

ANNUAL REPORT | 2019/2020

# Looking at tomorrow. Giving back today.





***CPAWS Southern Alberta acknowledges that they work in the traditional territories of the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), comprised of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and Amskapi Piikani First Nations; the Tsuut'ina First Nation; the Stoney Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations; the Ktunaxa Nation; and the Métis Nation of Alberta. Today, southern Alberta is home to Indigenous people from all over North America.***



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**The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)** is Canada's voice for wilderness. We are a non-profit environmental organization working to protect half of Canada's public land and water. Since 1967, CPAWS Southern Alberta has led conservation efforts to protect areas in Banff National Park, Kananaskis, the Whaleback and the Castle. Our chapter is a leader in environmental education offering award-winning programs to help build the next generation of environmental stewards.

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**Cover Photo: Christopher Landry**

**Inside Cover Photo: Rebecca Schortinghuis**



# What are we fighting for?

**Brad Clute, Executive Director**

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society — Southern Alberta Chapter. I'm thrilled to be part of an organization with such a solid track record of science-based conservation work, and award-winning education programs. Joining CPAWS was an easy decision to make, as organizations like CPAWS help build healthy communities.

After a career of more than 20 years in the outdoor recreation industry, focusing on community investment and sustainable business development, I've seen first-hand how the bottom line and supply chains are dependent on the health of our environment, and how reliant businesses and communities are on healthy ecosystems. Any forward-thinking business strategist who's focused on long-term sustainability will tell you how important it is to understand what is truly needed for sustained wellbeing. We all rely on Alberta's natural heritage, and the work CPAWS does is crucially important to both present and future Albertans.

***“So then we need to ask ourselves — will our children and their children be able to benefit from the landscapes we value now? Will they have the same access to clean air and drinking water? Will they be able to enjoy our parks and wilderness the same way we do?”***

We all know and understand that the impacts of the decisions we make today will be felt by future generations. So then we need to ask ourselves — will our children and their children be able to benefit from the landscapes we value now? Will they have the same access to clean air and drinking water? Will they be able to enjoy our parks and wilderness in the same way we do? Whether it's due to overuse, poor management, or bad policy, if our children and their children won't be able to experience and benefit from our landscapes the same way we do today, do the same things in the same places, and see, smell, and hear the same things — then we have a problem.

With both conservation and education teams under one roof,

CPAWS Southern Alberta is a unique organization within the environmental non-profit community, one that is able to meet both our present challenges and opportunities, while working towards a more resilient and healthy future.

Our conservation team is working to ensure that wild areas and public lands maintain their ecological value, established protected areas are well managed, and that the creation of new protected areas is a priority.

Our education team is working to build generations of environmentally literate and engaged citizens through curriculum approved, hands-on environmental education programs both in the classroom and in the field.

Both conservation and education programs play a key role in creating a thriving, healthy and resilient future for Alberta. So we ask you today to help us build a thriving, healthy, and resilient future. With you as part of the CPAWS community we can work together to give back to nature now, so that we can move forward. Together, we can build the future that Alberta needs.





# *Moving forward, together*

*Phil Nykyforuk, Board Chair*

Our Board of Directors is a group of dedicated volunteers with varied backgrounds. Our experience includes science, education, journalism, marketing and communications, organizational planning, law, accounting and national parks management. Despite our varied backgrounds, each board member has a shared belief in three foundational principles.

First, we all believe that Alberta is a wonderful place to live, with many spectacular natural wonders. We are proud to call Alberta home.

Second, we see a need for vigilance and advocacy in ensuring that our parks, protected areas and natural landscapes are properly valued and managed on behalf of all Albertans by our government. Third, we believe in the importance of educating Albertans, especially our children and new residents, about our natural landscapes and conservation issues.

In our capacity as board members, we provide guidance and oversight to our talented and hard working staff. In addition to the board's strategic planning and oversight, many of our directors volunteer on behalf of our chapter in countless other ways. We have been operating in unusual

times over the past year. Survey after survey indicates that Albertans cherish and use our provincial parks and protected areas more than any other Canadians. This has been particularly noticeable since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Albertans have turned to the outdoors in massive numbers to walk, hike, cycle, fish, paddle, camp, and recreate in a variety of ways. Despite all the uncertainty in our world, the peace, beauty, and restorative capacity of nature has brought comfort to huge numbers of Albertans.

Ironically, as more Albertans than ever have been getting out into our parks, our provincial government is proposing unprecedented cuts to our world class network of parks and protected areas (see page 12). At the same time, a 44-year-old government policy prohibiting open pit coal mines in sensitive areas on the front ranges of our Rocky Mountains was rescinded (see page 14). Proposals for new mines in these areas are being encouraged. All of this has been done without any public consultation.

A core part of our chapter's mandate is to be a strong voice for Alberta's wilderness, parks, and protected

areas. Unfortunately, the current nature of public debate is to vilify those that express disagreement. Conservation groups have been characterized as anti-Albertan, left-wing radicals who want to harm our economy. With respect to our chapter, nothing could be further from the truth. Our chapter and board are non-partisan and include people of all political leanings. We respect different perspectives. We believe in rational decision making based on science. We believe in consultation and collaboration with all levels of government, industry, Indigenous people, and stakeholder groups.

We are proud Albertans with deep roots here. We want our province and economy to succeed.

As the board looks ahead, we take pride in our chapter's many achievements in conservation and education. We have played an important role in protecting some of Alberta's most treasured landscapes. We are not, however, stuck in the past. We are forward-facing and ready to deal with the many challenges of today and in the future. The importance of conservation and our province's special parks and protected areas demand no less.





# When nature thrives, we thrive

As Albertans, we love and value the natural beauty that surrounds us. But how do we give back to nature? By investing in Alberta's landscape, we can ensure healthy ecosystems, abundant wildlife, and beautiful moments for generations to come.

We have an important job to do. We all play an important role in protecting our parks, natural spaces, and biodiversity. From everyday actions like turning off your lights to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to having a meeting with your MLA to discuss why parks and wild spaces are important to you. You CAN make a difference. Because when nature thrives, we thrive.

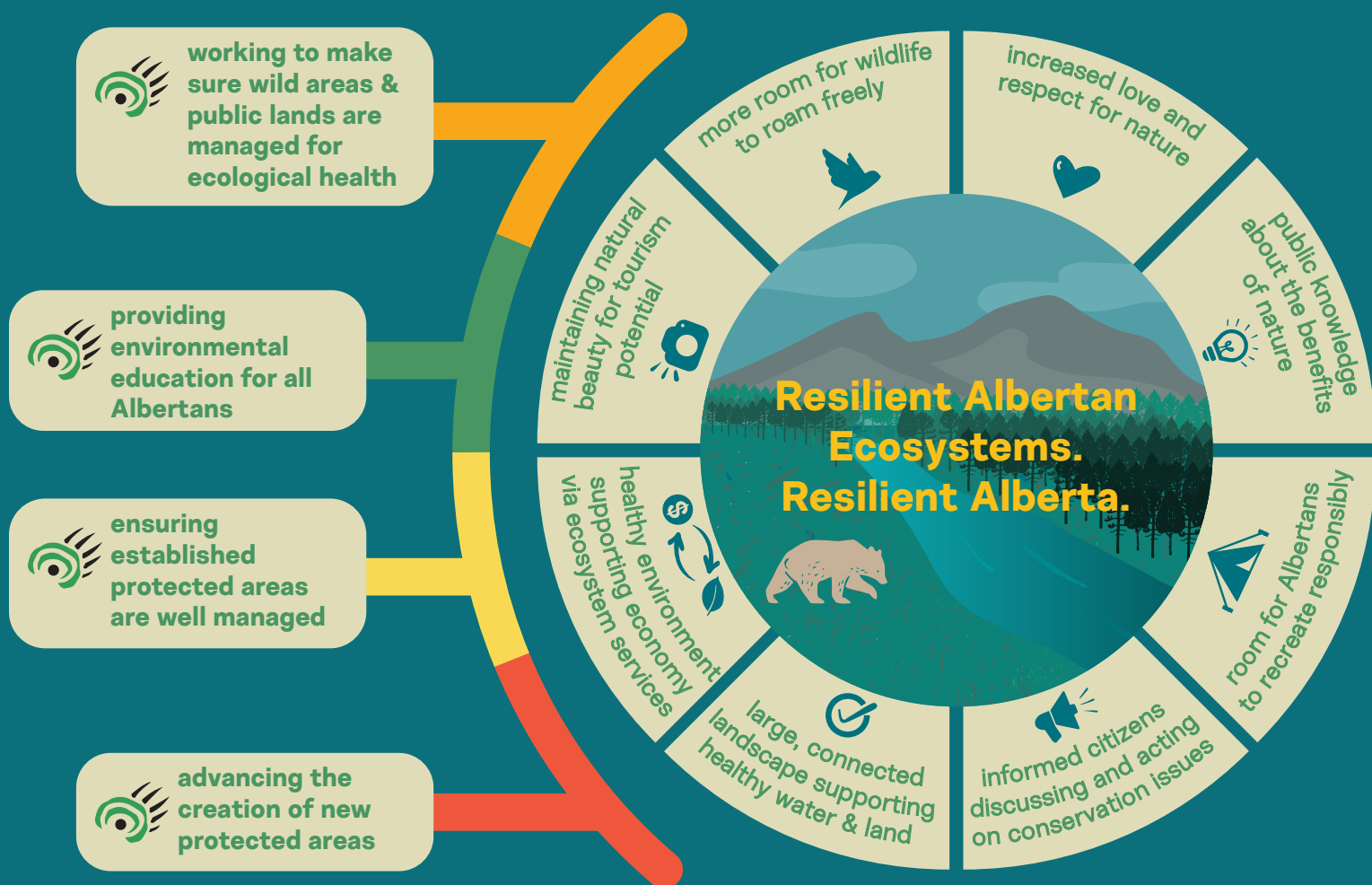


# What we do

Here at CPAWS Southern Alberta, nature is our priority. Thriving ecosystems support biodiversity, provide natural solutions for climate change impacts, and promote a healthy, wild Alberta. Not only do healthy ecosystems benefit our landscape, but they benefit us. They provide us with clean water, support our communities and economy, supply us with food, protect us from natural disasters, and allow us to recreate and enjoy Alberta's landscape.

Now is the time to give back. By protecting these special places, we can make sure they are functioning, resilient, and diverse. Join CPAWS Southern Alberta in celebrating these landscapes, and taking action to protect them.

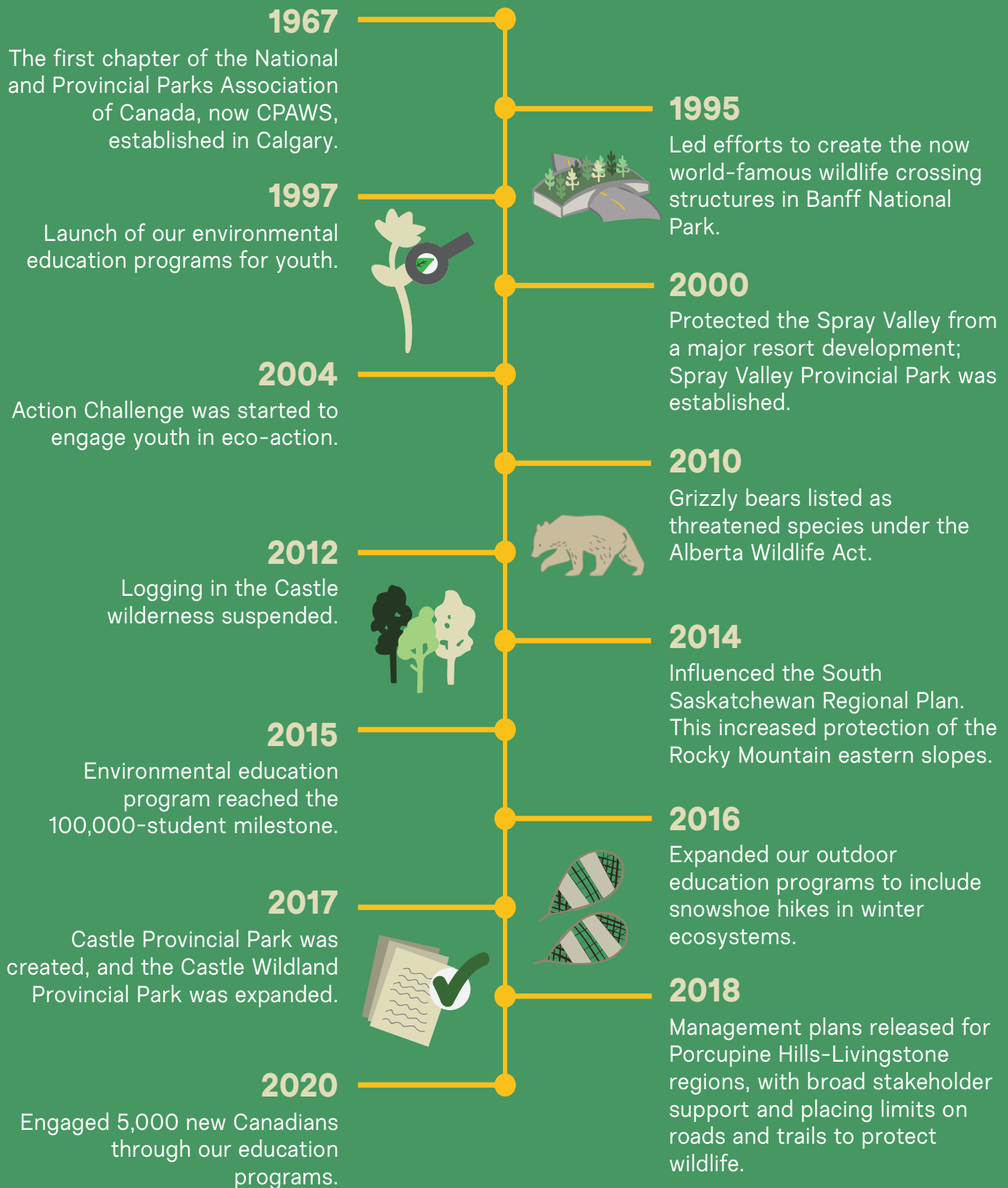
See page 24 for more information on how you can get involved.





***Even if you're new to learning about CPAWS, you've likely seen our work throughout southern Alberta.***

***Here are some of our major wins:***





# Our people

*We would like to give a warm welcome to our newest board members Lana Mezquita, Kirsty Mackenzie, and James Early as invaluable additions to our dedicated and hardworking board team: Phil Nykyforuk, Jim Donohue, Doug Firby, Ross Glenfield, Jeff Goldberg, Jon Mee, and Cinthia Nemoto.*

*A huge thank you to everyone in the CPAWS Southern Alberta community, including our staff (below), dedicated volunteers, and enthusiastic supporters!*

**Brad Clute |  
Executive Director**



**Katie Morrison |  
Conservation Director**

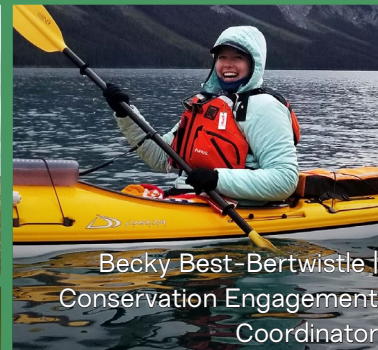


**Bonnie Glines |  
Office and Fund  
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**Sarah Elmeligi |  
National Parks  
Coordinator**



**Sheri Tarrington |  
Environmental  
Educator**



**Becky Best-Bertwistle |  
Conservation Engagement  
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**Brooke Kapeller |  
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**Vanessa Bilan |  
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**Hira Shah |  
Communications  
Coordinator**



**Justin Howse |  
Hiking Guide**



**Alex Mowat |  
Hiking Guide**



**Julie Walker |  
Hiking Guide**

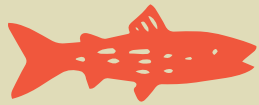


**Lisa Coyne |  
Hiking Guide &  
CWSP Coordinator**





# How we protect southern Alberta's landscape



## **Healthy wildlife populations**

From the rolling grasslands to frigid and fast mountain streams, Alberta is home to a huge diversity of wildlife. We are working to increase knowledge about Alberta's species at risk, including native trout, like westslope cutthroat and bull trout, and their habitats, to encourage Albertans to celebrate these ecologically important species.

### **What we're aiming for:**

Healthy landscapes, water and riparian areas, as indicated by thriving native trout populations, supporting wildlife across the province.



## **Protecting provincial parks**

The Government of Alberta has proposed the removal of 175 parks and provincial recreation areas from the provincial park system, which could be closed, sold, or opened up to industrial uses. We have been working to amplify the voices of concerned Albertans and urge the government to reverse this decision.

### **What we're aiming for:**

Alberta parks are protected and public for all Albertans and visitors.



## **Safeguarding national parks**

The Rocky Mountain National Parks are renewing their management plans for the next 10 years. This means that YOU hold the power to influence what Banff and Jasper National Parks will look like from 2020-2030. We want to ensure that these plans limit overcrowding and harmful development, and promote effective management of the parks.

### **What we're aiming for:**

The Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks are the global model for conservation, community sustainability, education, and stewardship.



## **Defending the eastern slopes**

We are working with community groups in southwest Alberta to fight against a series of coal mine projects in the region covering over 50,000 hectares of landscape. The area, previously protected by the 1976 Coal Policy, provides clean water for local communities, and unique and essential habitat for flora and fauna species.

### **What we're aiming for:**

No new coal mine development in southwest Alberta to maintain watershed health, key habitat for wildlife, and prevent climate change impacts.



### **Forests for everyone**

Alberta's forests are an important place for our water, wildlife, and communities. We are working to make sure these values are prioritized and management decisions are helping local communities to become more involved in forest management. Together we can ensure the long-term sustainability of Alberta's forests.

#### **What we're aiming for:**

Ecosystem and community-minded management implemented in Alberta's forests.



### **Environmental education**

We believe that conservation and education go hand in hand. In order to inspire the future stewards of our province, they must first understand what makes Alberta's landscape so special. Our award-winning environmental education programs have been delivered to Calgary and surrounding areas since 1997, reaching over 148,000 Albertans. We vary our activities to allow effective learning for everyone, from in-class programs to hands-on outdoor activities, such as guided hikes and snowshoeing. Through our Action Challenge, we encourage Albertans to take everyday actions to help fight for nature.

This year we introduced three new programs to our suite of hands-on programs for youth and adults: *Why Grasslands?*, *Energize*, and *Climate Game Changers*.

We also created *Bring Nature Home* this year which takes our favourite activities and games from our programs for you to access at home!

#### **What we're aiming for:**

Through education, appreciation, and personal experiences, all Albertans value and respect our parks and wilderness areas.



### **Proper land-use planning**

There is a need for stronger land-use planning in southern Alberta. We are working to ensure the commitments of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan are fulfilled through specific land-use plans that protect biodiversity, manage human disturbance, and provide sustainable recreation opportunities.

#### **What we're aiming for:**

Land-use plans in southern Alberta prioritize headwaters, wildlife, and low-impact recreation.

For more information on our programs and all the ways that we help to protect southern Alberta, head over to our website at [www.cpaws-southernalberta.org](http://www.cpaws-southernalberta.org)



# Albertans mobilize to defend Alberta parks

By Becky Best-Bertwistle, CPAWS Southern Alberta Conservation Engagement Coordinator

Photo: Matt Bozec

**If you love Alberta's environment and the outdoors, it would have been impossible to miss the government's announcement and the public reaction to the drastic cuts to the province's parks system.**

This spring, while many Albertans were turning to the outdoors to deal with the stress of social isolation in our new COVID-19 reality, the Government of Alberta announced a plan to close, privatize and delist approximately 175 provincial parks, provincial recreation areas and natural areas across the province.

The sheer number of parks that would be affected is significant — nearly 40% of all of Alberta parks including more than three quarters of our provincial recreation areas. While many of these parks are smaller day-use areas, staging areas and campgrounds, they are places that have helped Albertans to safely and responsibly enjoy

nature with their families for decades. From the badlands to Peace River, no area of the province was left unaffected by these changes.

While concerned Albertans were told that the cuts and closures were a result of under usage and in the interest of fiscal responsibility, we have since learned through a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) request that these factors had little to do with the decision. Internal communications regarding the cuts revealed that financial impacts of the decision were unknown and the Minister of Environment and Parks was even warned that the plan could end up costing the government money. The documents also did not contain any visitation statistics to justify the statement that these parks are underused.

We also learned that despite advice from Alberta Environment and Parks, the Minister chose not to conduct any public participation regarding this plan. This represents a worrying trend to exclude Albertans from decision-making processes on parks and public lands.

The public outcry that has followed this announcement has confirmed what we always have known: Albertans across the political spectrum and from around the province love parks and value the conservation and outdoor opportunities they provide.



**We have seen folks across the province coming together to stand in opposition to these cuts.**

Even at the very height of the pandemic the fact that Albertans continue to fight for parks confirms how important they are to our daily lives. Working closely with our Northern Alberta chapter, we had hundreds of people join us online for townhalls, stage protests on social media, and, most importantly, write and call their MLAs.

**This did make an impact.** In June, the government quietly announced that 17 parks previously slated for immediate closure would be kept open for the 2020 season. Still, there is much to do to ensure that the entire plan is permanently reversed. It is crucial that the government heeds the calls of park-loving Albertans everywhere and keeps parks open, public, and protected for all.

**Head over to page 17 to learn how you can take action.**



***“Albertans across the political spectrum and from around the province love parks and value the conservation and outdoor opportunities they provide.”***



**9,888**

**Albertans sent letters using the CPAWS letter writing tool to the Government of Alberta opposing this decision**



**249**

**communities, towns, and cities where Albertans have shown their love for Alberta parks**



**7/10**

**Albertans oppose the removal of these parks, according to a public opinion survey**



**400**

**Participants in our virtual town halls**



# *Fighting for the life of the southwest Alberta Rockies*

**A series of industrial coal projects are threatening the environment and a way of life in southwest Alberta. By the CPAWS Conservation Team**

## **Forty-four years of protection dissolved**

The cancellation of the provincial Coal Policy in June 2020, which had been in place since 1976, removed land zoning that restricted open-pit coal mining and coal exploration in some of Alberta's most environmentally sensitive areas along the Rocky Mountains. This opened up the floodgates to coal exploration drilling and mine development. In Alberta, a total of 1.5 million hectares of headwaters, forests, and foothills grasslands, previously off-limits to coal mining, are now open for mountaintop removal coal mines. These areas provide drinking water to downstream communities in southern Alberta, including the Livingstone region of the Oldman Watershed.

This region in southwest Alberta provides many invaluable ecological and social benefits. It is the water source for the prairie's cities, towns and agricultural industry. It provides essential habitats for many iconic species of wildlife and plants. The area has provided unsurpassed beauty,

refuge, and bounty for generations. The region is no stranger to land-use conflict and controversy, but the latest set of industrial projects proposed for the region has the potential to change its face and very nature irrevocably. While the 1976 Coal Policy was created with extensive public consultation, it was cancelled without any consultation and no sufficient policy replacement was offered.

## **The overwhelming risks of coal mines**


Four Australian-owned coal mining companies are conducting exploratory drilling and planning for mountaintop removal coal mines in the Livingstone region. If approved, these mines could blanket the landscape between Kananaskis and Castle Parks with a series of 40-50 kilometre long swaths of industrial destruction. Despite coal lobbyists and politicians trying to convince Albertans that these mines would be both "clean" and "ethical", the environmental consequences will be anything but.

While metallurgical coal enjoys a more positive reputation than the thermal variety, the mining, transporting and burning of metallurgic coal is incredibly carbon intensive. For every tonne of steel produced from metallurgical coal, two tonnes of greenhouse gases are generated. Approving these projects will fly in the face of any national and international climate targets we hope to achieve as a country.



These open-pit mining operations will also displace wildlife, contaminate water, and jeopardize human health. Native fish that are listed as threatened on a federal scale, such as the westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, inhabit many areas within and downstream the proposed mines. Due to Tech Resource's Elk Valley operations in BC, local trout





populations downstream have dropped by over 90%. Deformities of fish in this watershed due to selenium pollution are common, with no successful mitigation tactics. If these coal mine projects are approved, the effects are expected to impact the Oldman River drainage indefinitely.

### **Albertans will be left to pay**

Volatile prices, international market uncertainty, and the continued automation of this industry means that these projects are not the sure-fire job creators and job sustainers they once were. With the raw coal being exported overseas, most of the projected economic value will flow out of Canada. All the while, existing and growing sustainable economies are undermined, including negatively impacting the livelihoods of ranchers, outfitters, the outdoor recreation industry, and other land users.

Looking further down the road, one can anticipate the massive public liability that these projects represent. Once markets or prices drop and companies can no longer make a profit, Albertans could be left with the bill to clean up environmental damage. We have seen this with many other coal mines around the

world and with other similar volatile commodities in Alberta, as illustrated by the fallout of orphaned and abandoned wells.

CPAWS Southern Alberta has partnered with ranchers and landowners, including the Livingstone Landowner Group, and is working closely with recreation organizations, businesses, outfitters, scientists, concerned citizens, and other conservation groups to protect our Rocky Mountains and foothills from the flood of coal exploration and development. We are working together to raise awareness of the impacts and how together we can protect these special places.

### **There's still time to act and protect these unique landscapes**

The first of these coal mine projects, Grassy Mountain, will be going to a hearing in fall 2020 where a regulatory panel will recommend whether it should be approved and under what conditions. CPAWS Southern Alberta is working closely with the Public Interest Law Clinic and has formal intervenor status to recommend that Grassy Mountain not be approved. We are engaging

experts to critique the science, conclusions, and mitigations in the company's Environmental Assessment, define the clear environmental risks, and propose better assessment approaches or mitigations. If the Grassy Mountain project is approved, it signals to the other companies that governments consider coal mining an appropriate use of this landscape and makes it more likely that their projects will move forward. Simply put, the Grassy Mountain project is the first domino in a line of potential coal mines that could change our province's headwaters forever.

All Albertans have an interest in the healthy streams and landscapes we rely on for our well-being. In fact, anybody who cares about coal's contribution to the climate crisis has a stake in this issue. You can take action to help give our mountain headwaters a sustainable future free from massive mines. Reach out to your elected officials to let them know that our iconic landscapes, water security, and native trout streams should not be destroyed to line the pockets of a few foreign investors.

**Head over to page 17 to learn how you can take action.**



# We're hooked on native trout

By Katie Morrison, Conservation Director



## But why trout?

While species like the grizzly bear get a lot of attention, fewer people think of the importance of less furry (but certainly not less cute) species, like trout. Bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, and other fish species like the Arctic grayling, are an integral part of Alberta's ecosystem.

These fish have inhabited the cold streams and lakes of western Alberta since the last ice age, approximately 13,000 years ago. These native species not only contribute to Alberta's biodiversity, but act as indicators of the health of our watersheds and quality of water for human use. Having these species thrive into the future also ensures a healthy environment for people and other wildlife.



Photo: Westslope cutthroat trout, Marc Fossi

Unfortunately, there's bad news for these fish, and for the land and water health they represent. All three

native trout species have experienced drastic declines in recent years and are listed as threatened provincially and under the federal Species at Risk Act. Recent provincial policy changes put these fish even further at risk. The rescission of Alberta's Coal Policy greatly increases the risk of habitat loss and water pollution from both coal exploration and mine development activities (see page 14). Attempts by the provincial government to reverse land-use planning in southwest Alberta and expand motorized access in the Castle Parks and Oldman River headwaters, could continue damaging their sensitive habitats. Announced increases in allowable timber volume extraction could place additional pressure on watersheds already highly impacted by forestry activities. Finally, given the species' cold water habitat, native trout are especially vulnerable to climate change.

## Steps for recovery

This may sound dire, and it is, but there are glimmers of hope for our fishy friends. CPAWS recently provided input into the federal Recovery Strategies for bull trout and Athabasca rainbow trout which, if implemented, could help recovery

of the species. We also continue to monitor the implementation of the Recovery Strategy for westslope cutthroat trout and contribute to recovery efforts.

As part of the Native Trout Collaborative, CPAWS Southern Alberta is working with Trout Unlimited Canada, Cows and Fish, Alberta Conservation Association, Foothills Research Institute, and Alberta Environment and Parks to mitigate threats and promote recovery of native trout in the province. Raising awareness, fostering community, and encouraging action will lead the path to government, industry, and land and water users motivated to create positive change for native trout.

## Swimming forward

We can all be part of that change. Follow us in our journey to explore and learn about our beautiful native fish, how to recreate responsibly to decrease impacts on trout, and let governments know that land-uses including recreation and industry must protect and restore trout habitats. Because if native trout are the report card on healthy lands and waters, we've all got work to do.



# Take action today

## Defend Alberta parks

Thousands of Albertans have already written to the government demanding they reverse their decision on the closure, delisting, and privatization of 175 provincial parks and recreation areas.

You can join them by:

1. Learning more about the issue by reading through our website.
2. Sharing your stories and pictures with showing why these places are so special to you.
3. Calling and writing your MLA to let them know you do not support this decision!
4. Ordering a lawn sign to show your support for Alberta parks.

[Click here to learn how you can Defend Alberta Parks](#)

## Fight for coal mine free Rockies

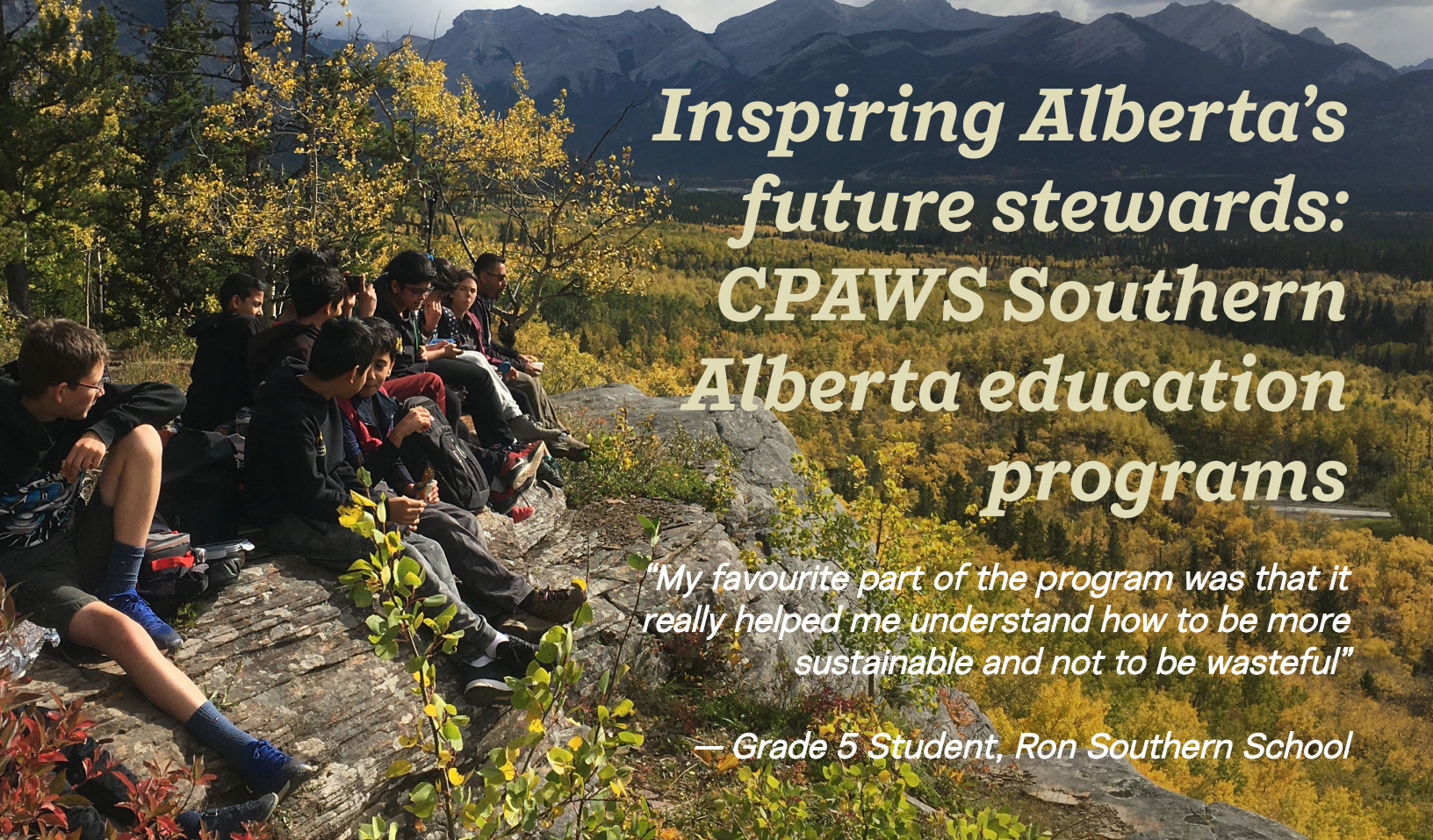
Your voices are needed to ensure that the ecological integrity of our Rocky Mountains are maintained. You can help by standing together against new coal mine developments in Alberta. Take action today!

1. Head over to our website to learn more about how coal mining can impact our landscape.
2. Call and write your MLA to let them know you do not support this decision!
3. Donate to help us continue advocating for coal mine free Rockies and spread awareness of the issue.

[Click here to fight for a coal free future in Alberta](#)

Small actions bring about big changes





# Inspiring Alberta's future stewards: CPAWS Southern Alberta education programs

"My favourite part of the program was that it really helped me understand how to be more sustainable and not to be wasteful"

— Grade 5 Student, Ron Southern School

through our programs we have helped inspire...

8,402

youth

923

new immigrants

403

adults

...to take eco-action

50% of programs delivered to rural and high needs areas

across 30 different locations in Alberta

classroom

hike/snowshoe

211 classroom programs

123 outdoor programs

44 adult workshops



Program Themes







## Book a program for your students

From science to social studies curriculum, CPAWS Southern Alberta programs fit in directly with the topics that you and your students are learning in the classroom. Our fun and interactive programs are perfect to get students excited about nature.

*"The connection of what we are already learning about in our class and expanding on those ideas.*

*Motivating and inspiring the kids to make a difference for their environment."* — Grade 2 teacher, New Brighton School



## Engage your community group

Our programs focus on improving environmental literacy. However, depending on our group, we strive to bring in other elements into our programs. When presenting to new immigrant groups, we work to incorporate English language learning into the program. For teachers and educators, we work to help teachers better communicate environmental literacy with their students, and how to motivate their students to take action. We look forward to working with your community group!

***There are so many ways to get learning!***

Bring Nature Home is a unique educational toolkit that helps students engage in environmental education in the comfort of their own home.

This toolkit includes some of CPAWS Southern Alberta's very own tried and tested games and activities for K-12 students, as well as other online resources to support learning.

Bring Nature Home also provides resources for teachers who are looking for ways to incorporate environmental themes into their students' learning.

## Bring Nature Home



We know that our youth hold great power in their voices and actions. CPAWS Southern Alberta wants to help youth take their innovation, creativity, and passion and structure it into meaningful environmental action. Our Action Challenge is more than just a contest. It provides youth and families with the knowledge and resources they need to help reduce their environmental footprint in their home, school, and community! The Action Challenge also helps benefit communities by amplifying our youth and community voices.

## Action Challenge



**To learn more about our education programs, book a program, or access our online resources, head over to: [www.cpaws-southernalberta.org/education](http://www.cpaws-southernalberta.org/education)**



# Because here is home

**A spotlight on one of CPAWS Southern Alberta's newest education programs, which helps Albertans to better understand one of our most threatened, yet underrated ecosystems. By Sheri Tarrington, CPAWS Educator**

## **I have a question for you, Southern Alberta**

I'd like you to please take a moment and decide where it is that you live? A seemingly simple question, I know, but please take a moment to reflect.

I am willing to wager that amidst the flurry of thoughts that came to mind—from the name of your town, nation or neighbourhood to the type of dwelling in which you reside, very few of you would have cited “the grasslands” as your living space.

This makes sense if you're from Canmore or Lake Louise. However, if you live outside of the Rockies in southern Alberta, I'd like you to think again. Do you live in the grasslands? Maybe Alberta's grasslands are places you've never seen, experienced, or thought much about at all. This, my friends, is exactly why CPAWS Southern Alberta's newest education program, *Why Grasslands?*, was created.

Perhaps the word grasslands is new to you. Perhaps you grew up as I

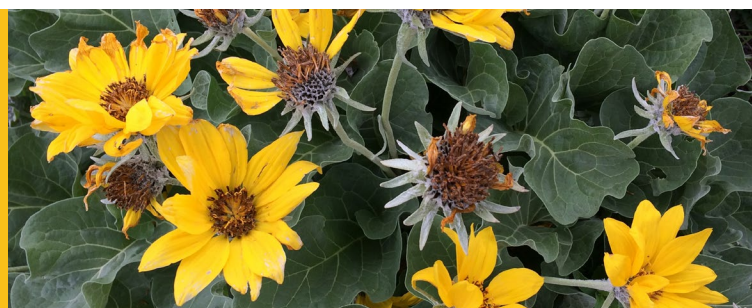
did, calling landscapes dominated by grass and sky as “prairie”. Perhaps, on top of this, you also regarded these relatively treeless places as empty, remote, lifeless, or boring. I hear you. In fact, when I began writing and researching *Why Grasslands?*, I held pretty much a “meh” take on grasslands.

That was before I was introduced to the amazing things that grasslands are. Before I got to know its hidden wilderness through the perspectives of Indigenous voices, artists, explorers, conservationists, and creatures that call it home. Truth be told, when it comes to the insight I've gained into power and beauty of our prairies, this landscape has changed not only my opinions, but me as well. Once experienced, the pure, unadulterated generosity of Alberta's native grasslands will change you too.

## **Yep, that's right, grasslands are givers**

Native grasslands' generosity is an entanglement of the ancient and the everyday. Life soars to the sun and reverberates even deeper underground. Dense fescue root forests filter and retain water to provide drought relief and sponge-like flood mitigation. Slow and steady decomposition of these subterranean root jungles creates extra rich, extra thick layers of organism-steeped soil. A gift in and of itself, this humus-enriched fertility is the reason grasslands are enormous carbon captures, or sinks. They contain over 50% of the world's organic carbon. With a warming planet on our hands, this grasslands gift might just be the nature-based climate solution that ensures a carbon-neutral, new world order.

**Photo: Balsamroot, Sheri Tarrington**







## So much shared

Surfacing above and beyond their crusts of lichens, mosses, algae, and bacteria (called cryptogamic crust), the native prairie gifts continue to knit and multiply. Microclimates among the tussocks and turf pulse with ants, beetles, badgers, ground squirrels, and snakes. Songbird trills and chimes set the summer soundtrack by which wildflowers spark and stretch the rainbow's spectrum.

Cultivated by hoof, claw, wing, and talon, life here intersects and unfurls for those unafraid to dig deeper and look closer.

To call this unique, widely unknown wilderness — interwoven with creatures as fascinating as the swift fox, Sprague's pipit and the greater sage grouse — merely a gift seems like a massive understatement. But, make no mistake, it is a gift. Bountiful biodiversity quite literally seeded and spurred the inclusion of our stories of life, wonder, change, and challenge.

From the retreat of the last glacier to the harvest on your plate,

the gifts of our grasslands have provided inspiration, innovation, fascination, education, meditation, and reconciliation. They have filled our senses and provided our food, our work, our energy, our play, our identity, our spirit, our community, and, most importantly, our home.

## The gifts of the grasslands have made us who we are. And yet...

Recent estimates indicate that of the nearly 24 million hectares of native prairie Mother Nature gifted our province, only 6 million hectares remain. In other words, in the process of writing our Alberta story, we have lost 75% of our fantastical wild prairie and its gifts. What's almost more upsetting is the fact that of this precious 25% that we have left, only 1.29% of Alberta's grassland region is protected inside our parks and protected areas network.

For the past 150 years, our generous grasslands have given and given. And we have taken. Now, more than ever, the time has come to give thanks.

The time has come to give back. And, I know what you're thinking. How? How can I possibly give back to the grasslands? Well, I have happy news—you just did!

By reading this article, by learning about all that we have and continue to receive from our spectacular grasslands, you are informed. Seek to know more!



Photo: Swift fox family, Colleen Gara

Find out what it means to be a grasslander. Recognize and honour Indigenous ways of knowing. Explore local grasslands. Be a steward. Ponder the prairies' living skies. Talk to farmers. Listen to ranchers. Get to know grazers. Call your MLA and ensure grasslands conservation is on their agenda. Volunteer. Rally. Donate. Include. Share.

**Welcome home.**



# Small actions making a big impact

## Youth are incredible change makers.

We want to inspire and empower youth to protect nature. The CPAWS Southern Alberta Action Challenge is a competition among youth, encouraging them to take environmental action. Youth can sign up as individuals or teams (schools, classrooms, clubs, or families) and submit actions online. These actions earn them points. The teams with the highest points receive cash prizes. It's a piece of cake! Prize money is used to continue their nature connection, learning, and/or environmental actions. Congratulations to these 2020 eco-heroes!

## Action Challenge Session 1 Winners (October 1, 2019 – January 31, 2020)



Our Lady of Wisdom School - Grade 4's  
(Chestermere)

Gold Prize Winner - \$500

27 Actions, 260 Points

Since the start of school, the Grade 4 class at Our Lady of Wisdom School in Chestermere incorporated environmental actions into their curriculum, with the hope of making their community a greener place. The students know they are not too young to make a difference in the environment and spread the word to the rest of the school, and their families, about how to be better stewards of the planet.

“We recycled all the markers that were dead and we sent them to Crayola to get them returned into clean fuel instead of staying in the landfill for over a thousand years,” said Ian Godley, Grade 4 student at Our Lady of Wisdom School.

Upon hearing about the Action Challenge during a CPAWS education program, Breanna Coupland, a Grade 2 teacher at Hillhurst School in Calgary, and her students registered right away. For four months, the students worked to reduce their impact in the classroom, in school, and at home. From conducting morning eco-announcements, organizing waste free lunches, completing a letter writing campaign, and creating schoolyard action posters, these kids never stopped! Not only did these actions establish them as local eco-leaders, but also many of their actions connected to the English, Art, Social Studies and Science curriculum. Not a bad day at school!

“This Action Challenge inspired my students to think deeper about their impacts on the environment. They noticed the rubrics gave more points for actions that had long term effects and impacted more people, and that ultimately mimics real life.” said Breanna Coupland.



Hillhurst School - Grade 2's (Calgary)

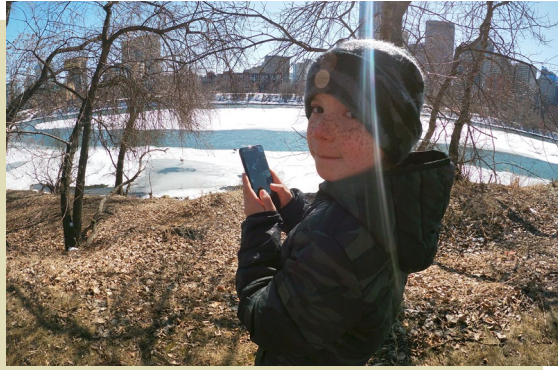
Silver Prize Winner - \$300

18 Actions, 215 Points



## Action Challenge Session II Winners (February 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020)

Even though COVID-19 put a halt on many things, it didn't stop our youth from continuing to take action for a healthy earth. Instead, our youth became even more creative in how they could help nature from home. From participating in citizen science projects, to undertaking home energy audits, our Action Challenge superstars did it all! These youth took the initiative to engage their parents, siblings, and family members to help create a more sustainable lifestyle in their home. A big congrats to everyone that participated!



Team Buster, Calgary  
Gold Prize - \$500  
25 Actions  
215 Points



Team Hillhurst Eco-Leaders, Calgary  
Silver Prize - \$300  
16 Actions  
176 Points

You can start flexing your environmental action muscles too! To learn more about how to register for the Action Challenge, and get fun action ideas, visit [www.actionchallenge.ca](http://www.actionchallenge.ca).



plastic bag recycling

**32  
teams**

committed to taking  
environmental action



classroom plants

**135  
actions**

were taken by  
youth to build a  
sustainable lifestyle



educational posters

**432  
points**

were earned,  
highlighting how  
every action matters

***Every action counts!***



# Growing our future together

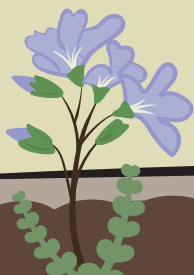
Here at CPAWS Southern Alberta, your support means everything to us. From fueling our day-to-day work, to inspiring us to continue fighting for our shared goal of an ecologically resilient Alberta for future generations, the role that you play is invaluable. Looking back at some of our recent wins such as protecting the Castle Wilderness, or engaging over 148,000 Albertans in environmental education, none of it would have been possible without you as part of the CPAWS Southern Alberta family. So from the bottom of our hearts, we want to say thank you. Thank you for your continued commitment to the natural beauty that exists here in Alberta. For celebrating the diversity of flora and fauna that makes our home so special. For cherishing the breathtaking moments that we share with our families and friends. Most importantly, thank you for giving back to nature.

But we still have a ways to go to protect all of Alberta's wild spaces. We need your support now more than ever to continue fighting for all of Alberta's ecosystems from the rolling prairies, to the rugged Rockies. Learn more about how you can support our work, and help us do even more for Southern Alberta.

[Click here to learn how you can donate to support our programs!](#)

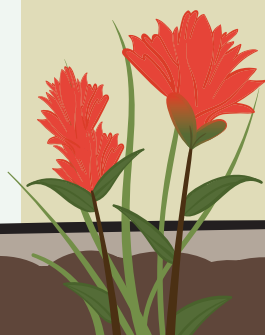
## ***VOLUNTEER WITH US***

We're always looking for people passionate about conservation to join our volunteer team. Apply on our website today!



## ***TAKE ACTION***

Interested in taking action on one of our campaigns? Flip to page 17 to find out exactly how you can join in to take action.



## ***JOIN OUR COMMUNITY***

Want to receive updates on our campaigns or alerts on how you can help fight for nature? Sign up for our mailing list today!



## ***GIVE A GIFT***

As a non-profit, our work is funded in part by people just like you. Consider giving a one time or monthly donation to keep our work going.





# Our supporters

CPAWS Southern Alberta would like to thank all the following organizations for their generous support which has been invaluable in the continuation of our conservation and education programs.



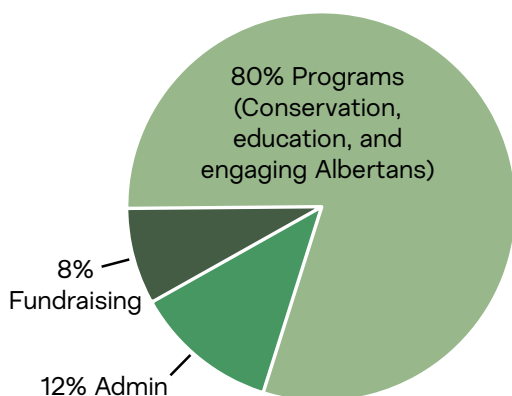


# Statement of Financial Position

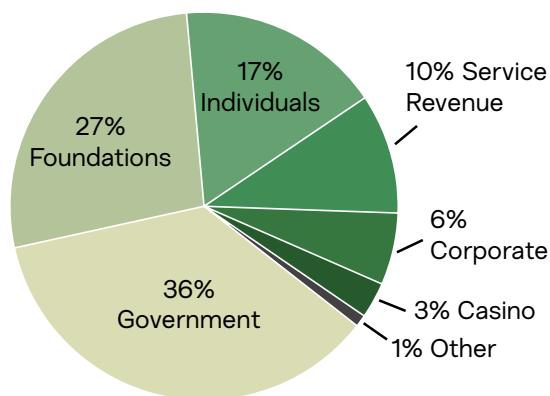
Year Ended March 31, 2020

	2020	2019
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>CURRENT</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 591,138	\$ 652,794
Accounts receivable	42,419	50,156
Goods and services tax recoverable	5,943	684
Prepaid expenses	4,524	8,323
Due from CPAWS National	10,099	50,488
	654,123	762,445
<b>CAPITAL ASSETS</b>	8,810	9,335
	\$ 662,933	\$ 771,780
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>CURRENT</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 23,193	\$ 77,313
Deferred contributions	220,568	320,859
	243,761	398,172
<b>DEFERRED CONTRIBUTIONS RELATED TO CAPITAL ASSETS</b>	3,211	4,408
	246,972	402,580
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>INVESTED IN CAPITAL ASSETS</b>	5,599	4,927
<b>UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS</b>	230,362	184,273
<b>INTERNALLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS</b>	180,000	180,000
	415,961	369,200
	\$ 662,933	\$ 771,780

*How your donations support us*



*How we're funded*



CPAWS Southern Alberta is unique amongst non-profits and strongly positioned with a healthy range of diverse funding sources to match our range of programming. With support from industry, foundations, government, and individuals we have been able to build a healthy operating reserve. Having a reserve helps us to weather storms like the current pandemic, while maintaining program quality, delivery, and campaign initiatives. A reserve allows us to be nimble and able to react to needs and opportunities as they arise, rather than being completely dependent on project specific funding. If there's work that needs doing, we can do it.

With the current challenges we're facing, and looking into 2021, we've identified the need to strengthen our reach across southern Alberta, expanding our conservation and education programs to continue protecting southern Alberta's landscapes, and natural heritage. Although an operation reserve provides some security and flexibility, CPAWS can't do this without your generous support.

We hope you'll renew your support and continue to stand with us in protecting Alberta's majestic and valuable wilderness. With your help, we can do this work together.



# *Let's give back together*

Protecting and maintaining our ecosystems, parks and wilderness isn't just important, it's necessary. Since the pandemic we've seen how much Albertans value our parks and wilderness. We've been reminded what getting outside can do for our state of mind and overall health. There is a need for increased protection, infrastructure, and services, as we all prioritize getting outside.

Future generations of Albertans, those not even born yet, will be impacted by the actions we take or don't take today. At this point in our history, we can no longer do nothing. We must consider the long-term with every decision we make, and demand our governments do the same. By simply valuing and protecting what we appreciate and rely on now, we will be taking action to build a resilient future for Alberta.

The good news is, we can all decide today what our legacy will be. With our simple everyday actions, we can change what the future will look like for the next generations of Albertans. We can ensure they have access to the same quality of parks and wild spaces that we do, and gain the same physical, emotional, and economic benefits from nature that we do. We have the unique opportunity to look forward, and act now, to protect what is near and dear to us — **our home.**

***One simple action that you can take TODAY is to take this poster on the last page and put it up or share it to show your support for Alberta's beloved parks and recreation areas that are set to be delisted. Share the love for Alberta parks!***

**Poster by Feast Letterpress**



DEFEND

ALBERTA

PARKS

[bit.ly/defendalbertaparks](https://bit.ly/defendalbertaparks)