



## Clear-cut Logging and Gas Well Planned for the Heart of Designated Protected Area

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For Immediate Release

Calgary, AB – Environmental groups in Alberta are decrying recent industrial activity in the Castle Special Place, saying that the impacts of new oil and gas development, logging and continued off-highway-vehicle use may be a death-sentence for the area's already fragile grizzly bear population.

On Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup> local residents of Beaver Mines were alerted to activity by Shell Canada at their controversial "Waterton 68" gas well within the Castle Special Place. The Castle Special Place was designated a protected area in 1998 but has not been legislated as such. The Shell "Waterton 68" sour gas well and planned clear-cut logging by Spray Lakes Sawmills are mere kilometres apart from each other.

"Yesterday morning, fresh grizzly bear tracks were found in the snow next to the new well site and a grizzly den in the area is also at risk. The clear-cut logging will also disrupt grizzly bear movement and habitat use in the Castle," says Gordon Petersen, President of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition.

The clear-cut logging is planned to start as early as June by Spray Lakes Sawmills and Shell's Waterton 68 gas well is proceeding, despite the efforts of a local resident who has asked the court to grant him leave to appeal the recent decision to approve the Shell Waterton 68 well.

In recent opinion polls, 78% of local residents opposed clear-cut logging and 73% opposed any new oil and gas developments. In addition, 80% of local residents supported establishing the Castle Special Management Area as a Wildland Park.

"The local people have spoken and stated what they would like to see happen for the Castle Special Place", says Gordon Petersen, President of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, "For years now the Government of Alberta and the local MLA have said that local opposition to a protected area was the reason the Castle hadn't been protected. Now what is their excuse? It's time for the Government to listen to its constituents and legislate the Castle as a Wildland Park."

"These developments demonstrate exactly what cumulative effects are and how they are not adequately considered in land-use decision making," says Sarah Elmeligi, Senior Conservation Planner of the Southern Alberta Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, "Right in the heart of a critical wildlife zone, we've got two major developments with significant impacts happening right next to each other. The combination of impacts will affect grizzly bears and many other species at risk."

The Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan states that core grizzly bear habitat should not have a road density higher than 0.6km/km<sup>2</sup>, yet a recent report by Global Forest Watch Canada states that road density in the Castle Special Place is already double, and in some places triple, that threshold.

Local residents blocked Shell's attempts to begin work on the site on Thursday, but fear they will be back after the long weekend. Residents expect to return to the site on Tuesday to confront Shell and protect the Castle and its grizzly bears.

"The local people and Albertans have every right to be concerned about these two developments and demonstrate that to the government and companies concerned." Says Dianne Pachal of the Sierra Club of Canada, "This isn't how a designated protected area should be managed."

Over a year ago a local multi-stakeholder, citizen-led group put forward a conceptual proposal for protection of the Castle Special Place as a combination Wildland and Provincial Park. That proposal remains with the Alberta Government, but no action has been taken.

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