



March 16, 2017

Honourable Shannon Phillips
Minister of Environment and Parks
208 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
Canada T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Phillips

Re: Protection of the Castle Parks and Off Highway Vehicle Use

I am writing on behalf of the Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ACTWS), a 300 member organization representing wildlife professionals in the province, to express support for the Government of Alberta establishing the Castle Provincial and Wildland parks.

Because of their breadth, these parks include areas significant to the movement of wildlife along the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains as much as safeguarding the upper headwaters of the South Saskatchewan River watershed. The DRAFT Castle Management Plan is ambitious and forward thinking for recognizing the values and outcomes that have been noted nationally as well as internationally. Provided the Government of Alberta follows through on the plan, ACTWS is confident those values and outcomes will be safeguarded.

Reasonable and strong decisions have had to be made to set these lands aside. Notwithstanding the past access off-highway vehicle (OHV) users in both summer and winter have had to this area, the time has come to limit their access to these lands. The plan sets out a desire to increase the numbers of people accessing the area, many of these uses are not compatible with OHV traffic particularly in the backcountry. The projected use is dominated by pedestrian traffic.

While 12.4% of Alberta's land base is protected as parks/wilderness, only 4.2% is under provincial jurisdiction with the remaining 8.2% protected as National Park. By their very designation these protected landscapes draw more intensive pedestrian use than provincial lands not carrying a designation. Over 60% of Alberta's land base is public land accessible for a variety of use. It is our present position that OHV use can be better accommodated on these more extensive lands than to include them within the protected areas.

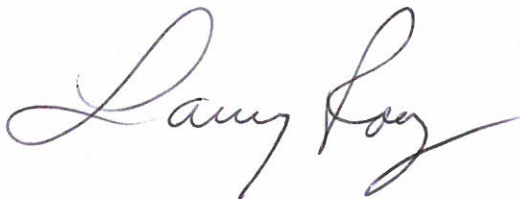
ALBERTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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OHV's introduce a level of noise, activity and soil hardening that is incompatible with the objectives of protected parks and wilderness. ACTWS believes there are instances where OHV use is acceptable and warranted. However, it is unacceptable to permit the continued access of OHV's to the lands contained within the Castle Provincial and Wildland parks including winter use. Key parameters set out for establishing the Castle Provincial and Wildland parks included: securement of natural landscapes, protecting the Castle watershed for its source water quality and quantity, safeguarding wildlife habitats and their functionality to support biodiversity and retaining a landscape whose size and quality would attract and sustain human use while retaining the aforementioned wilderness qualities.

In conclusion, ACTWS has taken the position, based on strong scientific evidence, that the impacts of OHVs will compromise the ecologically recognized parameters set out in the designation of the Castle Provincial and Wildland parks. Consequently, ACTWS recommends the government sustain its position to phase-out off-highway vehicles in the Castle protected areas, if not outright prohibit their use as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Laurence Roy

President, Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society