



## **Previous work in the Bow Valley**

### **Bow Valley**

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### **Bow Valley**

The Bow Valley is the most important wildlife corridor in the Central Rockies, and also contains rare montane and wetland landscapes. It is also the source of the City of Calgary's drinking water.

The Bow Valley is facing rapid growth in human facilities and intensity of use. The main priority of CPAWS in the Bow Valley is to maintain these wildlife corridors and key habitat patches.

Over the years, CPAWS has been involved in several key decisions to protect wildlife movement in the Bow Valley

- 1993 NCRB decision regarding the critical importance of maintaining functional wildlife movement corridors through and across the Bow Valley
- 1995 decision of the Alberta Government to establish Bow Flats Natural Area and Bow Valley Wildland Park
- 2002 decision to construct a wildlife underpass as part of the legacy from the G-8 meetings in Kananaskis Country.

### **Horseshoe Lands**

A new town with a population of fifty-six hundred residents has been proposed for the old Seebe townsite at the mouth of the Bow Valley. The town would be situated one kilometer north of the Highway 1 and Highway 40 South interchange, on the banks of the Bow River. Horseshoe Lands, as the development is known, is co-owned by Moondance Land Company, a Calgary-based developer, and 991021 Alberta Ltd., a wholly owned Stoney-Nakoda development company.

An Area Structure Plan (ASP) that was presented to the Municipal District (MD) of Bighorn Council proposes a range of housing, commercial and industrial developments. Proposed are 2760 housing units, ranging from high-density condos to single family detached housing, covering approximately five hundred acres. Commercial and industrial developments are planned for eighty acres, including a new wastewater treatment facility. Because of the provisions of Alberta law no environmental impact assessment is required, even given the large scope of this project.

In January 2007, representatives of CPAWS and several other environmental organizations met with a representative of the developer to discuss the proposal. Several key issues and conclusions were drawn from the discussion, including the importance of a sustainable water source and waste water treatment, and the need for regional land-use planning to put this development into context and determine cumulative environmental impacts.

The importance of a land-use planning framework for the province is becoming more evident as ad hoc developments are continually proposed in the Bow Valley, including Deadman's Flats, Carraig Ridge north of the Ghost Reservoir, Three Sisters Resort, the possible expansion of Exshaw and Horseshoe Lands. CPAWS cautioned the province and the Municipal District of Bighorn to approach the Horseshoe Lands development with extreme caution and consider the ramifications beyond the border of this project. This project would occur in the montane, an eco-region that covers less than one per cent of Alberta, and is adjacent to the important Yamnuska Meadows (Bow Valley Wildland Park) and Bow Valley Provincial Park. This area provides unique habitat for a range of wildlife species and is noted for the high diversity of vascular plants, including twenty rare or uncommon species.<sup>1</sup>

A public hearing on the ASP was held over three days in March and April of 2007. The hearings in early March, included a presentation by the developer, and public comments for, against and neutral on the project. At the April 12 hearing, environmental consultants hired by the MD of Bighorn reviewed the environmental study commissioned by the developer. The consultants recommended the environmental study be rejected based on the fact it contained "bias", was "inappropriate" and not "evidence-based".

On June 12, the MD of Bighorn Council gave Second Reading approval to the ASP for Horseshoe Lands. This makes a town of over 5000 people at the edge of the Bow Valley one step closer to reality. That said, the MD Council outlined seven major amendments and twenty minor amendments that need to be addressed by the developer before the Third Reading will take place. The major amendments include the following:

1. Environmental studies need to be completed based on recommendations by Wildlife & Company and the draft ASP needs to be amended based on those environmental studies.
2. A water source needs to be clearly proven, and the license must be provided to the MD prior to the Concept Plan stage.
3. Permit for required sanitary sewage treatment system must be provided before Concept Plan approval.
4. Access road from Highway 1 should have a formal road plan, and be owned by the Province of Alberta
5. Demonstration of fiscal viability from a municipal perspective
6. Commitment to proportional development of 3:1 for residential to industrial/commercial land
7. Concept Plan approvals required prior to any subdivision or development proceeding within the ASP.

Some of the minor amendments include using the best available, demonstrated technology for storm water management, clearly recognizing the need for wetland protection and a commitment to affordable housing.

As of this summer, the developer has been working with MD administrative staff and environmental consultants to meet the terms of these amendments. The developer expects to complete the

amendments and make all necessary revisions to the Area Structure Plan by September, yet MD Council is uncertain as to when a Third Reading will occur.

CPAWS is very apprehensive about this development, and the lack of context within the bigger picture. We will continue to follow this process closely, and let our views be known.

Even though the MD of Bighorn Council is no longer officially accepting submissions, we encourage you to let the Council know what you think. You can also write to the Alberta government and convey the importance of integrated management and land-use planning in the province of Alberta.

### **Guest editorial on Seebe sprawl encourages everyone to write**

The following piece by Sarah Fulton was a guest editorial which appeared in the *Calgary Herald* on March 23, 2007, respecting the Moondance Lands development at Seebe. This presents an excellent opportunity for others concerned about this issue to send letters to the editor setting out your own concerns with the Seebe development.

Sarah is a participant in CPAWS Calgary/Banff's Volunteer Leaders Program, a program which is designed to build volunteers' skills in environmental advocacy.

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### **Seebe sprawl would spoil our natural capital**

#### ***A proposed development near Seebe demonstrates the precarious state of land use planning in the province of Alberta***

*by Sarah Fulton*

*The lack of leadership and long-term planning during a period of tremendous growth could hold terrible consequences for the future.*

*At a hearing on the Seebe development on March 5, the challenge facing Bow Valley residents was clear: How do we maintain affordable housing for our community as it grows, while maintaining its integrity as a place of natural beauty and environmental importance?*

*Unfortunately, I believe the proposed community of 5,000 at Seebe is a case of "if you build it, they will come," and I don't just mean young families looking to stay in the Bow Valley.*

*Repeated efforts to meet the demand for housing in the Bow Valley will only result in continued sprawl within this corridor.*

*The gradual encroachment of Canmore on the surrounding landscape is only the most obvious example of the cost of unrestricted residential development in this area.*

*If we are to maintain our natural resources, and minimize the costs of our continued growth in Alberta, we must plan our development to be more sustainable.*

*That means preserving some areas, like Seebe, for the natural environment which we value and enjoy.*

*As our province continues to grow, questions like those raised by the proposed Seebe development will become more common.*

*More people make more demands on resources, and unsurprisingly, conflicts as to how to use those resources effectively will increase.*

*A cohesive approach to regional planning, taking into account the cumulative economic, social and environmental effects of individual development proposals, is critical to the long-term health of our provincial community.*

*Unfortunately, attempts at regional land use planning have historically failed, disabled by squabbling and necessarily self-interested municipalities, and conveniently overlooked by provincial authorities reluctant to make enemies by intervening in ostensibly local issues.*

*We must overcome these political challenges to the implementation of a regional planning framework.*

*At stake are issues clearly in evidence at Seebe: increasingly limited water availability, detrimental effects on sensitive wildlife, and the need to maintain the integrity of small towns and rural communities, particularly in the face of the rapid expansion of urban centres.*

*We must start thinking now about how we want our province to look 20, 50, and 100 years into the future.*

*It will not be possible for our grandchildren to enjoy our quality of life if we continue to feed our growth limitlessly with increased suburban sprawl.*

*I encourage all Albertans to tell their government representatives what their priorities are for the province, and make sure plans are being made to meet those priorities into the future.*

*Without a plan, development decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, often in crisis.*

*If this is how the decision is made in Seebe, we will see how such short-sightedness can result in irreversible damage to the Alberta landscape we love.*

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### **Three Sisters Mountain Village**

Three Sisters Mountain Village (TSMV) is an area of approximately 2000 acres within the Town of Canmore, on the south side of the Bow River. This area was purchased by developers in the late 80's and since that time, has been the subject of serious debate as it lies within a ecologically critical wildlife corridor in the Central Rockies Ecosystem.



*Three Sisters in the Bow Valley  
Photo by Heather MacFadyen*

In 1992, the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) made the decision that those wishing to develop on the Three Sisters lands could only proceed under certain conditions.

1. Residents of Canmore would be able to voice their opinions on development and the municipal right to control all developments should precede all others.
2. Best possible scientific criteria are developed to determine how to protect wildlife with this regional movement corridor, as corridors are vital to wildlife survival. From this, an environmental study group was formed to create guidelines for wildlife corridors, Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG).
3. Developers must meet conditions and legal undertakings before development could commence. These include air quality monitoring, water quality monitoring, ongoing public consultation and retention of corridors in as undeveloped state as possible in order to allow animal movements to continue...and to ensure the continuity of corridors through adjacent lands.  
(Section 10.4.5)

Since the 1992 NCRB decision, Canmore residents have turned down several flawed development plans. In 2000, a draft Conservation Easement Agreement was developed between TSMV and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD). The wildlife corridor placement on TSMV land was not based on prior analysis of wildlife movement, thus guidelines from BCEAG were not met.

In 2002, Golder & Associates were contracted to perform an Environmental Impact Assessment on the TSMV proposed development. The results presented a compromise on the BCEAG guidelines and were less than perfect, but it gained public support as an acceptable middle ground. As a result, the “Golder Report” recommendations came to represent the absolute minimum for primary wildlife corridors, and their subsequent buffer zones, in addition to the necessary land use planning adjacent to the corridors.

A new Conservation Easement Agreement draft was produced in 2003, yet the proposed buffers by the Golder Report were not included and public input was not taken into account. In addition, the added sites in the Stewart Creek area were not part of this review process.

In September of 2004, an Area Structure Plan for the TSMV was approved by the Town of Canmore. Much diligence, on the part of conservation groups in the Bow Valley, has been needed to ensure that TSMV development plans are proceeding according to the Golder Report guidelines.

In early 2006, land use planning concerns were addressed by the Town of Canmore. Development of the Three Sisters Golf Course and a natural trail could proceed by following Golder Report's minimum corridor requirements, placing the natural trail below the golf course, thus appeasing residents wish for recreational trails, as well as following land planning guidelines that will reduce human/wildlife disturbance.

CPAWS and our allies are continuing our active vigilance as the Three Sister's development planning proceeds

### **Dead Man's Flats**

Dead Man's Flats, a small community at the eastern edge of the Bow Valley, is an area of contentious debate. Currently a hamlet occupies the area of Dead Man's Flats, yet developers, specifically BHB Canmore Ltd., are planning to dramatically enlarge this area with the construction of residential and light industrial developments.

At this time, the Municipal District of Bighorn has approved this development in the Dead Man's Flats area. The present proposal sees development within 100 metres of the G8 Legacy wildlife underpass which was constructed within the last 2 years as part of the environmental legacy of the G-8 Summit in Kananaskis. The location of the underpass was set based on studies showing the huge frequency of wildlife movement there.

The other concern in this area is the human use of the wildlife corridor and habitat patch. Adequately and effectively controlling human use will require considerable effort and resources on an ongoing basis. This concern is not sufficiently addressed in the development proposal.

The new development in Dead Man's Flats could significantly affect wildlife movement in this area, as well as key habitat patches, as this area is a critical juncture for regional wildlife movement. The integrity of this land bears on the viability of wildlife in both Kananaskis Country as well as Banff National Park, and thus CPAWS is monitoring developments in this area very closely.