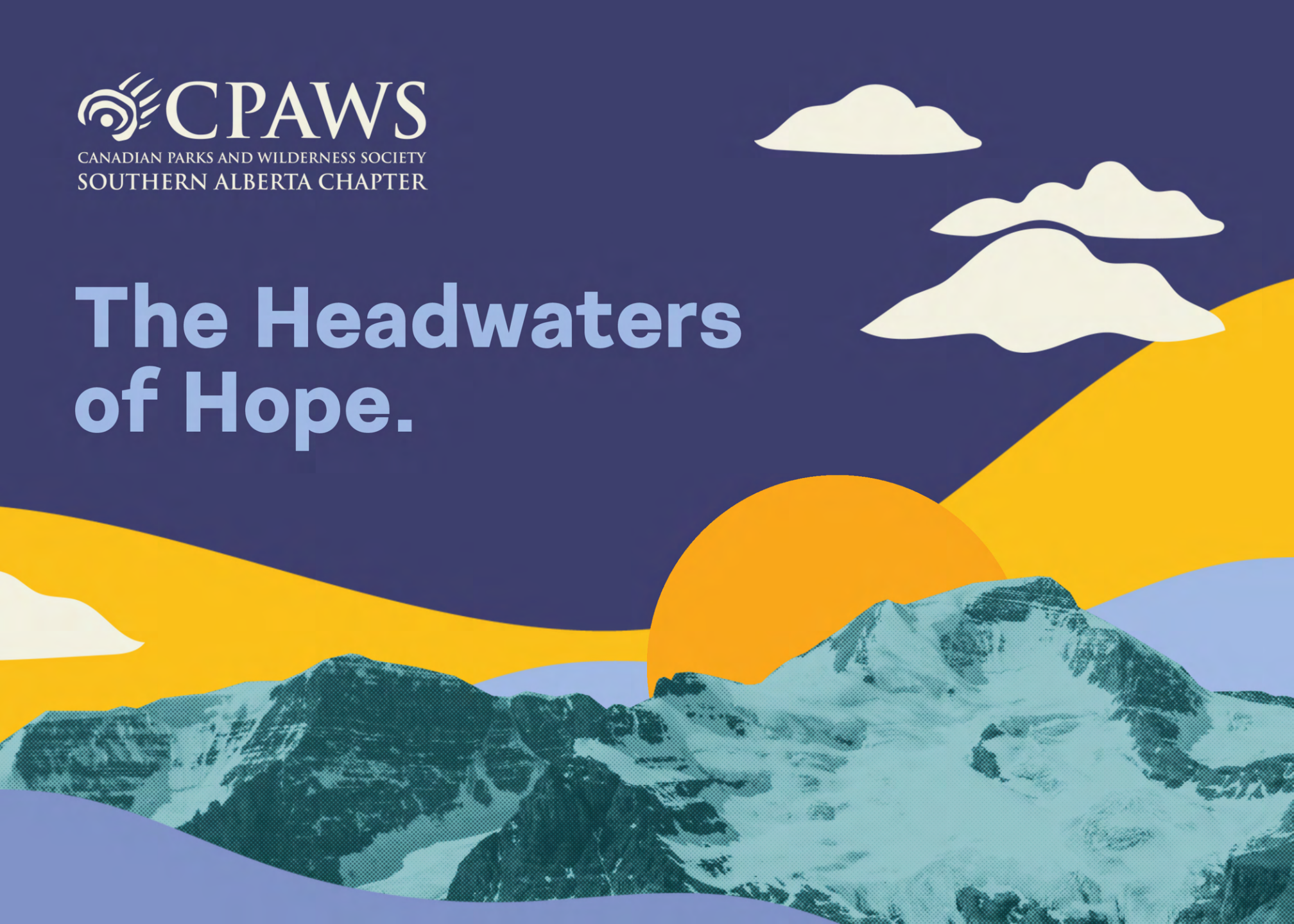


The Headwaters of Hope.



We are Southern Alberta's collaborative conservation leader.

Our mission is to conserve the vital ecological functions of Southern Alberta's public lands and waters, including our parks and protected areas, in collaboration with Albertans, and in a way that advances reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

We gratefully acknowledge that we live and work in the lands of the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), comprised of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and Amskapi Piikani First Nations; the Tsuut'ina First Nation; the Îyârhe Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations; the Ktunaxa Nation; and the Otipemisiwak Métis Nation of Alberta.



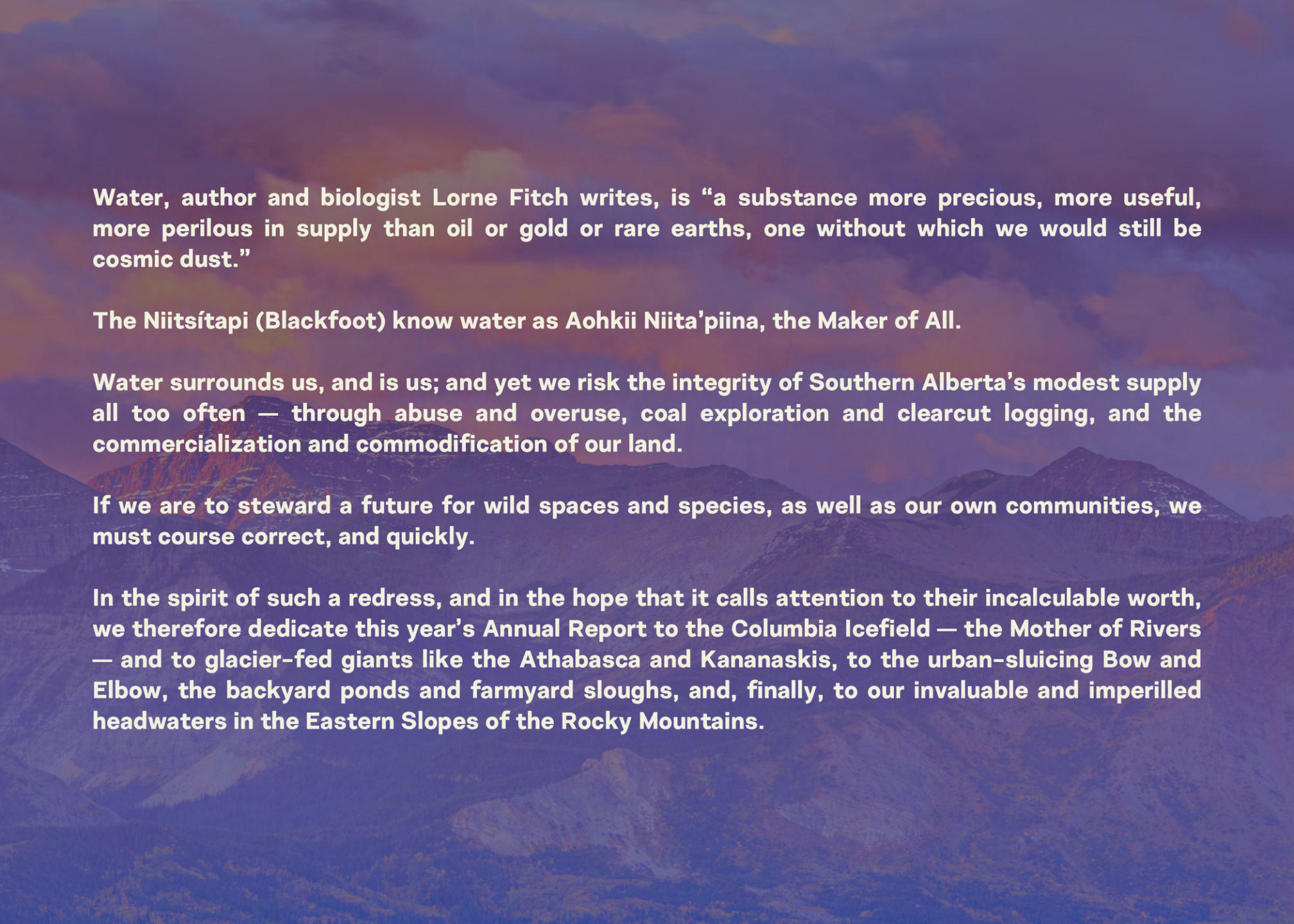
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Water, the Maker of All.





Water, author and biologist Lorne Fitch writes, is “a substance more precious, more useful, more perilous in supply than oil or gold or rare earths, one without which we would still be cosmic dust.”

The Niitsítapi (Blackfoot) know water as Aohkii Niita’piina, the Maker of All.

Water surrounds us, and is us; and yet we risk the integrity of Southern Alberta’s modest supply all too often — through abuse and overuse, coal exploration and clearcut logging, and the commercialization and commodification of our land.

If we are to steward a future for wild spaces and species, as well as our own communities, we must course correct, and quickly.

In the spirit of such a redress, and in the hope that it calls attention to their incalculable worth, we therefore dedicate this year’s Annual Report to the Columbia Icefield — the Mother of Rivers — and to glacier-fed giants like the Athabasca and Kananaskis, to the urban-slucing Bow and Elbow, the backyard ponds and farmyard sloughs, and, finally, to our invaluable and imperilled headwaters in the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

Storms Make Trees Take Deeper Roots.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE | KATIE MORRISON

Dolly Parton once said, “The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.” This year at CPAWS Southern Alberta, we’ve been able to work through the rain towards some incredible conservation rainbows.

On the home front, we moved into a new office in the Kahanoff Centre for Charitable Activities. Our new office is a lovely, professional, and collaborative space for staff to gather 9 to 5, share ideas, and work on projects, in a building that’s entirely occupied by charities doing great things. The board and leadership team, with input from staff and our community, also put together a new strategic plan that will guide our efforts for the next 5 years, with a key focus on advancing conservation policy and building strong community conservation advocates.

And there is certainly lots of work to be done. This past year presented some real conservation challenges including the continued fight to stop the logging at Loomis Creek and Upper Highwood, exposing the systemic issues with forestry across the province, and uncovering huge —

— gaps in federal legislation designed to protect species at risk. We also continued crucial efforts with communities, partners, and other grassroots groups to oppose new coal exploration and mining in Alberta’s Rocky Mountains.

And, as the Smoky Mountain Songbird says, “I don’t often lose my temper, but I often have to use it.”

Alongside CPAWS Southern Alberta, Albertans rose to the challenge and fought for our wild places — resulting in at least a glimmer of a rainbow, with a pause on the logging plans at Loomis Creek (for now), and the removal of [The Bridge](#) that was illegally built over the Highwood River. An overwhelming response from the community helped us fund an ecohydrology study in the region to document its importance for watershed integrity and species at risk.

We also saw some opportunities to advance conservation with the important engagement in the Government of Alberta’s new Plan for Parks that sets the direction for our parks and protected areas in the province and in the —

— engagement for Alberta's nature strategy.

And the results indicate that Albertans did speak up for parks. Our members' input in these two plans will be vital for providing a strong conservation direction for our province. Our involvement in pushing for a consequential provincial nature strategy also included putting out recommendations on how to meaningfully protect Alberta ecosystems, giving us **Something to Reach For** rather than fight against.

We also held two events with our CPAWS Northern Alberta chapter at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Colombia, highlighting how Alberta can contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

We also co-produced and released a film on water and water protectors that inspires us all to get involved in land and water conservation. We continued work with the Blackfoot Confederacy to support development of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area.

And we upheld ecological integrity in Banff National Park by providing input on the development of the Banff Railway Lands Area Redevelopment Plan to ensure it aligned with the park management plan.

Our commitment to ensuring nature and conservation are accessible to all Albertans is **Something Special** and the foundation of our work.

Beyond delivering nearly 300 outdoor education and hiking programs, we also launched a course on Niitsítapi hand signs in collaboration with Elder Pablo Russell; delivered programming on Creating an Inclusive Outdoors; partnered with Skipping Stone, the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre, and Multicultural Trail Network on reducing barriers to access for 2SLGBTQIA+, folks with disabilities, and BIPOC youth; held fourteen Indigenous-led nature walks; launched a new volunteer program; and supported youth to build their conservation and advocacy skills through the Canadian Rockies Youth Network.

And because of all of this amazing work by our dedicated staff and board, and by the committed Albertans who are taking action, together we are advancing conservation **A Little at a Time**. We will continue to stand as **Steady as the Rain** to protect our public lands and waters because, as Dolly also says, "Storms make trees take deeper roots."

Our Alberta conservation roots are strong and deep, and working together to protect the places we love only makes us stronger.

Your Support Revitalizes Us.

BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE | JON MEE

Protecting and conserving protected and public lands requires creativity, passion, imagination, commitment, perseverance, hope, and, most of all, support. One of the things I learned this year was that support can come in all different forms.

As a board member, I support the Chapter primarily by overseeing the responsible governance and financial management of the organization. Part of good governance, especially in our context, is making sure that we have appropriate policies and practices in place to allow our staff to replenish energy stores, rekindle inspiration, and refresh their commitment to the Chapter's mission.

There are heavy demands on people's emotions and energy reserves as a result of working in social change organizations such as ours. This year, for example, we enacted a sabbatical leave policy that is intended to augment the effectiveness of the Chapter over the long haul, recognizing that the passionate team we have in place is our greatest asset.

We took a major step this past year in revisiting and revising the Chapter's strategic plan. This might seem like an abstract and esoteric activity, far removed from the need for boots-on-the-ground action in the face of major threats to our lands and waters. But I see it as a sign of a very healthy and vibrant organization that we all (board and staff alike) got together and solidified our collective support for CPAWS Southern Alberta's position as a collaborative conservation leader in our province.

It was through this strategic planning process that we committed to renewed focus areas for our work, including a commitment to fundraising targets (and a commensurate fund development strategy) that will keep our Chapter healthy and vibrant through the remainder of the decade. Strategic focus is crucial in a world with seemingly infinite conservation challenges and finite dollars.

An eye-opening and surprising avenue of support this past year was the crowdsourcing campaign ('Defend Alberta Forests') to raise funds to monitor the impact of —

— forestry activities in the Upper Highwood.

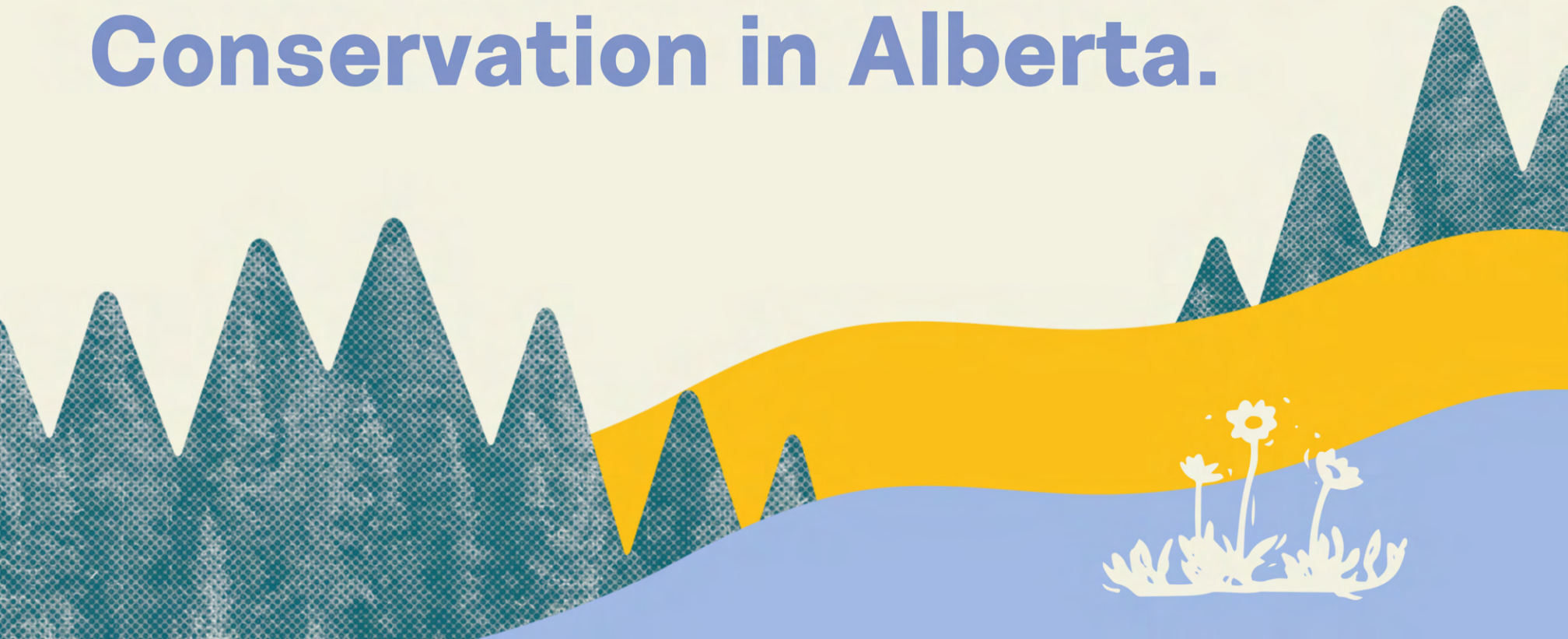
I'm frequently amazed by the variety of ways in which our Chapter engages with Albertans to help protect and advocate for the places we cherish. The support we've received to help halt coal mining, to Defend Alberta Parks, and to promote responsible forestry in the Upper Highwood have all come through in remarkably different campaigns.

I look forward to supporting our Chapter in the coming years as we continue to help Albertans voice their support for a landscape where nature thrives. The work of our Chapter depends on engaged civic-minded people who care enough to step up and contribute.

There are many ways to support us — I hope you've found at least one!



Advancing Science-Based Conservation in Alberta.



Our Vision

We envision a future where Albertans appreciate and value the public lands and waters and take meaningful conservation action on their behalf. The landscape is well-managed, includes an abundance of parks and protected areas, and is ecologically sound, supporting biodiversity and sustainable communities.



Places of the Heart that Touch the Soul.

LORNE FITCH

In a vivid memory, fog cloaked the breach in the Livingstone Mountain Range, through which the Oldman River has cut a deep passage. The rudimentary 's' curve carving a channel through the folded and faulted bedrock represents time beyond our comprehension. Even against rock the water is implacable. Truck sized boulders, part of the clawing of water through the weak spot in the mountains, shows the river isn't finished yet.

Each of us harbour places of memory, of joy and of sublime delight. They flood our senses from time to time. Then some of those places become part of you.

They attach themselves to your soul, as does a limpet clinging to a rocky ocean shore. When you leave those places, indiscernible pieces, traces, leave with you. Sometimes with the passage of time the feeling seems to fade, with faint memories remaining.

Never really gone, never really forgotten, places that stir the heart seem ephemeral, like phantoms but with a gentle nudge, there they are, tempting us to reconcile with them.





Every time I drive through the 'Gap' in the Livingstone Range, feelings of antiquity and persistence are refreshed. I am also reminded the place transcends my limited sense of time.

A salmon-red sunset filled the western sky, so vibrant it seemed Photoshopped. In dark relief were the Sweetgrass Hills, just over the Alberta border in Montana. It created a surreal sense of expanse, so compelling I could feel myself shrinking in comparison to the broad sweep of sky.

Humility isn't a bad thing for us humans to experience, maybe every day. This is doubly so for the beauty, scale and transcendent feeling places provide. Whenever I want to escape the artifacts of human creation, I go to that primordial sunset in my mind.

It was an untouched, unroaded, unlogged trout stream. Every foot of upstream passage was thwarted by a downed log, a tangle of understory shrubs or a pool of unwadeable water. Ancient spruce, much older than Canada, tipped towards the water. Some had already toppled, with their root masses some five metres in diameter either damming the stream or lodging parallel to the flow. These key logs accumulated smaller trees and limbs in an indecipherable jumble.

Trout, big trout, lollygagged in the slow current created by all the obstructions in the water.

Each piece of gravel seemed magnified in water clear as a window pane.

The matrix of trees, logs, understory, overstory and a convoluted channel that dipped and wove itself between, around and over the logjams seemed chaotic. A jumbled mass of unrelated pieces, of disarray and of unnecessary complexity. It took a while to see it wasn't chaotic, indeed it was a serene tableau.

It was like the interior mechanism of an enormous, natural clock. All the spare parts were present, the mechanism tapped out the time of ancient processes, to the syncopated rhythms of Indigenous seconds and minutes, a model of symmetry and efficiency, where everything mattered, everything was essential and nothing was redundant.

I suppose in the fullness of time, with enough scientific measuring equipment available, it might be possible to parse out what some of the pieces do, how some fit together and how all the pieces move in a dance over time to reposition themselves. But the explanation would be a pale facsimile of the whole. There are things we will never see, feel or prove.

The stream knew the formulae, the pattern, the instructions, the logistics, the construction and the

maintenance schedule.

It finally dawned on me the best we humans could do would be to stand back, ensure the watershed has integrity and let the stream, that knew its business better than us, get on with it.

These are some of the places that touch my soul. Some I can go back to, reminiscent of a visit with an old friend. Some have been gobbled up with our frenetic, frantic desire to extract all the economic benefits; left behind are the crushed bodies, skeletons and empty shells of what once was.

Some of my places of the heart are gone. These now tortured landscapes trigger an ache in my heart. A logging clear-cut, a coal strip mine, a cow-blasted meadow, ploughed up prairie grassland, or a hillside rutted with off-highway vehicle trails, all grate as coarse-grit sandpaper on my soul.

The reason it hurts is because, at least for me, my soul is connected to some of those places. As more of those places of the heart disappear I'm afraid I will be a body without a soul.

That's why I speak up, not only for places of my heart, but perhaps of yours too.

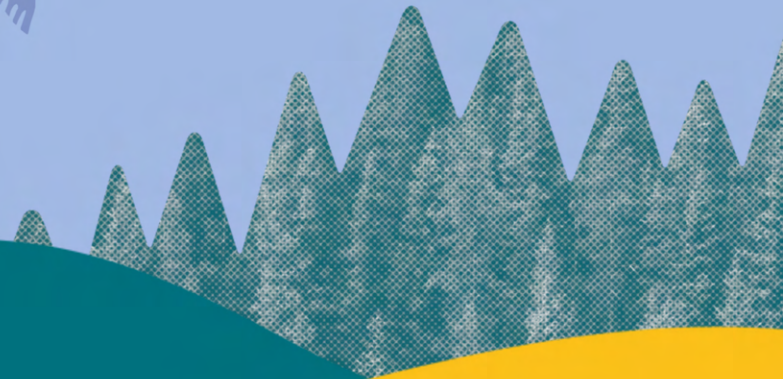
If there was a way to create a window to one's soul, so others could look in and see the grief when a place of the heart is trashed, it might make more sense why we are so aggrieved.

The late José Saramago, a Portuguese writer, said "Inside us is something that has no name, that something is what we are." I would go further and say what we are, in some vital way, are the places that touch the heart and attach themselves to our souls.

Find the places that touch you and hang onto them. They both anchor and make us whole.

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist, and a former Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary. He is also the author of *Streams of Consequence* and *Travels Up the Creek: A Biologist's Search For a Paddle*.





If you're passionate about stewarding a sustainable, resilient future for wild spaces and species in Southern Alberta, become part of our team by volunteering with us.

CPAWS-SOUTHERNALBERTA.ORG/VOLUNTEER



Be a voice for land, water, and wildlife.

A Future for Critical Habitat in the Highwood

JOSH KILLEEN | CONSERVATION SCIENCE & PROGRAM MANAGER

In the summer of 2023, a bridge was built over the Highwood River in preparation for West Fraser Cochrane's (then Spray Lake Sawmills) 1,200 hectare clearcut, igniting intense public backlash against plans to log this beautiful corner of Kananaskis Country. Well over 6,000 people sent letters opposing the plan and, across the region, people stepped up to make their voices heard.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans began an investigation (still ongoing) into the legality of the bridge crossing the Highwood River, and the Government of Alberta responded by commissioning a report examining the risks to the watershed. At present, the logging plan is on pause, and that's thanks to all of the people who became involved in this campaign.

However, the pause is no guarantee that logging won't still go ahead in the future and there is still much work to be done to protect the Highwood. We conducted an initial watershed assessment for the area and found very high risks of increased peak flows and surface erosion due to the planned harvest.



This would have a major impact on trout populations, like the threatened bull trout.

But we knew that a detailed field-based assessment was really the only way to scientifically document the importance of the watershed to bull trout, and the risks that logging would bring.

To this end, we collaborated with aquatic biologists and fisheries experts to design a field study that would provide such a comprehensive assessment. Doing this type of work is expensive, but we were blown away by the support from our community. We raised \$70,000 in only two months toward making this project happen and, as a result, fieldwork began this summer. It's the generosity of all the people who care about this place that are making the project possible.

The project has three key components: Fish distribution and habitat use, forest hydrology, and erosion and sedimentation.

The first aims to (a) document bull trout presence in the watershed, including assessing the upper reaches of tributaries, which have no monitoring data; (b) identify overwintering and rearing locations; and (c) survey bull trout spawning locations.

This will provide us with a clear and detailed account of how and where trout populations are using the watershed. We've already seen that trout are spawning in some of the smaller tributaries that would be directly and heavily impacted by the planned logging.

The second aims to (a) measure water temperatures, (b) measure water flow levels, and (c) assess channel geomorphology and riparian conditions. This will provide us with a detailed picture of the current state of the watershed and will provide data to assess the potential impacts of logging.

The third aims to provide baseline data on areas of high erosion risk, as well as sediment levels in the tributaries that would be impacted by logging. If logging did go ahead, this would provide a comparison point for assessing how logging influences erosion and sediment levels in the water, and trout population survival.

By doing this work, we hope that the case for stopping logging in the Upper Highwood will be clear.

Already this logging plan, which had initially been given a green light by government, has been paused and opened up to intense scrutiny thanks to the work and support of community members.

A Future for Critical Habitat in the Highwood

CONTINUED



It is now clear to all involved that the regulatory process that led to approval was lacking and needs to be strengthened. We will use this work to continue to push our governments for improved regulation for watershed protection and at-risk species.

Ultimately, the Upper Highwood is only one of many examples of unsustainable logging practices in this part of the province. We anticipate that the work that goes into the Upper Highwood project will have wide ranging implications for how forestry is managed across the province, especially where threatened native trout species and watersheds are concerned.



The Home of our Headwaters.

While the 'Eastern Slopes' may not be a term everyone is immediately familiar with, they likely know where and what they are: The eastern face of Alberta's Rocky Mountains, which run from the provincial border in the south to Jasper National Park in the north.

The Eastern Slopes are a critical region for the well-being of our communities, as well as our regional economy. They're not only the source of our headwaters — providing nearly 2 million Albertans with our daily drinking water — they also support our province's diverse agriculture, ranching, tourism, and recreation economies.



These iconic landscapes, and the wildlife which inhabit them, draw people from all over the world to Alberta; provide Albertans with amazing areas to recreate, connect with nature, and nourish our mental and physical health; and, as described above, are the source of arguably our most important natural infrastructure: Water.



Parched Plains: Our Vanishing Headwaters

KATIE MORRISON

Standing at the top of a hill overlooking the confluence of the Oldman and the St. Mary's rivers, a vein of trees snaking through an otherwise dry prairie, a local farmer tells us this is where he comes to check how dirty the river is on any given day to know if he has to turn off his downstream irrigation sprinklers, so they don't get clogged with sediment. Later that afternoon sitting on the porch of a home in the Kainai Reserve on a crest above the Belly River, a Blackfoot Elder tells us of his spiritual connection to the lands and his concerns about not being able to drink his own water or use it in ceremony.

Over the months working on our forthcoming film, *Dry Horizons*, the filmmaker, Ryan HK, and I listened to many beautiful, inspiring, and heart wrenching stories from anglers, business owners, biologists, musicians, farmers, ranchers, hunters, Indigenous knowledge keepers, and youth. Albertans who, despite their differences, rely on clean water, have seen the changes to it, and fear for the future of their livelihood, families, or outdoor experience, if we don't change the way we manage the lands on the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains —

— that provide 90% of water to Southern Alberta's downstream communities, ranches, farms, and businesses.

But there is something else these people have in common — they are all taking action in their own ways to advocate for a better future and defend life-giving lands and waters from coal mines, forestry, or unsustainable levels of recreation. We heard again and again “I couldn't imagine telling my grandchildren that I just sat back and let it happen,” or, “If not me, then who?” These aren't people who were out to pick a fight or who imagined themselves as environmental advocates, but everyday Albertans who stepped up to speak for what is right and for the places they love.

And I think this is what it's all about. This is why, despite the challenges of conservation, I love what I do. Our role at CPAWS Southern Alberta is to help identify needs, gaps, and challenges, define solutions, share expertise, science, and knowledge, and to facilitate and empower diverse coalitions for influence and success. To provide the conditions for people to use their voices towards change.

The film itself is a collaboration between CPAWS Southern Alberta, Alberta Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and the Pekisko Group of ranchers. And it is the people who inspire me to continue to protect the land and waters we all love and value; the air, water, trees, species that we rely on for food, quality of life, livelihoods, and outdoor recreation.

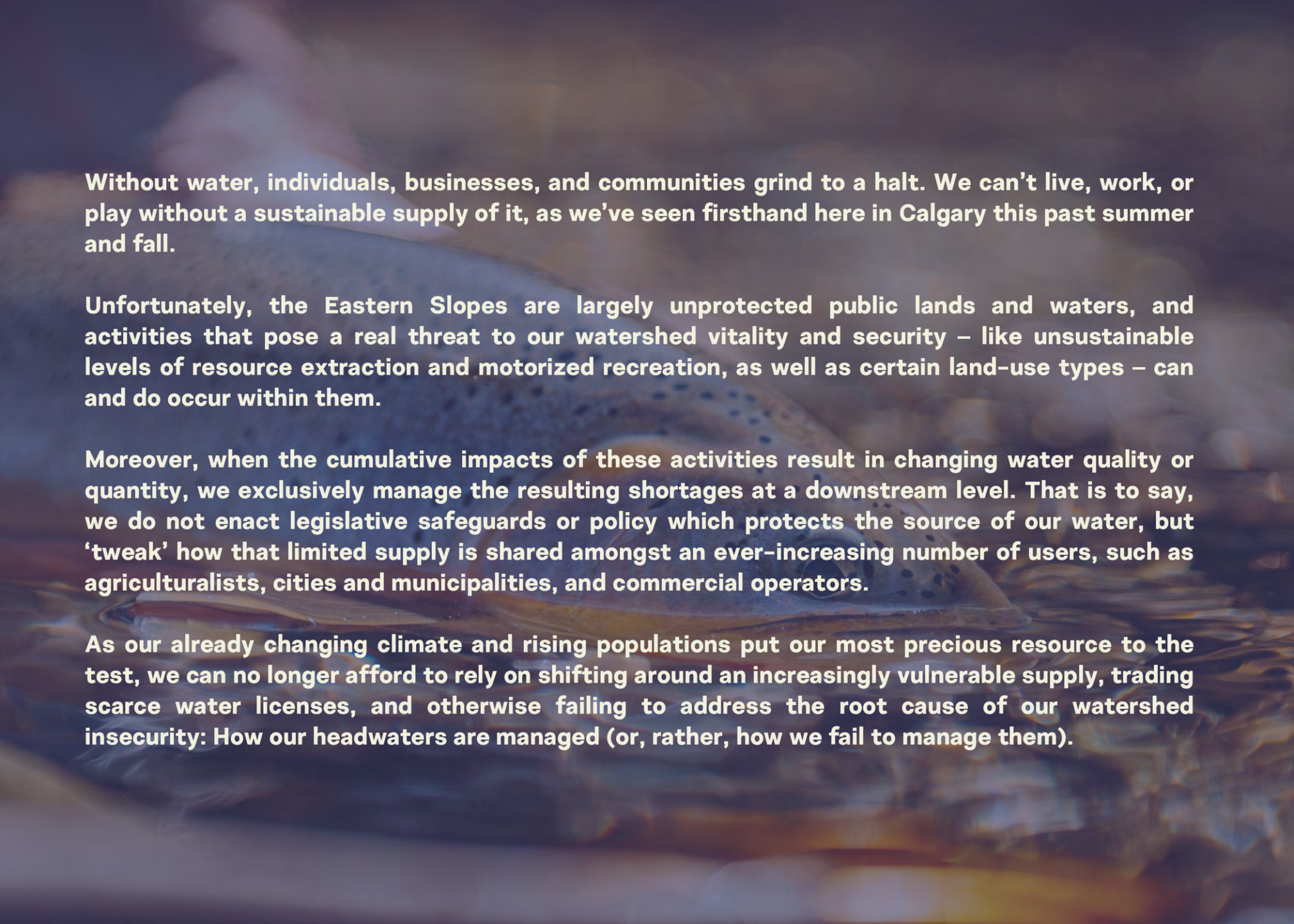
It is not work that any one of us can do alone, but together we can take individual and collective actions to protect special places, change policies to maintain and restore ecological functions and services, recover species at risk, and provide resilience to our communities in the face of a changing climate.

Because as one long-time conservationist we interviewed so plainly said, “we do it for love.” That love shines all the way through Dry Horizons and I hope that it inspires you too.

Thank you to Ryan HK for his tireless efforts to bring this film to life. We are so grateful for his time, energy, and creative energy.







Without water, individuals, businesses, and communities grind to a halt. We can't live, work, or play without a sustainable supply of it, as we've seen firsthand here in Calgary this past summer and fall.

Unfortunately, the Eastern Slopes are largely unprotected public lands and waters, and activities that pose a real threat to our watershed vitality and security – like unsustainable levels of resource extraction and motorized recreation, as well as certain land-use types – can and do occur within them.

Moreover, when the cumulative impacts of these activities result in changing water quality or quantity, we exclusively manage the resulting shortages at a downstream level. That is to say, we do not enact legislative safeguards or policy which protects the source of our water, but 'tweak' how that limited supply is shared amongst an ever-increasing number of users, such as agriculturalists, cities and municipalities, and commercial operators.

As our already changing climate and rising populations put our most precious resource to the test, we can no longer afford to rely on shifting around an increasingly vulnerable supply, trading scarce water licenses, and otherwise failing to address the root cause of our watershed insecurity: How our headwaters are managed (or, rather, how we fail to manage them).

We All Belong in Nature.





The world of conservation is shifting. Organizations, academics, and individuals in Alberta are realizing that conservation and social justice goals belong side by side. We believe this work is long overdue for us and Alberta's conservation community as a whole. By working closely alongside partners from equity deserving communities, we hope to change the reality of colonial environmentalist culture by promoting diverse voices, framing nature as a positive space for all, and removing barriers against participating in conservation. We recognize that decolonization and social justice are the future of conservation and commit to a resilient, wild Alberta for all.

bioDIVERSITY is the Beating Heart of our Work.

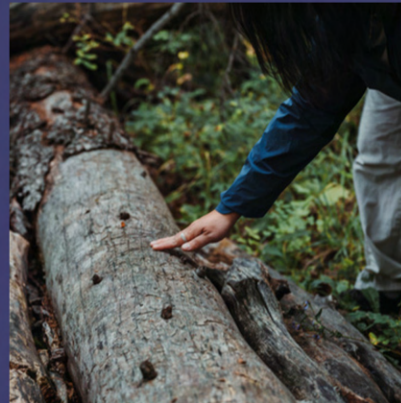
KAT GRAVES | COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

In 2020, we launched bioDIVERSITY. Designed to break down barriers to environmental action, the new program was born out of the belief that social justice and conservation goals belong side by side.

By working with and promoting diverse voices from Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) and LGBTQ2SIA+ communities, as well as New Canadian groups, we wanted to tackle — and begin dismantling — the long-standing culture of colonialist environmentalism in Alberta.

“Over the years, we’d witnessed time and again how cultural identity, racial inequality and lack of representation can impact students’ access to and experience of outdoor education and nature,” says Jaclyn Angotti, our Education Director. “And, quite simply, we wanted to change that.”

Through bioDIVERSITY, we’ve committed to six principles for enacting ecojustice.



- 1 | Reduce barriers for individuals and communities that feel unwelcome or excluded from the outdoors;
- 2 | Amplify diverse voices and stories in conservation;
- 3 | Amplify Indigenous-led conservation efforts to protect Treaty lands for future generations;
- 4 | Acknowledge and educate on the history of Indigenous erasure in conservation and the outdoors;
- 5 | Support the great work being done in conservation by BIPOC-led community organizations; and
- 6 | Work towards an inclusive, welcoming and safe CPAWS Southern Alberta.

“Our team believes that we have to take action to make the outdoors, environmental education, and conservation accessible, inclusive, safe and joyous. Otherwise, we risk becoming complicit in perpetuating the structures that make them the opposite,” says Jaclyn.

She knows that this is no mean feat. “There is so much work to be done,” Jaclyn admits. “But there are also so many inspiring steps being taken in the community.”

As the program has taken shape, we’ve introduced exciting initiatives to the public, including an Indigenous-led Nature Walk series in Mohkinstsis (Calgary) and Sik-Ooh-Kotoki (Lethbridge). The walks, which have been hosted at places like Nose Hill and Fish Creek Park, have offered attendees the opportunity to experience Indigenous stories, games, and even traditional foods.

According to Pookaakiiwun (Sierra Shade), a former Indigenous Event Consultant and Guide with us, “Participants have left with a much greater understanding of the Niitsítapi (Blackfoot) people, their ways of Knowing and Being on the land, and a new perspective of their own responsibility to the land.” Jaclyn agrees, adding that “the demand for Indigenous-led, land-based learning has surprised us, and we feel honoured to facilitate these walks.”

Meanwhile, efforts to improve the inclusivity of our classroom experiences are underway, too. We worked closely with Elder Api’soomaahka (Running Coyote) to bring the Blackfoot language into existing education programs, like Grizzly Bears Forever and Community Science, and the feedback from students and teachers alike was so overwhelmingly positive that Michif and Cree translations are being incorporated, too.

“We’re really pleased with the response to this program,” says Katie Morrison, our Executive Director here at CPAWS Southern Alberta.

“The environmental community has been very intrigued by what we’re doing, and we get lots of questions from partners asking how they can get involved and what action and learning opportunities we’ve found useful in our journey. There is a lot of interest in ecojustice work.”

What’s more, Katie continues, that interest extends to the broader community, “We know that Albertans want to participate in ecojustice and are looking for ways to do so.”

“It comes full circle,” says Jaclyn, “If we want to protect Alberta’s landscape, we need inclusive conservation efforts.”

Jaclyn, Katie, myself, and the entire staff and organization are proud of the work that we’ve been able to do so far, but prouder still of the relationships we’ve forged along the way. A common sentiment you’ll hear expressed by all of us is that we learn far more from providing education experiences to our community partners than we teach them.

“Being in community and on the land with community members offers the best growth opportunities we could ask for. Whether it is co-teaching clients of the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre with their incredible staff or co-hosting a wellness walk, Kananaskis hike, or snowshoe with the Multicultural Trail Network or Skipping Stone, our team is immeasurably grateful to connect with community,” concludes Jaclyn.

Our community connections are ever-more expansive and we are thankful to each and every partner who has collaborated with us in our journey so far.

Together, we’re doing our best to change the narrative on what it means to be an ‘outdoorsy’ person or a ‘conservationist.’ There are as many ways to be in nature as there are people — just as there are ways to be in relationship, and reciprocity, with the land.

We all belong in nature, and our team will continue advocating for a future in which it is safe for all to care for, and explore, Alberta’s land and water.



Amplifying the Work of the Original Stewards

JACLYN ANGOTTI | EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Mami (fish) have lived in North America for 450 million years. The iinnii (bison) have lived here for 15 million years. Imagine the memory, knowledge, and experience of the water and the land that these ancient species have to draw upon. By comparison, our mere 300,000 years as humans is nothing! We are so young — and yet, we think we know everything. But we must learn to draw from the experiences of our animal brothers and sisters.

This was the opening teaching of the 10th Annual Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association (KEPA) Summit by Elder Dr. Leroy Little Bear. If we don't want to go the way of the Neanderthals, Elder Little Bear continued, we must maintain the conditions that the Niitsítapi (the Blackfoot People) need to survive and thrive.

By learning from, partnering with, supporting, and advocating for Indigenous-led initiatives like KEPA, those of us here at CPAWS Southern Alberta collaboratively protect and conserve Southern Alberta's public lands and waters in a way that advances reconciliation.

Indigenous Peoples have been denied access to their lands through colonization, which has impacted their ability to carry out their ancestral responsibilities as land stewards.

In this challenging, and often turbulent, time of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (the triple planetary crisis), we must turn to the original caretakers of the land to lead us in a better direction. A critical goal for our Chapter moving forward is to ensure that land management in Alberta supports Indigenous leadership.

One way that we are working towards this goal is supporting the Blackfoot Confederacy's exploration of creating an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) in the Eastern Slopes. Undertaking watershed-scale planning as part of an IPCA project is engaging Blackfoot people, strengthening their relationships to their lands, elevating their rights, giving them voice, and adding to employment opportunities in meaningful, long-term ways. Moreover, an IPCA in Alberta's Eastern Slopes would ensure clean water, habitat, and protected wildlife.





As part of our commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous-led conservation, we aim to uplift Indigenous voices and raise awareness about Indigenous Knowledge and conservation efforts, such as KEPA and IPCAs.

Our Chapter also provides land-based education informed by Indigenous Knowledge through our education programs, online courses and lesson plans, and our Indigenous-Led Nature Walks. For instance, Api'soomaahka (Running Coyote, William Singer III) has gifted our education programs with Siksikai'powahsini (Blackfoot Language). Our team has included Siksikai'powahsini into our classroom and professional learning workshops and into a gorgeous set of cards we can use on the land, showcasing local flora, fauna, and ecosystem concepts. Api'soomaahka provided sound recordings for our team to be able to speak these words confidently with our participants.

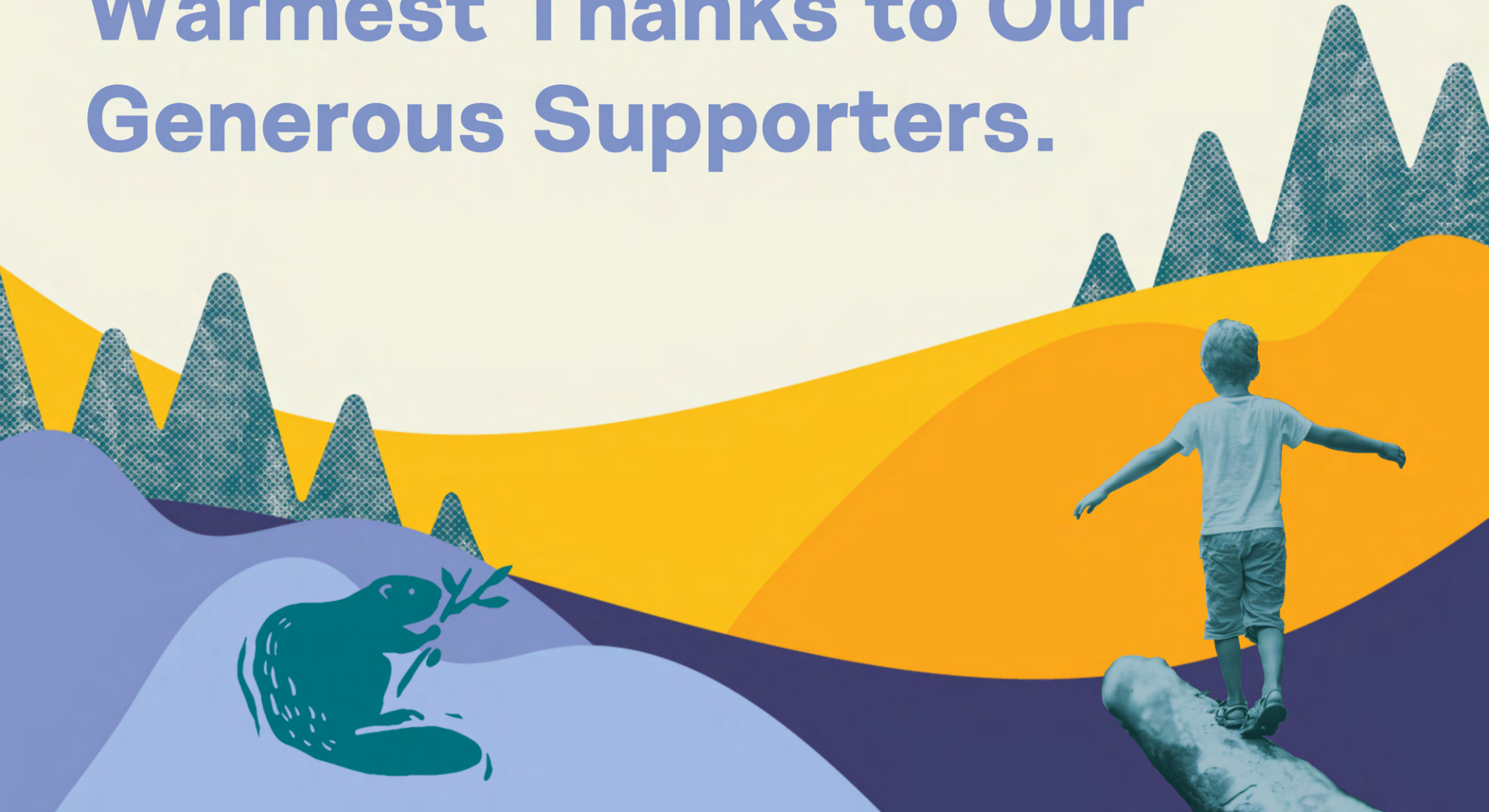
Online, you can also join CPAWS Southern Alberta in learning Niitsítapi sign language. We partnered with Elder Aas'paohk'koomiikwan (Shooting in The Air, Pablo Russell) to create an online course designed to celebrate and preserve Niitsítapi sign language. In this online video-based course, you can learn directly from Elder Aas'paohk'koomiikwan as he teaches Niitsítapi hand signs about animals, plants, celestial bodies, and more. You can find this course, and more resources, for free at www.WeAreChangeMakers.ca.

Personally, I am incredibly grateful for the teachings I have been gifted by the Niitsítapi. Nitsíniyi'taki (I am grateful); the teachings and kindness shown to me, and our entire team, encourage us to become better environmentalists; to redefine what it means to be an environmentalist; to advance reconciliation in our work; I am grateful that our Chapter supports KEPA and that members of our team were able to participate in and volunteer at the 10th Annual Summit.

The decadal summit, Aohkii Niita'piina (Water; the Maker of All), celebrated Aohkii and fostered reconciliation between cultures and with the land. At the close of the summit, Elder Ninna Piiksii (Chief Bird, Dr. Mike Bruised Head) announced that KEPA is working on a water treaty, a declaration for all people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, young and old, to speak up for the water.

Elder Ninna Piiksii encouraged us all to become true relatives of the water spirits. At CPAWS Southern Alberta, we look forward to signing onto the water treaty and walking with KEPA to protect the land, water, and all the beings that live here — our sacred duty as human beings.

Warmest Thanks to Our Generous Supporters.



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Left to right, back to front (opposite page): Josh, Kat, Katie, Carolyn, Tatiana, Lisa; Sheri, Jaclyn, Chloe, Vanessa.



Financial Statements:

Please find our 2023–2024 Audited Financial Statements on our website using the below QR code:



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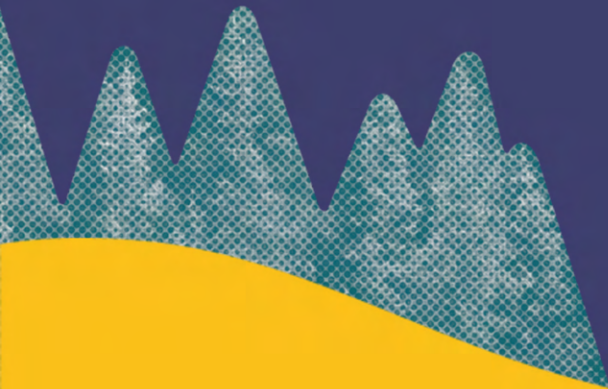
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