

Will the Grinch Steal your Park this Christmas?

Logging may begin over holidays in Alberta protected area

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As the residents of nearby communities of Beaver Mines and Pincher Creek prepare for the holiday season, concern is growing that up in the mountains of the Castle Special Place the Grinch may be preparing to steal their Park this Christmas. The Castle is just north of Waterton Lakes National Park.

“We’re concerned that the Grinch might steal the Castle Wildland Park before we can unwrap it this holiday season,” says Beaver Mines resident Gordon Petersen. “Spray Lake Sawmills has been threatening to log the Castle this fall, and now we’re concerned that logging could start over the holiday season. That would be akin to the Grinch stealing Christmas.”

The Castle was designated a protected area in 1998 under the Special Places process, but legislation to enable its permanent protection was never passed. Spray Lake Sawmills has been given permission to log in the Castle by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. A collaboration of local residents called the Castle Special Places Working Group, which includes business leaders, the ID of Waterton, Shell Canada, grazing lease holders and others completed a conceptual proposal for protection of the Castle. This proposal recommends the Castle be protected as a combination Wildland and Provincial Park and was submitted to the government of Alberta in late 2009.

“The Castle Working Group worked hard over 18 months and considered a variety of land-use designations that would protect the wide variety of natural and economic values in the region,” says Sarah Elmeligi of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. “Under consensus we agreed that Wildland Park designation was the best tool to protect the Castle; the area is far too important for the protection of Southern Alberta’s water, wildlife, and for rural economic development as a tourism destination. If the Grinch wanted to deliver a gift to the people of Alberta this Christmas, then agreeing not to log the Castle would be a good first step. Permanent protection is next on our wish list this season.”

Just as the Who’s down in Who-ville support Christmas, the residents of the region surrounding the Castle are in favour of permanent protection. A survey last spring showed that 79% don’t want logging, and 74% want permanent protection for the Castle as a Wildland Park.

“Will the Grinch steal Christmas?” asked Gord Petersen. “I feel a little like Cindy-Lou Who, watching and waiting for the logging trucks to come and take our trees away. What we need is real leadership from the Province of Alberta to recognize that the true meaning of the season is about protecting the real prosperity that comes from keeping places like the Castle protected for future generations, not stolen for marginal profits.”

For further comment:

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