS UP FOR GRABS

By Joyce Hildebrand, AWA Conservation Specialist

The ancient Hebrew myth of Cain, the agrarian, killing his brother Abel, the herdsman, continues to inscribe itself on Alberta’s prairie landscape. Public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, across Alberta’s remaining native grasslands are being given away, sold, and converted to cropland at an alarming rate, with devastating consequences for endangered and at-risk prairie species.

AWA recently received word of a land swap that, if approved, could result in a large expanse of native grassland west of Medicine Hat – public land leased for grazing and home for numerous species at risk – being ploughed up and lost to future generations. Louis Ypma, owner of SLM Spud Farms Ltd., recently approached the Hays Stock Grazing Association (HSGA) with an offer to buy their lease for 99 quarters of land in Cypress County near the confluence of the Bow and South Saskatchewan rivers. The lease comprises two chunks of land known as the “south Murray pasture” and the “Laidlaw pasture.” This is an expansive area of unbroken prairie that provides excellent pronghorn winter habitat and, according to Environment Canada, is “within the dispersal range of the prairie rattlesnake and bull snake.” It is our understanding that Ypma wants to



“Storm Clouds on the Prairie Fields” © PAM WILMAN

trade his own grazing leases in the MD of Taber with the HSGA grazing lease in Cypress. All of the land concerned is administered by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD).

During Ypma’s first meeting with

the Grazing Association on September 25, he made an offer that was rejected by the approximately 50 members of the group. He came back in October offering an additional \$25,000 for each member. Some members are finding the cash difficult to turn down, but others are concerned about the potential destruction of ecologically valuable native prairie. Ypma pushed for a vote at that second meeting, but Association members decided to consider the offer further before making a decision. If he succeeds in acquiring the lease, Ypma will be able to submit an application to buy the land from SRD.

The land that Ypma now leases and that we have been told he wants to swap with the Grazing Association is in Taber County. According to Derrick

Land Category	Percent of Alberta
Public land.....	60% (94% of B.C. is public land)
Private land.....	28.5% (virtually all in the White Area)
Green Area (unsettled).....	47% (contains 57.5% of Alberta’s public land)*
Public land in Green Area.....	47%
White Area (settled).....	31% (contains 2.5% of Alberta’s public land)*
Public land in White Area.....	2.5%
Provincial protected areas.....	4.2%

**These figures exclude federal land (10% of Alberta), provincial protected areas (4.2% of Alberta), tax-recovery lands, and areas of the province covered by water (2.5% of Alberta).*

Krizsan, municipal administrator of the County, Ypma purchased two grazing leases in the County, one earlier this fall and the other a year ago. All of the land in his leases is public land (some is Tax Recovery Land) currently administered by SRD. “We haven’t been involved in any negotiations or been formally notified,” says Krizsan. “Ypma did make a brief appearance at one of our Council meetings, but we sent him back to SRD and Hays Stock Grazing Association.” If HSGA accepts Ypma’s offer, then the three parties – SRD, Ypma, and HSGA – would come to a Council meeting, would affirm in Council’s presence that they are all on side with this plan, and the swap could proceed. “From an administrative perspective, it would be a very positive development for the County,” says Krizsan. This is without doubt a good deal for Taber, but what kind of a deal is it for most of the taxpayers of Alberta or for prairie conservation? How much native prairie rangeland and valuable wildlife habitat will be ploughed under as a result?

Krizsan informed us that the land that Ypma now leases is protected by a 30-year conservation agreement prohibiting breaking of the land, made in 1999 with Ducks Unlimited. “Much of it is riverfront, much of it very sensitive, and we’re satisfied that the HSGA would be an excellent tenant.” If Ypma’s plans are for crop production, it’s not surprising that he wants to swap this land for land that he could apply to buy. Under current rules, anyone can apply to purchase grazing leases, and – using the rules governing lease swapping and public land sales – end up with a huge swath of native prairie ready for the plough at a fraction of the price of already broken land.

Even if the 92 quarters of Taber County land that Ypma wants to trade (for the 99 quarters in Cypress County) will remain unbroken for 30 years, two issues must be addressed. If the trade does not go ahead, both pieces of land will remain native grassland under grazing lease for at least 30 years, rather than one piece – the 99 quarters – becoming irrigated cropland with the accompanying habitat loss. Furthermore, SRD’s mandate is development of natural resources, not environmental protection, so when the



The star marks the approximate location of the public lands currently leased by the Hays Stock Grazing Association.

30-year agreement ends, there is no guarantee of continued protection from the plough.

When AWA questioned Ypma about the deal, he said that “nothing is happening” and that it is “too early to get into it.” When asked about the meetings with the Grazing Association, he neither denied nor confirmed them, and responded by taking our contact information and saying he would get back to us. We did not have the chance to ask him what he intends to do with the acquired land should the trade go through.

The First Swap, 2003/04

If Ypma’s past record is anything to go by, this bodes only doom for the prairie species on the land he is hoping to own. In 2004 Ypma acquired a similar piece of native prairie for potato production – this was also public land, in the same area as the land he is now looking to acquire. He took title of the land in January 2004, but ploughed the land during peak nesting season in spring 2003 – while it still belonged to Albertans. In a May 2004 letter to then-SRD Minister Mike Cardinal, University of Alberta ecologist Dr. Mark Boyce revealed that “this was done within three days of his receiving a proposal from Public Lands suggesting that

the province would entertain the land exchange.” Dr. Boyce, the current Alberta Conservation Association Chair in Fisheries and Wildlife, went on to say that with these actions, Ypma violated the *Public Lands Act*, the *Alberta Wildlife Act*, and the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. As far as we know, there have been no repercussions.

A recent government letter (November 7, 2007) from an MLA about this 2004 deal cites SRD Minister Ted Morton as claiming both of the following: “Titles to the lands were exchanged in January 2004” and “The land exchange was agreed to prior to the public land being put into crop.” What form that agreement took is unclear, but the fact remains that Ypma ploughed the land under before it was legally his. How many landowners would allow the buyer of their land to seed and harvest a crop before paying for the land?

Documents acquired through the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPP) revealed several disturbing points about Ypma’s 2004 land exchange. It happened despite a wildlife survey that found evidence of four at-risk wildlife species on the land that Ypma acquired and cultivated. The report indicated that this land had significant wildlife

Grassland Matters

Most Albertans view landscapes through an agrarian, tree-loving lens, similar to their immigrant ancestors – they drive the country roads in early fall and take pleasure in the blue lakes of flax, the cheerful yellow canola fields, and the amber waves of grain. Look at these same fields through ecological eyes, though, and you will see biodiversity destruction and species extinction. “A wheat field is nothing more than a clearcut of the grass forest,” says Richard Manning in his 1995 masterpiece, *Grassland*. The analogy couldn’t be more apt.

To the careful eye, native prairie is at least as stunning, as complex, and as worthy of conservation as the most spectacular mountain vista, and ploughing it up is as ecologically devastating as clearcutting an old-growth forest. “Just as a forest is not only trees,” writes Manning, “a grassland is not only grass. It is hundreds, literally hundreds, of species of plants woven together in a complex fabric of interdependencies that extend then to insects, to birds, to a carpet of rodents, to predators, and finally to large mammals, of which humans are but one.”

More than half the species on Canada’s endangered list are species adapted to and dependent on unbroken grasslands, including the burrowing owl, swift fox, and ferruginous hawk. If we care about human-caused extinction of species, we should certainly care about preserving what’s left of Alberta’s grasslands. We listen with horror to the stories of the heartless shooting of the last passenger pigeon or the nineteenth-century slaughter of Great Plains bison while prairie species here in our province are increasingly squeezed onto islands of habitat, a portent of coming extinction.

Most of us head to our spectacular foothills and mountains for respite from the pressures of everyday life. We anticipate with excitement the possibility of seeing a grizzly or wolf, both of which once lived in the grasslands as well. But exploring the coulees, sloughs, and grassy uplands of southeastern Alberta, listening to the tumbling trill of the Sprague’s pipit or the warning rattle of a snake under a sagebush provides an expanded appreciation of the diverse natural beauty of our province.

I often recall sitting next to the South Saskatchewan River one summer evening in the middle of a week-long canoe trip. My paddling companion and I were trying to catch up on some reading, but after numerous interruptions, we finally put down our books to take in the activity around us. A beaver was busily repairing his bank lodge across the river, patting pawfuls of mud into place. A mule deer came down from the uplands for a drink, a coyote howled from a nearby coulee, nighthawks buzzed above our heads, a pronghorn snorted an alarm on the ridge behind us, and jumping fish left expanding ripples on the river’s surface. “There are people who think of the prairie as boring,” says Saskatchewan writer Candace Savage, “and it’s hard not to pity them.”

values, including endangered species habitat, and that it was part of a large contiguous block of native prairie. Despite this, in the letter cited above, Minister Morton refers to that same survey as concluding that “there was no evidence of any species at risk on the surveyed land.”

Referring to the land Ypma gave up in the exchange, Minister Morton is cited in the same letter as advising that “the environmental values of the freehold land were assessed by Sustainable Resource Development’s Fish and Wildlife Division... The freehold land contained important wildlife resources such as prairie

rattlesnakes, burrowing owl habitat and a sharp-tailed grouse lek.” The FOIPPed documents, however, reveal that Fish and Wildlife biologists were opposed to the deal. In fact, they did assess Ypma’s land but said that it should not be acquired by the province in exchange for the public land as it was degraded by oil and gas development and roads, and it was largely covered with non-native crested wheatgrass, was highly fragmented, and was surrounded by agricultural land.

Finally, extensive wildlife surveys were not conducted on the property Ypma wanted to offload in

the proposed exchange. SRD initially sent an agrologist, an agricultural soil scientist, to assess the wildlife values on this land. After discussions with the landowner and a visit to the site for a few hours, the agrologist indicated that the land had similar ecological values to the public land. AWA believes that it is inappropriate for an agrologist to make any recommendation regarding wildlife values. Such recommendations should only be made by a qualified biologist who is eligible for membership in the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, a society formed under Alberta’s *Societies Act*.

SRD claims that “public land required for recreation or conservation purposes, or bordering lakes and rivers, is not available for sale or cultivation” (SRD website). But how can we know whether public land is required for conservation purposes without a thorough environmental review? How could the Government of Alberta approve the cultivation of native prairie when this is the very ecosystem that is most threatened in Alberta, when three-quarters of Alberta’s at-risk species rely on native prairie? At least 75 percent of Alberta’s grasslands have been cultivated or highly disturbed, and less than 1 percent of this natural region is protected.

In an August 18, 2003 letter to Grasslands Naturalists, then-SRD Minister Mike Cardinal wrote, “SRD has entered into a two-phase land exchange with Mr. Ypma and other parties that provides a positive outcome for all.” It appears that his “all” included neither Albertans concerned about the ongoing loss of native prairie, nor the sensitive, at-risk, and endangered species that depend on Alberta’s grasslands.

If SRD approves a trade such as the one now being proposed by Ypma without an environmental assessment of both pieces of land by their own highly qualified and dedicated biologists, and without basing the decision on that assessment, the government’s lack of commitment to science-based planning and conservation will be revealed once again. “The last time this happened,” says AWA Vice-President and ecological consultant Cliff Wallis, “habitat for species of concern was destroyed. That was our experience

with this specific individual with lands in the same area. This is a continuation of the same bad process.”

Tax Recovery Land Giveaway

Another issue related to the loss of public lands in Alberta, particularly in the settled White Area, is that of Tax Recovery Land transfer to municipalities. Tax Recovery Land is public land that at one time was privately owned but was forfeited due to unpaid taxes between the 1920s and 1940s, when drought and other factors forced many off the land in southeastern Alberta. This occurred before the establishment of many municipal governments. In the Hanna-Oyen-Consort area, the default on taxes was so great that the provincial government stepped in and created special municipal management areas, now referred to as the Special Areas. But in addition to Special Areas, Tax Recovery Land is also widely distributed in other municipalities in southern Alberta.

it is located upon the municipality’s request, a practice that had been underway for some time. The land is transferred to the municipality for \$1 per parcel, generally a quarter section. Municipalities will, of course, reap huge financial windfalls if they subsequently sell the land that they acquire – and being perennially short of cash, why wouldn’t they?

After this Cabinet decision, an extensive inventory and title search was done on remaining Tax Recovery Land to determine which lands were transferable to which municipality. Based on Environmentally Significant Area surveys, land that contained internationally and nationally significant areas (less than 10% of the total) was retained. In 2004 the Treasury Board questioned, on a fiscal basis, the transfer of Tax Recovery Land, and Cabinet once again affirmed the policy.

And so the privatization of Tax Recovery Land is now happening with no public consultation and with no

the ecological value of land is being considered in current transactions.

Although policy allows the government to transfer these lands, it has no legal obligation to do so. The fact that transfers are going ahead confirms the government’s tendency to favour local control of Alberta’s public lands and local public involvement, despite the fact that these lands belong to all of us. When AWA contacted SRD’s Land Management branch to find out how much Tax Recovery Land exists and how much has been transferred in the last year, we were told that those numbers were unavailable because of current transfer negotiations now underway.

According to the MD of Taber’s newsletter (Winter 2007), the county contains approximately 569 quarter sections (368 km²) of Tax Recovery Land that are now leased by SRD to local leaseholders. The newsletter states: “In August of 1996 individuals who held Tax Recovery Land grazing leases were notified by Sustainable Resource Development that there would be one additional 10 year lease renewal with Public Lands whereupon beginning in 2006 the title to the lands would be transferred to the Municipal District of Taber. Leases expiring after 2006 would transition to a Municipal District of Taber lease. The process of transferring title to the Municipal District of Taber has already started and will continue until 2016.” What this means is that just nine years from now, all 569 quarters will have been transferred to Taber County if this process continues as planned. Similar transfers are happening in counties throughout southern Alberta.

The problem from an ecological point of view is that Tax Recovery Land is generally part of large contiguous blocks of prairie habitat, almost none of which is legally protected. Look at any map of a southern Alberta county, and you will see a sweep of green representing public land, including Tax Recovery Land, dotted with occasional islands of yellow deeded land.

Burrowing Owls vs. French Fries

A great deal of pressure, including political pressure, has been applied in some areas of southern Alberta for



The expansive grasslands of the Suffield National Wildlife Area, CFB Suffield. A. TEUCHER

Although municipalities and the Government of Alberta may argue differently, AWA views Tax Recovery Land as public land. Since 1930, the government has treated Tax Recovery Land as public land, using provincial taxes to maintain and manage it. In 1996 Cabinet confirmed that Tax Recovery Land could be transferred back to the municipality within which

updated environmental assessments, despite SRD’s claim that only land with “no commanding environmental sensitivity” will be transferred (SRD website). This process includes no transparency, participation, or accountability measures to guarantee that the government is adhering to this claim. Past public land sales, trades, and transfers offer little hope that



The ferruginous hawk is one of the many Alberta endangered species dependent on native prairie. This one was perched near its nest in the Suffield National Wildlife Area. C. OLSON

the sale of public rangeland, including Tax Recovery Land, for conversion to irrigated farmland. Although those who have managed to acquire cheap rangeland and convert it to irrigated cropland have experienced financial benefits, existing environmental values, including wildlife, have been disregarded or ignored. The process of fragmentation and habitat loss is well underway, as native grassland is converted to irrigated cropland.

This is in contrast to other activities on public rangelands. For example, oil and gas companies are not allowed to proceed with development until comprehensive wildlife surveys have been conducted. Mitigation plans have to be developed in the event that migratory birds or sensitive or at-risk species are found. Setback and timing guidelines are in place to ensure that wildlife species are not impacted by oil and gas activities. While this is not to say that these activities are benign with respect to prairie ecosystems, it reveals a double standard. “Why are these requirements bypassed when it comes to ploughing up native prairie,” asks wildlife biologist Greg Wagner. “Breaking rangeland results

in irreversible loss of habitat and fragments the remaining large blocks of prairie in Alberta.”

Wagner has spent much of the last fifteen years studying, surveying, or managing wildlife populations occupying the Dry Mixedgrass or Mixedgrass Natural Regions of southeastern Alberta. “Over this time,” he says, “I have watched the ongoing decline of native prairie habitats. It’s death by a thousand cuts, as prairie ecosystems are impacted by a wide range of activities.” Wagner and others are particularly concerned about the transfer of Tax Recovery Land to municipalities, which privatizes public land and leads to loss of government and public control over threatened grassland ecosystems. “This kind of transfer happens behind closed doors without due process and species of concern get lost in the shuffle,” says Wallis.

What’s driving this exchange of valuable prairie habitat for cropland is the same thing that’s responsible for Alberta’s oil sands fever: money. There is currently a huge demand for new farmland, particularly that which could become irrigated because of its location near watercourses or adjacent to irrigation infrastructure. This is especially true for potato production, which has proven to be very lucrative despite potatoes being one of the thirstiest of all irrigation crops grown in Alberta. The five major potato

processing plants, including the huge McCain (Coaldale) and Lamb-Weston (Taber) plants that came online in 1999 and 2000, have prompted a massive increase in irrigated potato acreage. Potatoes grown for processing into products such as french fries constitute 68 percent of all potato production in Alberta. These potatoes are subject to a number of diseases and typically are not grown in the same field in successive years. Consequently, a large amount of acreage is required to grow them, since less lucrative crops must be grown in years following potato production.

Whether Ypma plans to grow potatoes on the Cypress County land is unknown. Other crops may be equally lucrative, especially given the provincial government’s promotion of biofuel development. On May 22, 2007, CR Fuels received a development permit from the MD of Taber for a \$325 million ethanol, biodiesel, and biogas digester complex on about 100 acres of land that is owned by Louis Ypma (*Lethbridge Herald*, June 8, 2007). If the necessary approvals are granted, construction could begin in summer or fall 2008. The biodiesel operation will produce about 113.6 million litres a year and use 250,000 tonnes of canola. The ethanol plant will produce 95 million litres a year and use 260,000 tonnes of wheat. As more hungry biofuel plants are approved and built in the province, the



The endangered sand verbena is part of the complex ecosystem of Alberta’s prairies. C. WALLIS

New Proposed Act Good News for Wildlife

In November 2006, the burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk, both of which are dependent on native prairie, were uplisted from threatened to endangered under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. The provincial and federal status reports for both of these species – as well as those for most other endangered prairie wildlife species – indicate that habitat loss and fragmentation are of prime concern in their ongoing decline. The first federal status reports on the burrowing owl and the ferruginous hawk came out in 1978 and 1980, respectively. The province's status reports on the same species were produced in 1997 and 1999. All of these reports clearly emphasize that preserving native prairie is key to the continued existence and well-being of these species. How can the Government of Alberta justify the transfer and sale of native prairie public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, when the loss of prairie habitat was clearly identified as being the key reason for these species' decline almost 30 years ago?

The good news is that MLA Dr. Neil Brown (Calgary-Nosehill) has begun work on a bill that he hopes to bring forward in the spring 2008 sitting of the legislature. According to Brown's draft Purpose Statement (October 2007), the *Wildlife Habitat Preservation Act* would "prohibit the sale of unbroken Crown lands which are subject to grazing leases or which are Tax Recovery Lands, in order to maintain the natural value of the land. This would require an assessment of the land before it is sold, to determine the environmental/wildlife attributes of the parcel." AWA supports this initiative, but we will also recommend that the proposed Act include the requirement for an open, transparent, public process for any release of public land – sales, trades, or transfers – including Tax Recovery Land.

Please consider contacting Dr. Brown (calgary.nosehill@assembly.ab.ca, 403-215-7710), and your own MLA, to support the proposed *Wildlife Habitat Preservation Act*.

pressure to break more native prairie for crop production is likely to increase tremendously, with devastating effects for endangered species.

After 150 years of trying to prove John Palliser wrong about his assessment of this semi-arid region as ill-suited for farming, perhaps it's time to admit the foolishness of this agricultural exercise and leave the remaining grasslands unbroken. Indeed, the fact that the Bow River is currently in a state of crisis because of overallocation provides strong evidence that converting more native prairie to cropland requiring heavy irrigation is unsustainable and unwise. Dr. David Schindler, one of Canada's top water experts, warns that the Bow River may soon be depleted to the point where it will not recover as a fully functioning aquatic ecosystem.

If Ypma acquires the Cypress County land and converts it to cropland, the water required for irrigation, regardless of what is grown, will need to come from the Bow River, the nearest water source. Ypma has already approached the Bow River Irrigation District about the

possibility of incorporating the land that he is interested in buying into the District. "Without a comprehensive water conservation strategy in place in Alberta," says AWA Conservation Specialist and water economist Carolyn Campbell, "this ad hoc approach to expanding irrigation acreage is short-sighted."

Public Land Policy Vacuum

In a 1998 paper entitled "In Search of Public Land Law in Alberta," research associates Steven Kennett and Monique Ross of the Canadian Institute of Resources Law state: "The importance of the province's land and resource base to the well-being of Albertans and the increasing demands that are being placed upon it would lead one to expect a businesslike and well-conceived approach to public land management." After reviewing Alberta's land and resource legislation, Kennett and Ross made the following conclusion: "Alberta's statutes governing land and resource use lack an overarching framework of integrative principles, objectives and standards, the extent of substantive and procedural

direction provided to decision-makers is often very limited, and adherence to principles of ecosystem management is not mandated by law. Alberta is also currently without a comprehensive planning process for public land and resources."

If anything, government stewardship of public lands has worsened since Kennett and Ross's analysis. In 2004 SRD stated that 9,000 to 10,000 acres of public land are sold every year. According to the MD of Cypress, the land that Ypma is trying to acquire in that county is entirely public land and therefore subject to sale. Any Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada who is over 18 can apply to buy public land in Alberta. Land managers determine if the land is suitable for the intended use, and if they approve the use, the land is sold to the highest bidder. If Ypma acquires the grazing leases of the Hays Stock Grazing Association, therefore, he can buy the land through this process. According to SRD's website, this should not happen if the land is environmentally sensitive, but recent history shows that this may be no more than lip-service.

What is needed immediately is a full public disclosure and public review of the sale of all Alberta government-administered lands, including Tax Recovery Land and lands administered by Special Areas. Furthermore, all public lands must undergo a thorough environmental review within a broader ecological framework that examines the need for prairie conservation and the protection of endangered species. Ecologically significant lands must be identified and a plan put in place to protect them in perpetuity. Policy must be changed so that any transfer or sale of public land, including Tax Recovery Land, involves public participation. Premier Stelmach's much-repeated promise to Albertans of transparency must be applied to the management and sale of the land that belongs to all of us. We need a clear, defined policy for the release of public lands, a policy that includes an open process whereby all Albertans, not only those with local interests, are given the opportunity to be involved.

Current SRD initiatives that are meant to address the environmental



“Grasslands Vista” © PAM WILMAN

impacts of human activity on Alberta’s landscape must address the issues outlined here. Whether or not the government is serious about three recent initiatives – the Land-Use Framework, the proposed cumulative effects regulatory framework (the draft policy document “Towards Environmental Sustainability”), and the Integrated Land Management

program – can be determined in part by how SRD deals with Ypma’s proposed land swap and with the issue of Tax Recovery Land privatization. The Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan 2006-2010 – created by the Prairie Conservation Forum, of which the provincial government is a member – specifies three goals, one of which is stewardship: “Conserve Alberta’s

native prairie and parkland landscapes.” Alberta’s current management of public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, is in direct contradiction to this goal.

When Premier Stelmach was the Minister of Agriculture in 1998, the *Calgary Herald* cited him as saying that “‘good black soil’ is what drives farming and ranching.” We hope that in the past decade, he has realized that ranching is in fact driven by “good native grassland,” and that turning up that black soil destroys not only the home of many of Alberta’s endangered species but also the potential for sustainable grazing. “Ranchers have saved our bacon with respect to conserving native prairie,” says Dr. Mark Brigham, biology professor at the University of Regina and member of COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). “Hats off to them. We have relatively little native prairie left, and unlike many other habitats, once it’s gone we cannot get it back. We don’t know how to restore it.”

The silent characters in the drama of Cain the farmer and Abel the herdsman – the ones with no voice since the arrival of Europeans with their shiny metal implements – are the land itself and the many species that depend on it. It’s time to learn to listen to the grassland, to expand our tunnel vision, and to realize that humans are also dependent on its continued existence. Candace Savage, in her eloquent conclusion to her magnificent tribute to the prairies, *Prairie: A Natural History*, says it well: “The survival of the wild prairie and its creatures will depend, in no small part, on our ability to ensure their well-being right now. By protecting and restoring wild prairie and managing the working landscape for wildness, we can strengthen and enhance the ecosystem, in all its diversity and abundance, both for our own sake and for the future.”

For an overview of public lands in Alberta, particularly the issue of public access to those lands, see the October 2007 issue of the Wild Lands Advocate. See also AWA’s website: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca.