

## Enviros bearish over development in Castle wilds

By Damien Wood Saturday, May 21, 2011



*Photo: Castle River near Pincher Creek*

Finding fresh grizzly bear tracks near the Waterton 68 sour gas well site last week confirmed Gordon Petersen's environmental concerns.

A fuss has been raised by Petersen's Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition and also by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society on the environmental impact of industry on the Castle area, particularly on a nearby grizzly bear den.

Both groups feel the Shell Canada gas well, combined with clear-cut logging by Spray Lakes Sawmills, expected to start in June just a couple of kilometres away, is too much.

"This area has already been hammered fairly hard, and here we continue to chip away at the ecological values that are there," said Petersen.

"It really is a big issue of cumulative effects and lack of vision and planning for the landscape — it can only take so much."

Sarah Elmeligi of CPAWS asked if this is how Alberta manages its designated protected areas, calling what is happening with the Castle area counter-productive.

Castle was designated a protected area in 1998, but has never achieved the legislation to back it up.

Officially, it is fair game until legally protected.

"What we've seen happen over the last 13 years is a continual degradation of the ecological attributes of the Castle, because it hasn't been designated as a park," said Elmeligi.

"That is what needs to change right now — I think we're running out of time."

In a March interview Duncan MacDonnell of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development said what is occurring with the Castle area is not the cause for concern it has been made out to be.

"There's been logging for a hundred plus years and it's still been one of the most sought after areas of the province, which speaks to the quality of our forest management," he said.

The Calgary Sun

The Waterton 68 sour gas well site was approved for drilling by the Energy Resources Conservation Board in March, following a hearing.

Attached pipeline applications were denied.

Petersen said an appeal is currently before the courts — most recently brought forward last Tuesday — even as work on the site begins.

He said the bear den is common knowledge, but just how close it is to the site was never really taken into consideration when the ERCB made its decision two months ago.

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With files from Bill Kaufmann