



ALBERTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

June 24, 2020

Re: Cumulative Effects of Land Uses and Conservation Priorities in Alberta's Southern East Slope Watersheds

Dear Premier Kenney,

The Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society is a non-profit organization representing over 450 wildlife professionals in the province of Alberta. Our mission is to inspire and empower wildlife professionals to engage in science-based management and conservation of wild animals and their habitats. We are pleased to provide the Government of Alberta with an assessment of cumulative effects for the headwaters of the Oldman and Bow basins. The report "Cumulative Effects of Land Uses and Conservation Priorities in Alberta's Southern East Slope Watersheds" has been shared with our membership and project partners both on the [ACTWS website](#) and through a [lunch and learn webinar](#); a video of the webinar is available should any of your staff wish to see it.

Alberta's Southern East Slopes are treasured by Albertans for their economic, recreational, and ecological attributes. As the current and future land use footprint in this area increases, there is mounting evidence of impacts related to the area's hydrologic response (including floods), fish and wildlife habitat and populations, aesthetics, recreation, and commercial interests. Understanding the impacts of cumulative effects on this landscape is important for the Alberta economy, as well as recreational access and opportunity. The ACTWS contracted ALCES to conduct a cumulative effects assessment to focus on future needs and directions to guide sustainable land use decisions, while contributing to the conversation about future management and potential options for adjustment while opportunities exist.

This research was designed to contribute to the following existing Government of Alberta planning processes:

1. The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan (LFMP)
The LFMP required the addition of spatial human footprint targets as thresholds to guide the spatial human footprint until 2045. This vital piece of the LFMP was due to be completed by May, 2019, but remains incomplete.
2. The C5 Forest Management Plan
Reframing the C5 Forest Management Plan to shift focus from timber/fiber management to forest/watershed management will ensure new planning incorporates the linear footprint,



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recreation, cumulative effects analysis, and biodiversity management framework elements of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. This would allow a new C5 plan to meet Forest Stewardship Certification and operations within C5 become the “gold standard” for provincial management.

3. Detailed Forest Management Plans

FMA holders will have the advantage of information on cumulative effects to chart a course to meet other watershed values, inclusive of species at risk recovery plans, reduced hydrologic response and recreation needs.

This research used a cumulative effects analysis (CEA) to test the status quo of land use management (business as usual) against other possible scenarios and predictions for both. As a science-based assessment this provides an opportunity to improve our understanding of different management scenarios and clearly show expected outcomes. This work can be used to assess the implications of expanded coal exploration and possible development, an increase in timber harvest annual allowable cut, and proposed closures of provincial recreation areas, which will increase random camping and off highway vehicle use. All of these are current changes facing land use decision making along Alberta’s Southern Eastern Slopes. Our research and final report is timely and will be useful to inform evidence-based land use decision making. With different management trajectories, there is an opportunity to make a real change in terms of conservation.

The research focuses on the presence, distribution, and abundance of native trout (Westslope Cutthroat trout and Bull trout) as a strong indicator of the sustainability and health of their larger watersheds, which provides a metric for watershed integrity. Declines in populations signal issues, which also include other aquatic and terrestrial species. Other biological indicators (i.e. grizzly bears) display a similar pattern to that of the trout indices, demonstrating that impacts extend beyond trout to encompass the broader ecosystem.

Using trout as an indicator of watershed integrity, the simulations in the CEA suggest that current land management in the East Slopes is leading us to an undesirable and unsustainable future. There is, however, hope through cost-effective conservation strategies that have potential to make real change along Alberta’s Southern East Slope Watersheds.

The ACTWS is happy to provide you and your staff with this cumulative effects analysis to assist in an important dialogue on land use planning for the southern East Slopes of Alberta. We look forward to a reply as to how the Ministries of the province might employ this work to allow an informed choice to be made about future options for land use in the southern East Slopes. The ACTWS would be pleased to be part of discussions on pathways for a sustainable future for these vital watersheds and landscapes.



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Respectfully,

Alex Beatty
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President, Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society

cc: Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks, Jason Nixon
Minister of Finance, Travis Toews
Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Devin Dreeshen
Minister of Energy, Sonya Savage
Minister of Indigenous Relations, Rick Wilson
Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, Grant Hunter
Associate Minister of Natural Gas, Dale Nally
Leader of the Opposition, Rachel Notley
Environment and Parks Critic, Marlin Schmidt
Energy Critic, Shannon Phillips
Alberta Energy Regulator, Public Lands Group
Alberta Energy Regulator Biologist, Jeff Smith
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