

State of the Castle 2018



CASTLE-CROWN
WILDERNESS
COALITION

Box 2621
Pincher Creek, Alberta
T0K 1W0

www.cwc.ab.ca
403-627-5059
office@ccwc.ab.ca

Keeping the Castle Wild

Since the inception of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition (CCWC) in 1989, the Board of Directors and all CCWC supporters have worked hard to ensure the Castle area remains wild.

CCWC's vision – **a world in which wilderness survives so that wildlands and wildlife may thrive and future generations can know their natural beauty and diversity** – remains integral to our purpose and keeps us focussed on advocacy and stewardship.

The annual *State of the Castle* report is a snapshot of CCWC's recent activities and observations in the Castle. There are both encouraging and discouraging remarks. CCWC is delighted with the recent designations of the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park, but we are acutely aware that it is our responsibility to ensure wilderness values are upheld under this new legislation.

The CCWC Board of Directors and all coalition members would like to thank the Government of Alberta for moving quickly to commit to “fully protect” the area. We thank the many volunteers and conservation partners who participated in numerous stakeholder meetings, consultations, interviews and

focus groups. During this period for input, the advocacy work intensified while we continued our on-the-ground work of clearing out trash, pulling weeds and reporting what we saw through the hiking program.

We also acknowledge the scientists, local residents, conservationists, authors and recreationists who have been telling the story of stewardship for the Castle wilderness for 50 years. This dedication and the goal of protection never wavered, even as abusive responses and threatening actions mounted. We kept our vision paramount and remained focused, patient and disciplined.



This was the first time my husband and I had been to the Castle area for hiking and we were not disappointed!

The area is lush and the trails are not heavily used. Our guide led us to Suicide Creek Tarn which was both challenging and rewarding.

Definitely an area we want to go back to!

- First-time hiker in the Castle Wildland Park

Notable Changes in 2018

2018 was the inaugural year of working under a different land use structure. The new parks have resulted in a lot of change, mostly for the better.

- **Enthusiasm for peace and quiet:** The elimination of OHV's south of Highway 774 has resulted in peace and quiet in the backcountry.
- **Cycling:** More bicycles and fat bikes, bringing visitors further into the backcountry.
- **Fewer random campers:** Areas that have been badly damaged from random camping are reclaiming themselves. Garbage at these sites is greatly reduced.



Improvements

- **Beaver Mines Lake:** The staging area for the Table Mountain trail has been improved.
- **Cross-country ski trails:** New benches and many trails have been brushed.
- **Minimum Security Camp:** A new information centre has been developed.
- **Syncline Brook:** A new parking lot is being built.

Disappointments

- **South Castle Road:** New opening to Grizzly Lake.
- **Snowmobiles:** It seems their use will continue to be allowed in the short term.
- **Trail information:** General lack of signage and educational info at trailheads.
- **Backcountry huts:** It appears that huts may be built in environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Equestrian camping:** Remains unregulated.



I have studied hummingbirds in the Westcastle valley for the past seven years. This year I saw wildlife I had never seen in previous years, such as American Martens. And many other species, including beavers and osprey, appeared much closer than I had ever seen them before – I suspect due to the decrease in noise from off-road motor vehicles, especially at the weekends.

We still saw plenty of people enjoying the area but I was delighted to see that most were hiking or cycling, which I had only rarely seen in previous years. The restrictions on camping in the southern half of the Westcastle valley dramatically reduced the litter we experienced. **I am grateful for the addition of staff (who were all very helpful), and to those responsible for this amazing transformation.**

- Post-doctoral researcher

Stewardship

Stewardship has always been an essential part of our work.

- 1** Report to all levels of government on any problems observed in the Castle.
- 2** Conduct weed eradication and reclamation programs.
- 3** Haul out garbage.
- 4** Introduce the public to the Castle through our hiking program.

Challenges

Logging Camps

Trash piles remain.

Invasive Weeds

- Beaver Mines Lake Public Recreation Area: Bone Yard area has Blueweed, Daisy and Mullein
- Beaver Mines Lake Road: Tree Plot site has Hawkweed and the fence is in bad condition
- Castle Falls Road at Shell's reclaimed well-site: Lamb's Ear
- Headwaters of South & West Castle: Hawkweed
- Lost Creek: Hawkweed
- Lynx Creek Road: Henbane
- University of Lethbridge Research Station: weedy area
- West Castle Road: Henbane, Blueweed and Scentsless Chamomile was spotted for the first time
- Yarrow Creek Shell Pipeline: Burdock and Bull Thistle

Cattle

While cattle were removed from the park by the end of September (about 10 days sooner than normal), there continues to be a significant problem with overgrazing and cattle in all the Public Recreation Areas.

With the paving of the West Castle Road, we have concerns that increased traffic speeds may also increase the likelihood of accidents involving cattle. A solution may be to either fence the area or remove cattle completely from this area.

Successes

Weed Pulls

- 86 volunteers and over 250 volunteer hours at 4 sites
- Number of fire pits removed and reclaimed: 17
- Pounds of garbage removed: 71
- Pounds of metal removed: 212
- Number of 40-pound bags of weeds removed or composted: 318

Junior Forest Rangers (Calgary Crew)

- Made the park safer for animals by removing 300 metres of old fence and over 800 lbs of wire and poles.

West Castle Wetland Ecological Reserve Weed Pull

- 11th annual event had 35 volunteers
- Only eight bags of weeds were collected (compared to 64 in the first year!)

Weed Observations

- Only one tansy plant was found out of four prior locations along West Castle Road.
- The Castle Mountain Resort knapweed site was improved – only a few plants were found.
- Mullein was greatly reduced in the West Castle and South Castle valleys and along the Syncline Castle Trails.
- Bull Thistle sites are estimated to be 95% cleaned up.
- Burdock reduced by 95% in Blind Canyon.
- Knapweed areas monitored three times this summer and are reduced.

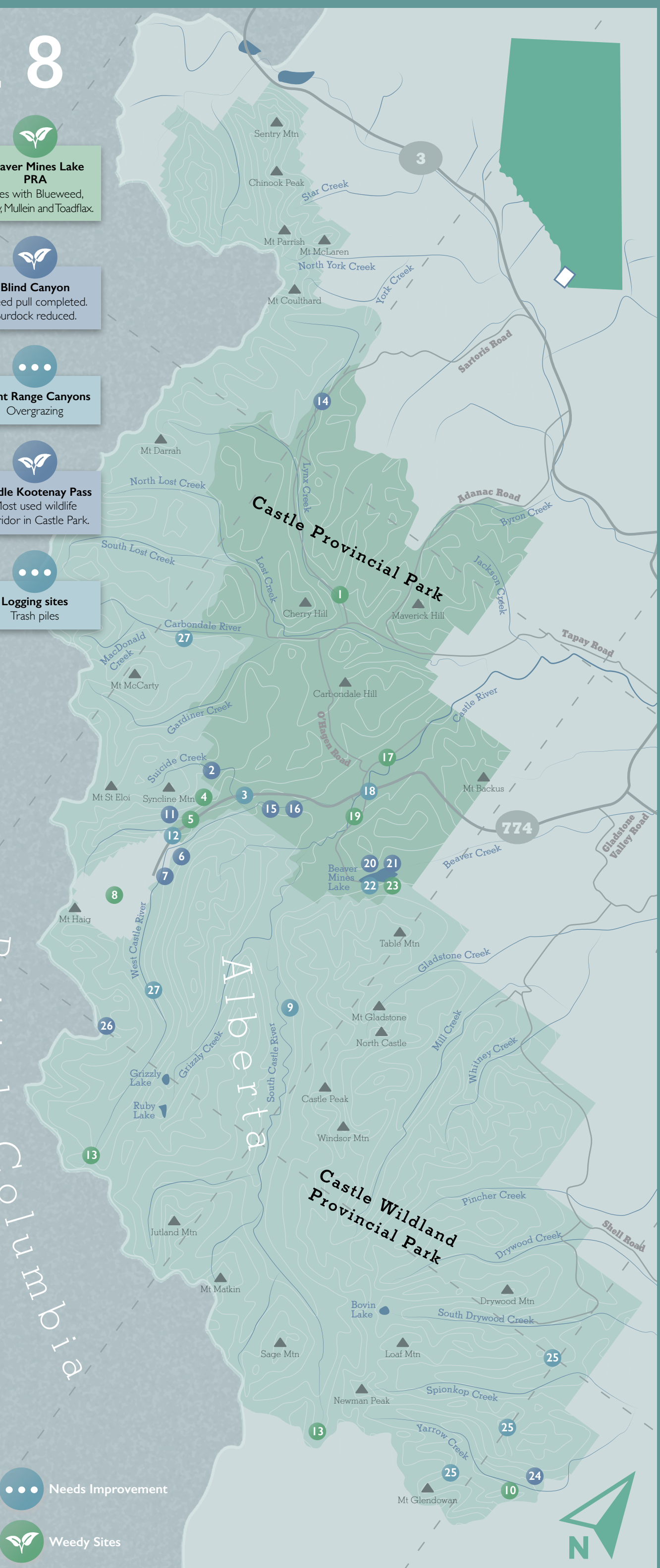
Hiking Program

- 15 unique hikes in both the Wildland and Provincial Parks.
- From 4 km to 25 km with elevation gains up to 1,000 metres.
- 137 hikers ranging in age from three to 83
- 9% of the hikers experienced the Castle for the first time!
- Nine hike leaders volunteered

State of the Castle 2018

- 1 **Lynx Creek Road**
Sites with Henbane.
- 2 **Syncline Brook**
A new parking lot built to accommodate hikers.
- 3 **West Castle Road**
With new paving, increased traffic speeds may increase the likelihood of accidents involving cattle.
- 4 **University of Lethbridge Research Station**
Weedy area.
- 5 **West Castle Road**
Sites with Henbane, Blueweed and Scentless Chamomile.
- 6 **West Castle Road**
With random camping sites closed, damaged areas are reclaiming themselves.
- 7 **West Castle Wetland Ecological Reserve**
Weed pull completed.
- 8 **Castle Mountain Resort**
Invasive plants need controlling.
- 9 **South Castle Road**
New opening from road to Grizzly Lake.
- 10 **Yarrow Creek Shell Pipeline**
Sites with Burdock and Bull Thistle.
- 11 **Minimum Security Camp**
New temporary information centre. Weed pull completed.
- 12 **Minimum Security Camp**
Cattle found.
- 13 **Headwaters**
Sites with Hawkweed.
- 14 **Sartoris Road**
Weed pull completed.
- 15 **Syncline Trails**
Mullein has been greatly reduced.
- 16 **Syncline Trails**
New benches have been added on the cross-country ski trails. Fat bikes are becoming popular in the winter.
- 17 **Castle Falls Road**
Sites with Lamb's Ear.
- 18 **Castle River Bridge PRA**
Cattle found.
- 19 **Beaver Mines Lake Road**
Sites with Hawkweed.
- 20 **Beaver Mines Lake**
Shoreline clean-up completed.
- 21 **Beaver Mines Lake**
The staging area for the Table Mountain trail has been improved with tables and landscaping. A trail to the outhouse at the boat launch has been developed.
- 22 **Beaver Mines Lake PRA**
Cattle found.
- 23 **Beaver Mines Lake PRA**
Sites with Blueweed, Daisy, Mullein and Toadflax.
- 24 **Blind Canyon**
Weed pull completed. Burdock reduced.
- 25 **Front Range Canyons**
Overgrazing
- 26 **Middle Kootenay Pass**
Most used wildlife corridor in Castle Park.
- 27 **Logging sites**
Trash piles

British Columbia Alberta



- Successes
- Weed Successes
- Needs Improvement
- Weedy Sites



Special Mention

CCWC acknowledges our dear friends and supporters who recently passed away: **Larry Frith (2016)**, **Norman Simmons (2016)**, **John Russell (2016)** and **Charlie Russell (2018)** were advocates who valued wilderness and contributed greatly to the protection of the Castle.

Wendy Ryan, our Summer Stewardship Program Coordinator, received the Alberta Wilderness Defenders Award in 2018. The award is dedicated to individuals who have inspired us with their love of Alberta's wild lands. Wendy follows other CCWC supporters as recipients including **Andy Russell (2003)**, **Peter Sherrington (2006)**, **Dave Sheppard (2008)**, **Judy Huntley** and **James Tweedie (2009)**, **Peter Lee (2010)** and **Gordon Petersen (2015)**.

Special thanks to our volunteer hike leaders: **Karla B.**, **Rob B.**, **Susan G.**, **Rob G.**, **Andrea H.**, **Kevin K.**, **Kris L.**, **Sabrina R.**, and **Wendy R.**

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