



Castle Special Place A Brief History

The Castle Wilderness needs protection now. The Castle's incredible diversity, role as a wildlife corridor, and spiritual and recreational values must be preserved. If destruction from irresponsible recreational use and industrial exploitation is allowed to continue, we may lose this irreplaceable part of Alberta's wilderness forever.

A Brief History

There is a long history of Albertans calling for the Castle's protection, yet despite coming close in 1993, the area still remains in need of the legislated protection. Here's a short history:

- 1968: Local residents and the Pincher Creek Fish and Game Association request legislated protection for the Castle.
- 1974: West and South Castle watersheds placed under Consultative Notation indicating government intent to proceed with a protected area.
- 1977: The provincial Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes notes that the Castle "has been identified as having considerable park potential."
- 1993: Alberta's Natural Resource Conservation Board finds the area has deteriorated and stipulates protection is needed.
- 1998: Parks Canada study finds ecological health of Waterton Lakes National Park threatened and cites activities on adjacent lands, including the Castle, as an important reason for protection.
- 1998: the Castle was a candidate site under the Alberta government's Special Places 2000 program in the late 1990s. Only a very small ecological reserve resulted, the West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve. The larger area of the Castle was designated as a "Special Management Zone," but that has shown little effect in protecting natural values.
- 2000: The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, set up under the free-trade agreement identifies the Castle as one of fourteen of North America's most biologically significant and threatened areas.
- 2005: An independent report commissioned by CPAWS, World Wildlife Fund and Shell Canada as a synopsis of current scientific knowledge for the Castle finds its ecosystem health and sustainability has been diminished.
- 2007: Minister Morton deferred acceptance of the C-5 Forest Management Plan, which would have committed the Castle and areas north to the Crowsnest Pass to twenty years of logging. He chose to await the results of an assessment on the state of the Oldman watershed before committing to a forest cutting future.
- 2008: A citizen-based group was formed to discuss potential options for legislated protection of the Castle.
- 2009: After working together for sixteen months, the citizen-based working group submitted a consensus-based conceptual proposal to the government of Alberta recommending that the Castle Special Place be legislated as a combination Wildland and Provincial Park.

- 2011: CPAWS is still working hard to protect the Castle and prevent logging in the area. CPAWS has been collaborating with other ENGOs and engaging Albertans to speak up for the Castle, as logging could begin any day. Over 80,000 people have spoken up and sent letters to Alberta's Premiers office opposing logging in the Castle.

CPAWS Southern Alberta is proud to be one of the parties at the table, working with local land owners, disposition holders, rights holders, industry, and small business to protect this special place. The timing has never been better to push for the protection of the Castle Special Place and it is more critical than ever for all Albertans to show their support.

Notes on Establishing the Castle as a Protected Area

Provincial Park legislation (legally binding) states that wildland parks and provincial parks, "shall be developed and maintained

1. for the conservation and management of flora and fauna,
2. for the preservation of specified areas or objects in them that are of geological, cultural, ecological or other scientific interest, and
3. to facilitate their use and enjoyment for outdoor recreation."

The backcountry of the Castle, amounting to about 99% of the Forest Land Use Zone is proposed as a wildland park (similar to the Bob Creek Wildland Park in the Whaleback, west of Claresholm). The remainder contains the existing West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve and the current Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs). The group is proposing that the Beaver Mines Lake, Castle Falls, Syncline, and Lynx Creek PRAs are upgraded to Provincial Parks. The Castle River bridge would remain as a PRA and be linked with Syncline and a new PRA cross-country ski area to make one small provincial park along the river.

Unlike the federal national parks system, the provincial protected areas system in Alberta does not include the interim step of establishing a "park reserve" prior to final designation as a protected area. Alberta Government interest in an area for future designation is usually conveyed through the placement of the area under a Consultative Notation or Protective Notation. The West Castle and South Castle watersheds were first placed under such a Consultative Notation in 1974.

What is the Citizens' Initiative and Working Group?

Citizens' initiatives do the background work for the Alberta Ministry of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation. They work on reaching a consensus amongst users and interest groups on the rough boundaries and the type of Protected Area proposed.

The Citizens' Initiative for the Castle is composed of various stakeholders in the area including user groups, interest and community groups, disposition holders, adjacent landholders, First Nations, businesses, and Municipal Governments with an interest in the Castle Special Place. All potentially interested parties were invited to join the working group and there has been an open invitation for any party not already taking part in the process.

Participants were self-selected and participated at the level of their choice. The working group was composed of individuals who were highly involved in the process and met once a month to discuss the details of the conceptual proposal. Once a draft proposal began to take form, it was circulated amongst other members of the initiative for their input. Meetings were run by an independent facilitator and all decisions were reached by consensus. See www.castlespecialplace.ca for more information.