



Conservation groups say it's high time for serious changes to the ERCB

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For Immediate Release

Calgary, AB – Local conservationists and ENGOs are concerned about a recent approval by the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) of a Shell sour gas well in southwestern Alberta's Castle region that doesn't properly take into account the development's effect on grizzly bears. The grizzly is a threatened species in Alberta. A local resident, Mike Judd, recently asked the court to grant him leave to appeal the recent decision by the ERCB. This morning it was announced that Justice Conrad denied this request.

"The recent decision to deny the leave to appeal is disappointing," says Sarah Elmeligi, Senior Conservation Planner of the Southern Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, "but even more upsetting is that the ERCB did not take proper account of the impact the development will have on, among other things, grizzly bears.

"The ERCB is supposed to look after the public interest, but with its onerous, cumbersome, and legalistic approach, it couldn't be more public-*un*friendly," comments Gordon Petersen, President of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition. "Rather than being set up to truly weigh the public interest, the ERCB is more about window dressing. This is a classic case."

The Shell Canada Waterton 68 gas well is located in the Castle Special Place, where clear-cut logging by Spray Lake Sawmills is also scheduled to begin in June.

"Business as usual is occurring in the Castle and we are seeing the approval of multiple industrial activities within a Critical Wildlife Zone," says Dianne Pachal of the Sierra Club of Canada. "There is no legislation backing up the protected area designation for the Castle, and no effective legislation in Alberta protecting the habitat of endangered and threatened species."

Conservation groups are criticizing the ERCB for setting its own rules, which excludes the public from having intervenor standing before the Board when it comes to public land-use decisions.

Gord Petersen elaborates that, "Everyone, including Shell and the ERCB, is aware of a grizzly bear den in the area, and that the proposed sour gas well will impact grizzly bears. Instead of having an honest discussion about the issues, Shell tied itself into knots to keep the information out of the public record, and the ERCB went along with it. It's high time for serious changes to the ERCB so that it actually deals with real and significant matters of the public interest."

The Castle Special Place is seeing ever-increasing pressure from things like logging, sour gas drilling and development, road development, and un-checked motorized recreation. All of these pressures are adding up, and the cumulative effects are taking a serious toll on the ecological health of the Castle.

"The Castle Special Place is already a degraded landscape in need of restoration, and we have passed a critical tipping point for effectively managing cumulative effects," says Elmeligi. "Shell's argument that there are already 50 wells and 200 kilometres of pipeline in the area doesn't hold up. It is the additional impact of more wells and more roads that is of great concern."

Changes need to be made to the ERCB process to allow for greater public input, as well as to deny applications within threatened species habitats. Albertans can make the biggest difference by writing and speaking with their MLA's and by choosing not to purchase wood products from the Crowsnest Forest.

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