



2023

Annual Report

Conservation is Collaboration

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ALBERTA CHAPTER

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Advancing science-based conservation of public lands and water.

OUR MISSION IS TO SAFEGUARD, CONNECT, AND EXPAND ALBERTA'S PARKS AND WILDERNESS AND WE WORK TOWARD THESE GOALS THROUGH EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND COLLABORATION WITH ALBERTANS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS. WE ENVISION A PROVINCIAL LANDSCAPE WITH A GROWING ABUNDANCE OF PARKS, PROTECTED AREAS AND WILDERNESS, WHERE NATURE THRIVES BECAUSE OF THE CONSERVATION EFFORTS OF AND FOR ALL ALBERTANS.

CPAWS Southern Alberta gratefully acknowledges that we work in the traditional territories of the original stewards of the land and water: The Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), comprised of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and Amskapi Piikani First Nations; the Tsuut'ina First Nation; the Iyârhe Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations; the Ktunaxa Nation; and the Métis Nation of Alberta. Today, southern Alberta is home to Indigenous people from all over North America.



Just One More Thing

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT | KATIE MORRISON

I didn't watch a lot of TV as a kid — I was more likely to be found outside riding horses, chasing frogs, or building forts. But I do remember Saturday evenings curled up on the couch with my dad, intently watching Detective Columbo uncover key evidence and piece together clues in his pursuit of justice. We would rejoice each time he uttered his gotcha catchphrase — "just one more thing" — knowing then that the crucial piece of information was about to be revealed, the jig was up, and he had the suspect cornered.

While perhaps not filled with quite as much suspense, I like to think of CPAWS Southern Alberta's work as akin to Columbo's mysteries. Our efforts to find proactive conservation solutions and to stay one step ahead of poor government and industry decisions, involves digging deep into the facts, analyzing key policies and legislation, joining forces with other experts and knowledge keepers, and using problem-solving and critical thinking to connect all the dots to crack complex conservation cases.

This past year has tested our detective skills, as we have worked with communities and citizen groups on looming clearcut logging plans that threaten sensitive watersheds, species at risk, and high value recreation areas. We have uncovered damaging and prohibited activities associated with logging activities, and shed light on systemic issues that continue to facilitate the degradation of habitat for species at risk like the threatened bull trout.

We have worked with a broad base of Albertans in continuing to push for standalone coal legislation that permanently prohibits all coal exploration and mine development across the Rocky Mountains, while standing our ground against companies trying to sneak in new coal exploration permits on Grassy Mountain.

As always, I've been inspired by Albertans' love for our lands and waters and their passionate engagement in these important conservation issues. And that is our "gotcha," the piece of information that gives me hope. The power of all these collective voices' willingness to take a stand for our wild places.



Albertans will continue to fight for healthy, protected landscapes, for fish and wildlife, clean water and air, and sustainable recreation opportunities. And so will we. We've got this.



The polling we commissioned with the CPAWS Northern Alberta chapter last fall reinforces this strength. Albertans care deeply about nature and wildlife and want to see greater protection. The thousands of letters submitted to the provincial government on forestry and coal show that Albertans are willing to take action. New projects like the exploration of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) by the Blackfoot Confederacy create opportunities, not just for conservation outcomes, but also for advancing reconciliation and upholding Treaty. And the efforts of the CPAWS Southern Alberta education and engagement team to ensure that nature and conservation are accessible to and inclusive of all Albertans means that this power can only deepen and grow as more people are heard and their voices and perspectives amplified.

I won't pretend there aren't challenges ahead. We certainly have a long way to go before we can close the book on our mission to safeguard, connect, and expand Alberta's parks and wilderness. Because of this, I am immensely grateful to our dedicated staff, board, members, donors, and partners for their roles in supporting this work. As we continue to advocate on behalf of Alberta's natural environment, and meet with government officials, industry representatives, and others, before I walk out the door, I'll tell them I've got "just one more thing."

Albertans will continue to fight for healthy, protected landscapes, for fish and wildlife, clean water and air, and sustainable recreation opportunities. And so will we. We've got this.





Nature Thrives Thanks to You

BOARD CHAIR'S STATEMENT | JON MEE

As Chair of the Board of Directors for the CPAWS Southern Alberta chapter, I'd like to thank you all for being part of our organization over the past year — or for however long you've been a partner, donor, supporter, board member, staff member, or in whatever capacity you've been and continue to be associated with us.

Nature thrives in southern Alberta because of your collective efforts and engagement.

From my perspective, it's been a great year for our chapter. Our education team is going full steam again in classrooms and on hikes with K-12 students. This past year, for the "Everybody Belongs" initiative, our education team won the Inclusion Award from the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre. Our conservation team has continued to shine in their advocacy on a number of fronts: for Forests that we can all cherish and enjoy, for healthy and stable populations of native trout in our rivers and lakes, for good management of our National and Provincial Parks, and for a coal mine free Alberta.

We continue, however, to face challenges to ensuring a sustainable future for nature in Southern Alberta. The spectre of coal mining in the southeastern slopes of the Rockies hasn't gone away. Forestry threatens some of our most cherished and fragile forested landscapes. Regulations regarding the protection of critical habitat for our native trout go unheeded in the building of bridges and pipelines.

It is because of those challenges that I am so grateful for all of you.

In particular, I'm grateful for the dedication and hard work of all of our staff. The passion and commitment that they all bring to the cause, and to the chapter, are inspiring.

I'm also grateful for all the members of our board. As a governance board: we approve financials, revise policies and terms of reference, and oversee the work of the Executive Director. In truth, being on the board is a series of fairly dry meetings — mostly online these days — and even drier email exchanges.

So, why would we volunteer to do this? Well, I can't speak for my board colleagues, but I can say this for myself: I get immense satisfaction if, even in some very small and indirect way, my efforts support the incredible work that the staff of CPAWS Southern Alberta do.

So, I want to thank all of you once again for helping to support, to collaborate, to volunteer, to get engaged, and to donate in the name of protecting and enhancing Southern Alberta's parks, protected areas, and wild places.

Thank you.



A Decade in Service of Alberta's Wilderness

KAT GRAVES | COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

While there are no shortages of perils and pitfalls to working in conservation in our neck of the woods — indeed, at times, it can seem almost tragicomic how manifold they are — the better part of what makes doing so not just bearable, but genuinely enjoyable, is the people we get to work alongside.

Katie Morrison, our fierce, fearless leader, is one such person — and this year, she celebrated her 10-year anniversary at CPAWS Southern Alberta.

For those who are unfamiliar with our Executive Director, Katie is a professional biologist with more than 20 years of experience in the environmental sector. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Conservation Sciences from the University of Alberta and a Masters of Environmental Design from the University of Calgary. She's worked in Canada and Latin America for university research projects, non-governmental organizations, and environmental consulting companies.

And, while her credentials are nothing short of impressive, they fail to do her justice either as an esteemed colleague or a tireless advocate for Alberta's wild spaces and species.

As our Finance and Operations Director, Tatiana Jaciw-Zurakiwsky says, "Katie's leadership is caring and thoughtful. I am continuously inspired by her passion and determination — not just in her pursuit of safeguarding our province's public lands and waters, but also in advancing our organization's

impact and that of the environmental non-profit world as a whole."

Like her credentials, her record speaks for itself. Over the past decade, Katie has led the charge in the conservation of Southern Alberta's parks, wilderness, protected areas and public lands. She's given time, sweat and tears to keeping coal mines out of the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains, preventing Alberta's parks from being de-listed, and protecting species-at-risk, like grizzly bear and native trout, from disappearing from the landscape.

She would be the first to say it's a labour of love, but it's also one that deserves recognition.

The privilege of working alongside Katie each day is that it offers a window into her unmatched willingness to push for more and better from industry, elected officials, policy-makers and government bodies. She is, quite simply, a force of nature — and, as our Educator Director Jaclyn Angotti notes, "We are so lucky to have her."

Thank you for leading us in this work, Katie.

We know that there are many battles left to fight to see our organization's mission fulfilled, but we're proud to tackle them by your side. We're confident, too, that when all is said and done, these battles will have been no match for your perseverance — or, for that matter, your Columbo-taught sleuthing skills.





Katie is truly an exceptional environmental campaigner — among the best on this continent. And the proof is in the pudding — she has been central to achieving major conservation successes [and] building the most powerful movements, spanning diverse allies, in one of the most challenging jurisdictions anywhere in North America.



KEN WU | ENDANGERED ECOSYSTEMS ALLIANCE





Together for Trout

**LAURA FETHERSTONHAUGH | COMMUNICATIONS
COORDINATOR, ALBERTA NATIVE TROUT COLLABORATIVE**

In 2020, the Alberta Native Trout Collaborative surveyed recreationalists along the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains and found that 100% of anglers attested to releasing the native trout they caught — unfortunately, only 10.8% of survey respondents were actually able to correctly identify all three stream-dwelling native trout species.

As bull trout (Alberta's provincial fish!), Westslope cutthroat trout and Athabasca rainbow trout are all threatened species with a zero-bag limit (meaning that fish caught can't be kept), this was an alarming finding. Anglers need to be able to properly identify these species in order to release them.

However, the results weren't universally bad — those surveyed clearly wanted to release these species (and, indeed, thought they had been). This gave our collaborative a clear objective: Equip anglers with the knowledge they need to enact the conservation values they already hold. We decided, as part of meeting this objective, to host a free, fun and interactive angling fair in Calgary.

For those who are unfamiliar with us, the Alberta Native Trout Collaborative communications team is made up of CPAWS Southern Alberta, Trout Unlimited Canada, Alberta Conservation Association, Cows and Fish, and Alberta Environment and Parks, working together to educate and inspire the public to support native trout recovery in our province.



For our first ever angling fair, we wanted to expand that collaborative ethos further by working directly with local angling clubs, influencers, and businesses. Our goal was to not only educate the public about native trout and how to protect them, but also to strengthen and celebrate Calgary's existing community of knowledgeable and responsible anglers.

The event was held on July 15, 2023, at Pearce Estate Park, and was an absolute blast. Out Fly Fishing and Fish Tales Fly Shop offered one-on-one fly-fishing lessons, outdoor influencer Amber Toner gave workshops on proper fish handling techniques, the Calgary Women Fly Fishers club and the Calgary Hook and Hackle Club recruited new members, and our organization and other environmental not-for-profits engaged attendees with entertaining and informative activities, games and raffles. Hundreds of attendees interacted with the booths and activities, and meaningful connections were made between participating organizations and businesses, too.

At the end of the day, community was strengthened, responsible angling was promoted, and we were able to spread the word about fish identification, threatened native trout species, invasive species, and more.

The success of the event was a wonderful reminder to tap into the likeminded outdoor communities that already exist, and enable those individuals, organizations, and businesses to lead their communities in the recovery of native trout and their habitats — because we all have a role to play, and the clean, cold, complex, and connected waterways that are good for native trout, are also good for all of us.





The Timber First Approach

JOSH KILLEEN | CONSERVATION SCIENCE AND PROGRAMS MANAGER

At CPAWS Southern Alberta, when we think about Alberta's forests, we think about biodiversity, Treaty rights, clean drinking water, flood and fire mitigation, carbon sequestration, and recreation. But when it comes to the management of our public forests, it's timber supply that, more often than not, is the number one priority — usually at the expense of ecological and social values.

Alberta likes to describe itself as a leader in sustainable forestry. But how can we make a claim to “sustainable forest management and responsible stewardship” and ensuring “forest values are maintained for future generations”, when species at risk like Boreal Caribou and Westslope Cutthroat Trout continue to decline year after year?

These species are indicators of the health and integrity of our forests — Boreal Caribou need large, intact, undisturbed tracts of forest, while Westslope Cutthroat Trout need the cold, clean, and clear waters that healthy forested watersheds provide. If they aren't doing well, we know that our forests aren't doing well either.

The underlying legislation for forestry management in Alberta is the 1971 Forest Act. It explicitly states that timber yield is the priority for forestry management: “[a forestry company may] enter on forest land for the purpose of establishing, growing and harvesting timber in a manner designed to provide a yield consistent with sustainable forest management principles and practices.”

As part of the legislation currently in place, twenty-year Forest Management Agreements are made with companies for timber harvesting

rights, and a company must produce a Forest Management Plan every 10 years. The Forest Management Planning Standard guides this process, and it also explicitly puts timber supply at the top of the proverbial heap — “FMPs shall focus on how activities (i.e., establishing, growing and harvesting timber) ... will be managed in order to reduce the negative impacts on other resource users and resource values.”

Instead of asking how we can maximise benefits to other values, we only try to minimize the damage done. By defining ecosystem values as constraints, we fail to prioritize them — they are something to be “managed for,” rather than goals to strive for.

That said, there have been many changes for the better to forest management in Alberta since the inception of the Forests Act. Forest management planning now includes many different indicators and measurements of biodiversity values and of watershed integrity.

But, at its core, the planning process still puts timber supply first, and other values second.

This is made abundantly clear in the planning process companies use to identify the amount of timber that they can cut. Typically, the maximum sustained yield (this quantifies what the greatest volume of timber we can extract from the forest while making sure that the extracted volume can be maintained over time) is identified first, and then constraints on that yield are added for other values after — always aiming to minimize the impact of those constraints on the timber yield.





“By defining ecosystem values as constraints, we fail to prioritize them — they are something to be ‘managed for,’ rather than goals to strive for.”

ABOVE | IN AUGUST OF 2023, WE UNCOVERED EVIDENCE THAT SPRAY LAKE SAWMILLS DID NOT HAVE A FISHERIES ACT OR SPECIES AT RISK PERMIT TO CONSTRUCT A BRIDGE, OR ANY KIND OF CROSSING STRUCTURE, OVER THE HIGHWOOD RIVER — CRITICAL HABITAT FOR THE FEDERALLY-LISTED BULL TROUT. THE BRIDGE WAS BUILT AS PART OF THE COMPANY’S PLAN TO CLEARCUT LOG MORE THAN 1,100 HECTARES IN THE UPPER HIGHWOOD AREA OF KANANASKIS.

Another example is the case of retention — the trees that are purposefully left behind in a harvest area. Expert opinion identifies 5-10% retention as a “strict minimum” to achieve a positive ecological response. But in Alberta, almost all companies use retention levels below 5% (and often as low as 2%). In 2016 Alberta Agriculture & Forestry proposed raising the minimum structure retention level to 10%, but this was never implemented.

As a result of this mindset, we continually see forestry operations that degrade our forests. In southern Alberta, there are numerous instances of this across the region.

At Horse Lake, in the Ghost Watershed, we see clearcuts surrounding ecologically important wetlands, threatening to dry them out, even though we know that wetlands are key carbon stores, fire breaks and biodiversity refugia.

In the Upper Highwood we see over 1,100 hectares of clearcut harvest planned right in between the Elbow-Sheep Wildland and the Don Getty Wildland, adjacent to the Highwood River, which is hugely important for threatened native trout species.

This is despite the area being part of the Kananaskis Pass zone, which Albertans pay \$90 to access to “keep this special part of Alberta beautiful and protected for generations to come.”

In West Bragg Creek and Moose Mountain we see clearcuts planned across some of the most popular recreation trails in the region even though recreation is a far bigger economic driver than forestry in Kananaskis Country.



And in the Crowsnest Pass area we see a new 20-year Forest Management Agreement, agreed to without any public consultation, that will support clearcuts in key areas for biodiversity.

The lack of meaningful public and Indigenous consultation (i.e., consultation in which companies are willing to make material changes in response to concerns) is part of this flawed system. The Government of Alberta claims that “meaningful public participation is achieved” and yet Forest Management Agreements and renewals are made without any public consultation, handing over the management of huge swaths of public land to private companies. Forest Management Planning processes then regularly ignore concerns that are raised, leaving the public largely left out of the decision-making process.

Our public forests are integral to all Albertans wellbeing and all Albertans deserve to have a say in how they are managed.

If our goal is “minimizing negative impacts,” we are already falling at the first hurdle. But, if we were to shift our mindset — to make the number one goal of forest management be a healthy, resilient forest that provides the “ecosystem services” that we rely upon — it would paint a much more optimistic picture for the future of Alberta’s forests, and all of the species that call them home.

Timber supply would become one of several different outcomes in this system. That doesn’t mean we can’t also have a thriving forest industry, but it does mean fundamental changes in the way we manage our forests — from government regulation through to corporate culture.

This might also involve exploring and utilizing alternative harvesting methods, including partial harvest systems that leave forest cover intact;

high retention systems where only a proportion of a harvest area is removed (with equal attention on what is left behind as to what is harvested); avoiding harvest altogether in particularly sensitive areas; and, importantly, respecting and incorporating feedback from the public in a meaningful engagement process.

Transparency, access to data, and clear explanations of methods, the “hallmarks of robust science advice,” need to be taken seriously.

Expanding the “toolbox” of harvesting techniques well beyond the traditional clearcut and being adaptive and responsive in how these are applied would provide options for building a sustainable forest industry that puts ecological integrity first.

It’s not only the forestry industry that is impacting our forests; it’s also the cumulative effects of multiple industries and users.

Holistic landscape management that accounts for and manages cumulative effects has long been promised by government, but rarely followed through on. We will continue to see the impacts of disturbances from different industries mount unless we have comprehensive land-use planning. This requires strong government leadership to complete and enforce initiatives like the South Saskatchewan Human Footprint spatial analysis, which would help to map and manage cumulative footprint.

We need to continue to push government and companies to do better — to improve accountability in decision-making processes, to account for cumulative effects when planning, and to shift our thinking to prioritizing the health and resilience of our forests.





Indigenous-led Conservation in the Eastern Slopes

KATIE MORRISON | ELLIOT FOX

The Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council is collaborating with CPAWS Southern Alberta, the Miistakis Institute, and many other entities to explore the development of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) on traditional Blackfoot Territory lands in Alberta's Eastern Slopes, to strengthen their relationships to their lands and water, inform local and regional land use policies and prioritize site-specific protection, conservation and restoration actions based on these objectives and to elevate their traditional rights and role in land use management.

Since time immemorial, the Blackfoot, comprised of the Kainai-Blood Tribe, Siksika, Peigan-Piikani and Aamskapi Pikuni Nations have lived in a territory that stretches beyond the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta and Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone River in the state of Montana, from the Continental Divide in the west to the Great Sand Hills in the province now known as Saskatchewan and beyond.

Blackfoot People believe everything is connected and has a spirit, and that the Rocky Mountains were created from water as the 'Backbone of the World.' Water from the Eastern Slopes was central to the link between culture and biodiversity, with flowing water and riparian areas providing life to people and bison alike.

There is growing recognition of the significant role Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) can play in biodiversity conservation and the protection of culture and heritage. IPCAs share 3 essential elements:

1. IPCAs are Indigenous-led,
2. Represent a long-term commitment to conservation, and
3. Elevate Indigenous rights.

In 2018, the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) reported that IPCAs were critical to achieving international conservation targets. Recently, COP 15 set new targets, highlighting the need for Indigenous leadership. To reach new targets it will be integral that Indigenous Nations are engaged and leading the establishment and management of new protected and conserved areas.

An IPCA in Alberta's East Slopes would ensure clean water and habitat, and protect wildlife including species at risk (native bull & cutthroat). Undertaking watershed-scale planning as part of an IPCA project will engage Blackfoot people, strengthen their relationships to their lands, elevate their rights, give them voice and add to employment opportunities in meaningful, long-term ways.

There is no blueprint or process to follow to establish an IPCA. IPCAs are self-determined by each Indigenous Nation and, while they can be recognized and

respected by federal, provincial and territorial governments, must be designed and governed with each Nations' territory, goals and governance structures. Thus, IPCAs may look different and use different legislative or policy tools.

The Blackfoot Confederacy is in the initial stages of this exploration, working to gather and discuss knowledge, values, and ways of being with community members and elders to determine how this initiative connects to Blackfoot governance and ecological, cultural, and biological health indicators rooted in place-based relationships and understood as interconnected through time and space, as well as contributes to advancement in leadership in management of Blackfoot traditional territory. There is also a need to engage with other Indigenous communities who have successfully established IPCAs to learn from them.

In the end, the goal of the project is the creation of an IPCA framework for a defined area, or areas, within Blackfoot Territory that is supported by the four Blackfoot Nations and which can be used to elevate and advocate with provincial and federal governments to achieve these goals, which are integral to the advancement of reconciliation in Alberta.



Exploring Water through the Niitsítapi Way of Life

LATASHA CALF ROBE | CPAWS SOUTHERN ALBERTA

This autumn, we honoured National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, and celebrated the gifts of water, with two special Indigenous-led Nature Walks.

Aohkii (water), water is a gift from Naatosi (the creator) and Kááhkomma (the earth) and as such it is seen as sacred because of its life-sustaining abilities. Our creation stories teach us of our relation and responsibility to water and to the Soiyitapiiks (water spirits), such as Ksísskstaki (the beaver), who is a sacred being to the Niitsítapi.

The walks, which were held at Fish Creek Provincial Park in Mohinkstsis (Calgary) in Treaty 7 Territory were co-hosted by Bow River Basin Council, and led by Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Api'soomaahka (Running Coyote).

On the walks, Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Api'soomaahka (Running Coyote) shared several Blackfoot (Niitsítapi) stories about the importance of water (aohkii), the watershed and water beings.

We learned about the Beaver Bundle and how beavers keep us connected to water beings. We also learned that aohkii is a gift from naatosi (the creator) and ksááhkomma (the earth) and as such it is seen as sacred because of its life sustaining abilities. Api'soomaahka told us how water is central to all aspects of Blackfoot life, including its ceremonial and medicinal importance.

Following the drought conditions of the past summer, the light rain experienced on this year's walks was not only a gift but also a reminder of the importance to be outside, learn outside, and connect with Mother Earth.

Api'soomaahka began each walk with a tobacco offering to Fish Creek to honour the water it provides and acknowledge our deep reliance on it. Each person was given a pinch of tobacco to offer to the creek and invited to give gratitude in their own way.

Api'soomaahka was joined by Pookaakiwun (Little Girl), or Sierra Shade, Indigenous Event Consultant and Guide with CPAWS Southern Alberta. This was Pookaakiwun's last event with CPAWS as she is now teaching fulltime with the Kainai Board of Education and pursuing her Master of Education.

The walks on this day, and the teachings they offered, provided a special send off to Pookaakiwun as she begins this new phase of her teaching and learning journey. We wish Pookaakiwun all the best!





Blackfoot Water Stewardship in Alberta, Past and Present

The Blackfoot, like many Plains Tribes, knew how scarce water was, and remains, in the prairie region of what is now Canada. So, through both generational knowledge and cultural practices, as well as stewardship and ceremony, these Tribes lived in accordance with the environment and didn't over-extract an already limited resource.

Today, Niitsitapi Water Protectors (NWP) continue to bring awareness to the Eastern Slopes and protection of the Old Man watershed through public education and hosting community discussions surrounding Blackfoot ecological knowledge.

NWP has been lucky to work alongside the Peigan Friends Along the River (PFAR) in the hosting of the annual fish rescue that takes place each October. For 20+ years the PFAR has saved thousands of fish from being trapped in the channel and returning them back to the river for the winter.

Each year the Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association (KEPA) leads numerous conservation and eco-action initiatives that weave together western science and Blackfoot knowledge. This gathering is an opportunity to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples while showcasing Indigenous research and conservation initiatives.

There are so many amazing grassroots initiatives happening across Siksikaitstapi (the Blackfoot Confederacy). Projects such as Naapi's Garden, Buffalo Berry Farm, Indigenous vision and NWP play a crucial role in the protection of land through the resurgence of Blackfoot practices.



The Arc of Education

VANESSA BILAN | OUTREACH MANAGER

To say I was nervous the first time I hoisted my guide pack on my back and prepared to lead a class on a hike up to the Yamnuska Bluffs would be quite an understatement. But, in the seven years since — and having taught thousands of young people through CPAWS Southern Alberta's hiking and classroom programs — my initial apprehension has turned into confidence. I've seen firsthand how environmental education can influence today's youth and transform them into the next generation of passionate advocates for Alberta's wilderness.

I am proud that Southern Alberta stands out among the 13 regional and national CPAWS chapters as one of the only with both a dedicated conservation and education department. Environmental education provides invaluable opportunities for students to engage with real-world issues that extend beyond the confines of the classroom. Our programs, like Explore Parks and Fabulous Forests, empower students from kindergarten to grade 12 to develop the skills necessary to become creative problem solvers and informed advocates.

However, our team identified a key opportunity for our offerings: While our education programs were popular among primary school kids, our conservation efforts were largely reaching adults aged 30 and older. We were not engaging with high-school and university-aged youth as much as we could (or should) — especially because we knew that bridging this divide between conservation knowledge, and taking action, was pivotal.



To that end, we've supported the development of two new programs at our chapter: the Canadian Rockies Youth Network (CRYN) and the Canadian Wilderness Stewardship Project (CWSP).

The Canadian Rockies Youth Network (CRYN) was conceived of by a Calgary teenager, Ben Greene, in 2019. Initially, it stemmed from a school project that sought to incorporate youth perspectives into a proposal to expand the Lake Louise Ski Area. As Ben delved deeper into his project, he discovered that youth voices were often marginalized and overlooked in environmental decision-making processes.

From there, the CRYN Summit emerged—a platform where young people could connect, learn, and establish a strong coalition of voices for the environment. We're happy to say we've been supporting and growing this program since 2020. We've provided education on conservation issues, assisted with project and campaign development, and lent our expertise in fundraising and planning efforts.

Last year, at the Bow Valley Summit, we welcomed over 50 participants from 10 different communities, including Piikani, Iyathe Nakoda, and Lacombe, providing a unique opportunity to experience cross-cultural perspectives. The Network has thrived, driven by a shared mission to ensure that youth have a meaningful say in environmental management decisions in the Canadian Rockies. They understand that these decisions profoundly impact not only their lives, but also those of the generations yet to come.





For us, the natural 'next step' for CRYN participants is our Canadian Wilderness Stewardship Program (CWSP). A brainchild of CPAWS, CWSP is an educational experience designed to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards by connecting young adults aged 18-30 to nature and their local communities.

The three core activities are a regional expedition, a participant-led community-service project, and a summit where participants share knowledge and develop skills in civic engagement, conservation, leadership, and advocacy. Since its inception, the program has yielded high-impact results.

Southern Alberta was one of four chapters across the country to host this program. Participants ranged in background from university students to nurses and professors. While the national program has wound down, we are working on a local re-boot of the program.

Programs like CWSP help foster cross-cultural and cross-sector conservation relationships and solutions, bringing forth new and innovative ideas and perspectives on contemporary conservation issues. While participants came from very different backgrounds, one thing they all shared was a passion for nature and a desire to learn how to protect it, whether as part of a future career or a cherished hobby.

In the words of a 2021-22 Southern Alberta CWSP participant, "When it comes to experiential learning, the immersive design of CWSP is unmatched. From backcountry trips to monthly exclusive webinars, intimate time spent on the land with Indigenous leaders inspired those with a curiosity for conservation. I am forever grateful for this opportunity and committed to celebrating our beautiful Earth through conservation efforts and education."

What I love about these programs is they run side by side, with roughly the same eight-month timeline and supported by our entire chapter staff. But the really exciting part is the mentorship opportunity between the two groups. CWSP participants become mentors to CRYN participants, attending similar educational opportunities, project planning events, and attending the high-school Summits. CRYN participants greatly benefit from the insights CWSP youth offer on career paths, post-secondary education options, and more. It's a cycle of support that keeps the conservation fire burning in Alberta's youth.

In reflecting on the journey we've embarked upon through the Canadian Rockies Youth Network and the Canadian Wilderness Stewardship Program, it's become clear to me why these programs are the lifeblood of conservation in Alberta.

They are a beacon of hope for a future where the protection and preservation of our natural world is paramount.

In a world where conservation is more critical than ever, programs like CRYN and CWSP are the guiding stars.

They inspire, educate, and empower the next generation of conservationists who will stand as guardians of our natural treasures. They are the essence of hope for a brighter, more sustainable future where our natural world thrives in harmony with humanity.





Conservation through Community and Creativity

KAT GRAVES

Amidst the sometimes-inescapable heaviness of conservation — including the anxiety of impending clearcuts and the mind-boggling prospect of the threat of coal mining returning to the Eastern Slopes (egad!) — we spent a not inconsiderable amount of time this year trying to carve out space for creativity, joy, and fun in our work.

In particular, we found tremendous solace in coming together with artists, businesses, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders, and grassroots groups on new, exploratory initiatives.

We worked with Elements Outfitters, Patagonia, and Canmore-based artist Emily Beaudoin on an eye-catching mural in Banff National Park, we collaborated with local ceramicist Leah Schwantz to design beautiful mugs that celebrate Alberta habitat and wildlife, we co-hosted a classical music concert with the Kensington Sinfonia, and we filmed a video-based translation project with Elder Pablo Russell that educates and inspires people to learn more about the Blackfoot (Siksiká) language in a way that honours the oral tradition of the Treaty 7 Nation.

On the surface, projects like this may seem disconnected from our core mission, or even a distraction from it. But we truly believe that there's room for everyone to participate in conservation in Alberta — from politicians to playwrights and everything in between. Unexpected gateways into conservation — like art, science, music, and language — recognize the fact that participation can come in all kinds of different shapes and sizes, too.





So, while we may focus the bulk of our energies on policy advocacy and environmental education, we invite you to find a path to walk that honours your interests, abilities, and passions. As we've said before, and will undoubtedly say again, conservation is collaboration — and we look forward to continuing to find inventive, imaginative ways to steward a future for Alberta's wilderness, alongside our community, in the coming year.



My goal with this mural is to make people pause and inspire them to take action. Art is such a cool way to grab attention and share a new perspective on an old story, and I hope this piece provides inspiration, connection, and motivation to conserve and protect our beautiful, fragile lands. I'm so proud of the work CPAWS Southern Alberta is doing, and so glad to play a small part in their amazing mission.



EMILY BEAUDOIN | MURAL ARTIST

Steward a future for Alberta's wild spaces and species with us.

THE WILDERNESS OF OUR PROVINCE IS HEALTHIER AND MORE ROBUST BECAUSE OF MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY OF WORK BY THE STAFF, BOARD MEMBERS, DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND SUPPORTERS OF CPAWS SOUTHERN ALBERTA — AND THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN CONTINUING THIS LEGACY OF STEWARDSHIP. BECAUSE NONE OF WHAT WE DO IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU.

Your support fuels our day-to-day work and inspires us to continue advocating for the conservation of Alberta's wild spaces and species.

From all of us here at CPAWS Southern Alberta, thank you. Thank you for your steadfast commitment to giving back to nature, and to protecting and preserving the biodiversity that makes our province such a remarkable place.

Our work is far from over, however, and we need your support more than ever. From the ongoing impacts of the coal exploration footprint in the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains, to the mining effluent being released into our waterways, the dwindling populations of at-risk native trout, and the barriers to access that many in our province still experience when it comes to environmental education and nature connection — there's much left to be done.

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



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 Covid-19 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.

Statement of Financial Position

YEAR END | MARCH 31, 2023

	2023	2022
ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 1,026,162	\$ 835,841
Accounts Receivable	10,431	54,139
Goods and Services Tax Recoverable	170	4,307
Prepaid Expenses	4,050	3,621
Due from CPAWS National	55,017	14,807
	<hr/>	
	1,095,830	912,715
TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS	13,305	9,890
	<hr/>	
	\$ 1,109,135	\$ 922,605
LIABILITIES		
CURRENT		
Accounts Payable and Accrued Liabilities	\$ 41,215	\$ 39,748
Deferred Contributions	172,771	121,086
	<hr/>	
	213,986	160,834
NET ASSETS		
INVESTED IN TANGIBLE CAPITAL ASSETS	13,305	9,890
UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS	621,844	491,881
INTERNALLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS	260,000	260,000
	<hr/>	
	895,149	761,771
	<hr/>	
	\$ 1,109,135	\$ 922,605
	<hr/>	

Supporters



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ALBERTA ECOTRUST

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PHOTO CREDITS

[PAGE | PHOTOGRAPHER]

01-02 | AMBER TONER

05 | AMBER TONER

07-08 | MILEN KOOTNIKOFF

09-10 | AMBER TONER

11-14 | AMBER TONER

17 [TOP RIGHT] | BARRY CREAM

17 [BOTTOM LEFT] | BARRY CREAM

21 [MIDDLE] | LUKA RODGER-DUNCAN

21 [RIGHT] | JANNIE NIKOLA

22 [MIDDLE] | LEAH SCHWANTZ

22 [RIGHT] | BARUN FOX

[CPAWS OR STOCK PHOTO IF NOT LISTED]

