

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

What is the buzz about Alberta's bees?

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VOLUME 28 ISSUE 3

AUGUST 2017

# ACTWS President's Report Robin Gutsell

Another September rolls around and the kids are back in school and the trees in Alberta are already being touched by Autumn's brush. I am sure that many of you took holidays over the summer months and many others had opportunities to do what Wildlifers love to do – go outside and get your boots muddy – and sometimes even get paid to do it! What a wonderful profession! Even for those of us whose careers keep us tied to our computers for much of the time, we remain aware of the seasonal flow in the wild world around us.

Awareness is something that many of us strive to instill in others – awareness of the beauty of nature and of the fragility of some of the habitats in our beautiful province and the wild species that live in them. Our Executive Director Delinda Ryerson has been working on behalf of the ACTWS to form new connections between the Chapter and other organizations and initiatives that share some of those values. On September 15 in the Town of Devon, we will be part of Epcor Riverfest ([epcorriverfest.ca](http://epcorriverfest.ca)), a focus of which is the joy of discovering nature. You may have seen towns where large numbers of brightly decorated fish cutouts, painted by people in the community, are mounted along a fence. Well, there are plenty of non-fish wildlife species that depend on the water as well, and to celebrate them, the Chapter is partnering with this festival and introducing cutout shapes of water-dependent wildlife species. If you are nearby, come on out and paint a wildlife silhouette to help raise awareness of species that share our rivers.

Along the theme of reaching out to the public, I want to give a shout-out to the Alberta Community Bat Program [www.albertabats.ca](http://www.albertabats.ca). This organization's mission is about awareness as well. They are rapidly becoming the go-to source for information about bats (Want to build a bat house? Want to keep bats from roosting in your attic?) as well as a friendly portal for Citizen Scientists to get involved, monitor local bats, and report information that will help with bat conservation.

I would encourage you all to check out these initiatives and to also keep your eyes open for any local events or programs that the Chapter could or should participate in. If there is something in your area, let us know. We can all do Wildlife Work in the big world and also reach out within our own neighbourhoods to share that wild world that we all love so much.



**Art Rodgers**

**Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry**

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## Canadian Section Representative's Report

As summer draws to a close I hope you have all had a fantastic field season and some time off before getting back inside to do all those great things that ensure the future of wildlife in Canada. While you have been away, the folks at TWS headquarters have been continuing their tireless efforts to keep the organization rolling smoothly along. Ed Thompson took over as CEO and Executive Director of TWS on July 1 and has been working with staff to implement a revised organizational framework. He has also made arrangements for handling TWS finances that was necessitated by the tragic loss of Jane Jorgenson. Numerous other changes have been made to the roles and responsibilities of headquarters staff but most of you will not notice. Nonetheless, we all need to be grateful for the tremendous effort and dedication by the folks at headquarters in constantly adjusting to our needs. Thanks to all of them!

TWS Annual elections were held in July and Gary White (former Central Mountains and Plains Section Representative) was elected Vice-President. Bob Lanka (Central Mountains and Plains Section) and Paul Johansen (Northeast Section) were both re-elected to a second term on Council. I have worked with all of these folks in the past and I look forward to working with them again during my final year on Council. The newly-elected members of Council will take office during the Annual Conference, taking place September 23-27, 2017, at the Albuquerque Convention Center in New Mexico.

TWS has experienced 13 straight months of membership growth and pre-registration for the Annual Conference in Albuquerque is well over 1,100, with more than 1,800 expected to attend; so far students account for 51% of the registrations. The program for the annual conference features;

- 5 Plenary/Keynote Sessions
- 21 workshops and 3 field trips
- 28 Symposia and 51 Contributed Paper Sessions
- 19 Working Group meetings
- 40+ Networking Events and several new Student Events
- the ever-popular Quiz Bowl
- and of course, the TWS Canadian Section reception!!



Find out more at <http://www.twsconference.org/schedule/>.

In addition to finalizing plans for the annual conference, the folks at headquarters have been;

- making the past five years of Council minutes accessible in the members-only section of the TWS website

## Continued....

- working on communications with over 200 “Give Back” members to boost conversion to full memberships
  - planning an initial site visit to Cleveland to scout potential field trip options and meet with contractors in preparation for the 2018 conference
  - enhancing coverage of Canadian topics, improve TWP based on reader survey results and increase the impact of TWS journals
  - working with the Publications Subcommittee and JHUP to recruit an editor for the next edition of the Techniques Manual
  - renewing the contract with WSB Editor-in-Chief Dave Haukos
  - updating the policy brief series and posting to the TWS website
  - drafting a plan to contact certified individuals six months prior to the expiration of certification to help generate renewal of CWB certifications and upgrades of AWB certifications
- and, much more.



Long-toed salamanders—Species of Special Concern

Photo: Lisa Wilkinson

By  
Megan  
Evans

Photos by  
Megan  
Evans

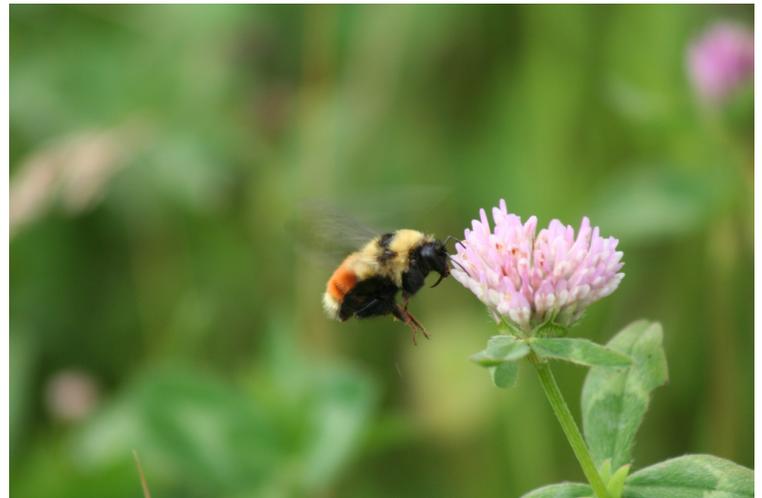
## What's the Buzz on Alberta's Native Bees

A total of 326 bee species have been identified in Alberta. Included in that diversity is roughly 30 species of big, fuzzy bumble bees, which are likely what comes to mind when you think of bees. The other 90% of bee species look very different. They tend to be smaller, less hairy, and are often mistaken for flies, wasps, or other insects. These bees are typically solitary, most of which excavate tunnels and/or nest cells in the soil where they lay eggs and leave behind pollen and nectar for their developing offspring, who they will never meet. Other solitary bees create nest cells in hollow stems, old beetle galleries, and decaying wood. The diversity of our native bees is incredible!

Of the 326 species in Alberta, 5 are considered non-native, including the familiar European honey bee. (There are no honey bees that are native to North America!) Because of the importance of honey bees for crop pollination and honey production, they receive a lot of attention, especially compared to wild bees. Over the past five or ten years there have been numerous news headlines suggesting that our bee populations are threatened and they need our help. And while I agree with that statement, it is often very misleading.

There are several variables that impact honey bee populations including impacts from pesticides, diseases, mites, and general hive management issues. The good thing about honey bees is that bee keepers become aware of sick or dying honey bee colonies in the spring when they open their hives. And in fact, they are required to report on this as well as the number of colonies and their location, to the Provincial Apiculturist under the *Alberta Bee Act* (isn't it incredible that there is such a piece of legislation devoted entirely to bees?!). In 2016, Alberta's honey bee losses were estimated to be roughly 15%, which is considered stable and acceptable.

But what about the 321 species of wild bees in Alberta? They face many of the same issues that honey bees are facing including impacts from pesticides, diseases and mites. Our wild bees are also dealing with habitat loss and in some cases competition for food resources and pathogen spillover from the revered honey bee (along with other managed bees). Unfortunately,



for our wild bees we can't simply open up their nests in the spring to check on their status. No one is required under the *Alberta Bee Act* to report on our wild bee species. In fact, a bee is defined under this legislation as the insect *Apis mellifera* - or the European honey bee. To be fair, it is legislation focused on the sustainability of apiculture (beekeeping) in Alberta. But imagine if the fictitious Alberta Bird Act defined a bird as the species *Gallus domesticus*, the common barnyard chicken.

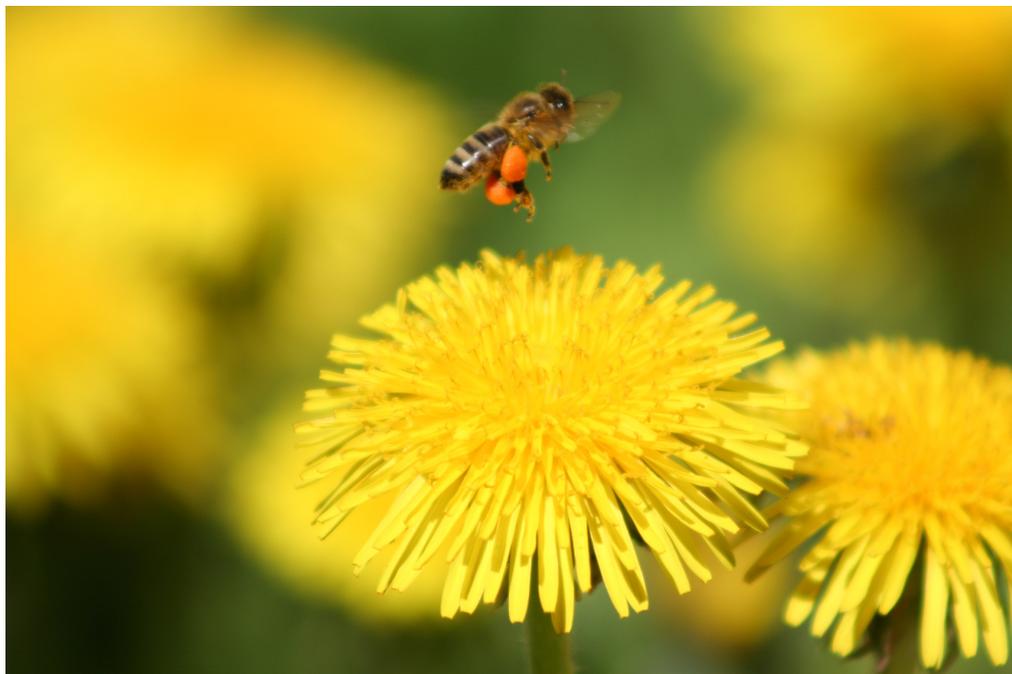
## Continued....

Furthermore, the number of honey bee colonies is increasing in Alberta, it has doubled since the 1980s. Honey bee and wild bees eat the same food, so do with increasing numbers of managed bees, do we need to be concerned about food resources for wild bees? To help answer this question, a recent paper calculated the amount of food required to sustain one honey bee colony over the growing season (Cane and Tepedino, Conservation Letters, 2017). This amount is equivalent to the amount of food that could sustain 100,000 native solitary bees. A substantial number. However, when this is broadened to a provincial scale, the number becomes much more significant. Bee keepers reported over 300,000 honey bee colonies in Alberta. Let's do the math: 100,000 multiplied by 300,000 equals 30 billion. That is, all of the honey bees in the province consumed (in 2016) the same amount of food that could have produced 30 billion native solitary bee progeny. This sounds drastic but does it matter? Is this something we should be worried about? And the answer is: it depends.

The issue of competition between managed bees and wild bees only matters in systems where food is limited. So in agricultural systems where crops are pollen limited because there are not enough wild bees to do the work (and managed bees are brought in) this is much less of an issue. However, in natural or semi-natural ecosystems research has consistently shown that food is the most important factor in limiting bee populations so we can assume that in these systems, food is usually limited.

What about urban beekeeping? Cities have been shown to be sources of wild bee diversity, particularly when they are surrounded by agricultural land. Diverse bee populations are most susceptible to the impacts from competition from managed bees. Some bee species forage on a single flower species (specialists), while other bee species forage on whatever is available (generalists). These specialist species who do not have the flexibility of finding alternative flower species for forage are likely the first and most greatly impacted by the effects of competition but all bees are susceptible to food shortages. Becoming an urban beekeeper is certainly not the 'green practice' that it is often presented as, and may in fact do much more harm than good, especially for those whose goal is to 'help the bees'.

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## What's the Buzz on Alberta's Native Bees

With regard to the status of our native bees, there are currently three species that have been listed by COSEWIC as endangered (*Bombus occidentalis* and *Bombus bohemicus*) and special concern (*Bombus terricola*) in Alberta. Additionally, the Canadian Wild Species Status, which lists the 321 species of wild bees, assigns a status to roughly 75% of the species. The remaining 25% have an undetermined status. These assessments are made from experts who compile data from researchers across Canada and not from any coordinated monitoring effort. Furthermore, the Alberta Wild Species Status announced earlier this year that it will no longer report status assessments for invertebrates. We need to do better.

What can you do?

If you're a beekeeper avoid placing colonies in areas with rich plant diversity. Including natural and semi-natural areas. A much better place for honey bees is in cropped areas. Beekeepers can also walk transects out from their hives to determine the spatial extent of any impacts on wild bees by simply counting the number of wild versus managed bees observed at different distances from the colony.

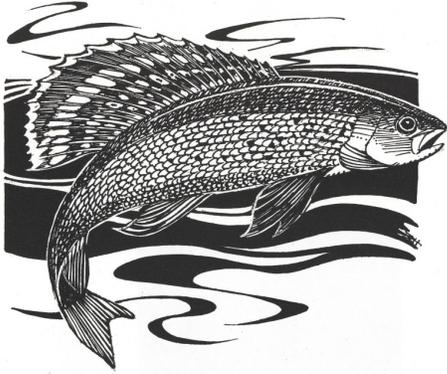
Plant lots of and a diversity of flowers that will bloom throughout the growing season! Plant native or non-native flowering plants, just not invasive species regulated by the *Alberta Weed Control Act* (see: <https://www.abinvasives.ca/fact-sheets>). This will provide an important food source for our bumble bee species that are active all season, and to other bee species that may be only active for four to six weeks.

Finally, the intention of this article is not to paint honey bees and other managed bees, nor their keepers, in a negative light. In fact, honey bees are incredibly important for crop pollination and honey production but in some circumstances, they may have a negative impact on our wild bees and they certainly get a disproportionate amount of attention and research resources. We need to do much more to help save ALL of our bees!

Citations

Cane, J.H. and V.J. Tepedino. 2017. Gauging the effect of honey bee pollen collection on native bee communities. *Conservation Letters*. 10(2) 205-210.

# Species of Special Concern



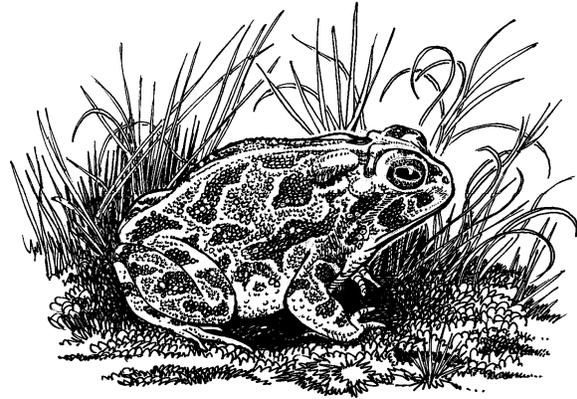
Arctic Grayling—Species of Special Concern

One of the species at risk categories in Alberta is ‘Species of Special Concern’. This applies to a species that is particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events. The fundamental strategy for these species is to prevent them from becoming Threatened. Conservation Management Plans are prepared for these species and can be found at the AEP website.

Check out the AEP website for the user-friendly Species at Risk Guide for more information about Alberta’s most vulnerable species



Barred Owl—Species of Special Concern



Great Plains Toad—Species of Special Concern

**Your article could be in this space ! Please contribute to upcoming issues of the Wildlifer**

In  
Memorium

By  
Gordon  
Court

## RICHARD W. FYFE

### 1932-2017

Richard Fyfe died on 17 June 2017 in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta after multiple battles with pneumonia; he was 85 years old. Richard enjoyed a long and very rich life, blessed with a loving family, an amazing and varied career, and a close association with his home community. Born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 1932, Richard spent his formative years on the prairies where he developed a fascination for bird life, especially raptors. In those early years he was employed by the Royal Saskatchewan Museum and, in his free time, was instrumental in helping to establish the Saskatchewan Falconry Association. He went on to study at the University of British Columbia and, ever ready for an adventure, eventually took post-graduate employment teaching elementary school in the remote Inuit community of Coral Harbour in the Canadian Arctic. With his wife Lorraine, the nurse for the community, Richard was to provide formal education to young Inuit men and women, many of whom belonged to families that were living in a settled community for the first time. Several of Richard's students went on to become prominent members of the Inuit First Nation, including a member of Legislative Assembly of Nunavut government formed in 1999.

Upon returning to southern Canada, Richard took employment with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) that would span over three decades, with service in Ontario, New Brunswick and, finally, Alberta. Richard worked on a variety birds and was particularly interested in the effects of biocides on raptor species. He was among the few Canadians to attend the Madison Peregrine Conference in 1965, an event that would connect him with like-minded colleagues, many of whom he would befriend for life. Richard would spearhead conservation efforts for the peregrine falcon in Canada and would eventually oversee the construction and operation of Canadian Wildlife Service Endangered Species Facility at Camp Wainwright, Alberta. Blessed with dedicated and talented staff, and by the mutual sharing of knowledge with primarily American counterparts, the Wainwright staff would begin producing enough young *anatum* peregrines to allow experimentation with re-introduction as early as 1975. Richard was to enjoy almost immediate success with this work when he documented the first successful breeding of a captive-raised peregrine falcon in the wild at Flett Lake, Alberta in July 1977 – a bird produced two years earlier at the Wainwright facility that had been fostered to a wild nest in 1975. That surely was a 'red letter' day for Richard and his colleagues in the Canadian program. Richard was fortunate enough to report on this event almost immediately, announcing it while presenting a paper at the symposium "Management Techniques for Preserving Endangered Birds" held at the University of Wisconsin in August 1977.

Richard Fyfe was rarely an idle man and, in addition to being a husband and a father of five children, he always had time for home, community, and non-government conservation organizations. He always had a garden going on his farm near Fort Saskatchewan, he passed on his considerable public speaking abilities through teaching Christopher Leadership Courses, and worked tirelessly with Dr. Mike Person and John Campbell Sr. to legalize falconry in Alberta and to establish the Alberta Falconry Association. Richard volunteered at the national level assisting the Wildlife Preservation Canada with the New Noahs program, something that would not only assist with the conservation of endangered species, but would train a new generation of Canadian biologists in hands-on wildlife conservation skills. Internationally, Richard would devote time to several organizations, including a

## Continued.....

term as Chair of the IUCN, ICBP

Specialist Group on Birds of Prey from 1975 to 1982. At the same time he continued to prepare and present important papers at major conferences on biodiversity conservation, expedited large projects for the Canadian Wildlife Service, like the Latin American pesticide residue monitoring project; all in addition to overseeing the *anatum* peregrine falcon breeding and re-introduction program. With the latter, Richard used his considerable charm and negotiating skills to work with several provincial wildlife departments in Canada to collaborate on re-introduction of the species in southern Canada; he was successful in ensuring that they were all pulling 'on the same rope'.

For all Richard's passion, industry, and talent, he was to fall victim, like others, to the specter that was 'Operation Falcon'. With one leaked memo, Richard, and others, would be implicated in investigations by wildlife enforcement agencies and the senior law enforcement agencies of both Canada and the United States that were launched to establish whether falcon breeding projects (government-funded or otherwise) were a front for the illegal trade in these raptors. Overnight, Richard and others, would never again enjoy the reputation they had enjoyed with many domestic and international colleagues. As history has shown, 'Operation Falcon' would eventually disintegrate into a wildlife law-enforcement fiasco and one that deserves as little mention here as possible. However, to put the record straight, an audit of the Canadian Wildlife Service Endangered Species Facility, overseen by Dr. Geoffrey Holroyd of the CWS, was to counter any and all ill-founded accusations of impropriety. Though fully exonerated, Richard felt alienated from the raptor research community and took early retirement in 1987.

Of resilient Saskatchewan stock, Richard would put the unfortunate final years of his government service behind him. In semi-retirement he took on consultation work, orchestrating efforts to mitigate the loss of raptor nesting habitat during the construction of the Oldman River Dam. He also conducted some of the earliest investigations of raptor electrocutions with power companies in Alberta and also produced a series of wildlife videos, with his wife Lorraine, for use by school children, something that featured his considerable talent behind the lens of a camera.

Richard's life's work was formally celebrated by Canada in 2000, when he was invested in the Order of Canada, our nation's highest civilian award, in recognition for his role in the restoration of the *anatum* peregrine falcon in Canada. Such a profile and remarkable career does, at times, seem difficult to ascribe to the soft-spoken 'Bud' from Saskatchewan, with the mischievous nature, sharp wit, and great slow smile. Richard was a quietly successful man who immersed himself in the world of raptors and mentored many to the same – he is owed a great debt of gratitude. During his funeral, the words of eulogy for Richard would end with a simple statement that he would enjoy, and one that seems perfectly suitable for remembering him:



Richard Fyfe with "Lady", his last falconry bird. (Photo by Gordon Court).

Richard Fyfe – he was a gentleman who knew and loved the falcons.

By  
Matthew  
Pyper

## ACTWS Conservation Committee Update – Trout, Caribou, OHV's and what's all the fuss about

Ken Crutchfield, Kirby Smith, Kristie Derkson, Larry Roy, Lorne Fitch, Mark Boyce, Delinda Ryerson, Matthew Pyper

The ACTWS Conservation Committee is focusing our attention on four key themes throughout the course of 2017: trout conservation, OHV use on public lands, woodland caribou recovery planning, and contributing to the current dialogue around ecosystem-based management in Alberta. Here's what we have been up to on each of these files.

### **Ecosystem-based Management – what's all the fuss about?**

The Healthy Landscapes program at fRI Research is conducting four dialogue sessions throughout Alberta on the topic of forest and land management. The intent is to hear what is working, what is not, and what the future could look like for the concept of ecosystem-based management in Alberta. The ACTWS Conservation Committee sees this as a unique and important opportunity to contribute to have the voices and experience of our membership heard.

So why is this so important and why should you participate? Our Committee sees this as a chance to collate the experiences and observations of our membership and for the ACTWS and our members to have a potential influence on modern approaches to forest and land management in a confidential way. More specifically, we see this as an invitation to have an open conversation amongst foresters, biologists, ecologists and a range of other stakeholders.

To advance the conversation, we will soon be reaching out to you with a brief 10 question survey to capture your experiences, observations and perspectives on the role of Ecosystem-based Management in Alberta. We will synthesize responses into a position statement on behalf of the ACTWS for submission to the coordinators of the dialogue sessions.

For those of you involved in wildlife or habitat management in forested areas of Alberta, we strongly encourage you to complete this survey when it arrives and help us form a robust position statement on behalf of the ACTWS.

You can learn more about the sessions here: <https://friresearch.ca/sites/default/files/HL-DialogueFlyer-17-04-26.pdf>

Athabasca rainbow  
trout  
*Threatened*



**Trout, Caribou and OHVs: Monitoring key files, taking action**

This spring the ACTWS Conservation Committee elected to raise the profile of trout conservation, recovery efforts and restoration through our advocacy efforts. We were recently made aware that the province has now appointed coordinators for both bull trout and cutthroat trout. We plan to submit a request for an update on recovery efforts and restoration activities this fall once the coordinators have had a chance to settle into their new roles.

With recovery planning efforts currently under way in Alberta for woodland caribou, we are closely monitoring activity and evaluating opportunities for the ACTWS to have our voice heard. One of our members is reviewing the draft boreal caribou range plan that was recently released by the federal government. We are in discussion about submitting a response on behalf of the ACTWS.

On the OHV front, our committee discussed submitting a letter to the provincial government outlining current issues related to OHVs and requesting immediate action on this file. We are aware that a report was recently compiled on this topic by the provincial government and was submitted to the Minister. We plan to submit a letter on behalf of the ACTWS once we know the report has been received and reviewed.

**Other news and updates**

Ken Crutchfield’s position as an NGO representative on the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance Board has been renewed, and he’s also received the nod to continue in his role as Vice President for the Alliance. He continues to keep the ACTWS Conservation Committee up to date on files associated with the North Saskatchewan Watershed, in particular recent work to complete State of the Watershed reports for Isle Lake and Lac Ste Anne.

ALMS workshop early-bird registration  
closes September 1<sup>st</sup>!  
Register by visiting:  
[www.alms.ca/2017-workshop](http://www.alms.ca/2017-workshop)

Lac La Biche County  
welcoming by nature.

Hutchinson  
Environmental Sciences Ltd.

HCL

EPCOR

New wildlife  
research  
permit  
application

## Bits and Bites

AEP has upgraded our wildlife research permit and collection licence application system to go online! It is an enhancement to the existing Alberta Parks system for their research and collection permits, and will look similar, but with wildlife-specific content. One can apply for one or the other or, if you are doing wildlife work in a park, you can apply for both in one application. Wildlife researchers are able to find information and access the system through our web site: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-research-collection/>. This change should make the application, amendment, renewal and reporting processes much easier for both permit holders and permit issuers.

REMEMBER - Do not underestimate the value of your input into wildlife conservation matters. Take a stand and engage in public forums. Introduce yourself to your local elected officials and offer your insight. Professionalism is not confined to working hours. ~ Ken Crutchfield



### The Ripple Affect—a new ATCWS partnership

**The EPCOR RiverFest** is a celebration of our North Saskatchewan River and the River Valley parks system. ACTWS has partnered with the town of Devon to help with the “Ripple Affect” component: providing wildlife activities and information to explain the importance of rivers and riparian habitats to a variety of species (Sept 15, 4-8pm). Each day of the 3 day festival features a different variety of outdoor activities all geared up to help get you active in our river valley and on the North Saskatchewan River. The kickoff to the event happens in Devon on September 15 from 4-8pm in Voyageur Park. Highlights of the event include the West Coast Lumberjack Show, new mountain bike trails opening, The Ripple Affect project, and various exhibitors from the region. Register for the flotilla launching from the boat launch in Voyageur Park around the bend to the Devon Lion’s Campground and grab something to eat from one of the food trucks on site! The fall is a beautiful time to experience the river valley both on and off the water.

Devon in  
September



## *In Memorium*

# Dr George Mitchell

## 1926-2017

There are many accolades that can be applied to George Mitchell, not the least of which is his unique position as the first provincial Game Biologist hired by the Government of Alberta.

In his own words, Dr Mitchell spent his early years on the Sunshine Coast of BC swimming, hiking, hunting, catching saltwater fish, and participating in a range of wildlife and outdoor activities. He was encouraged by a high school science teacher to consider biology and environment as areas worthy of greater interest. He took the advice with enthusiasm (as he did with so many things) and followed a path that took him through a BSc (1950) and MSc (1952) from UBC. On graduating, he caught the eye of the Government of Alberta and was hired as Alberta's first Game Biologist, arriving in Edmonton in May 1952.

Again in his own words, 1952 was 'a banner year for disease'. Outbreaks of tularaemia in beaver, foot and mouth in cattle, rabies in wild canids, and a polio outbreak in people meant that the new provincial game biologist became very busy very quickly. The disease issues were additive to his assigned duties of documenting numbers, distribution, and habitat use of game species across Alberta in order to inform harvest dates, seasons, and bag limits. Some help arrived in 1953 in the form of the willing hands of a young grad student from Rocky Mountain House (young John Stelfox) and in 1954 Bob Webb signed on as the second Game Biologist. Stelfox later signed on as the third provincial Game Biologist in 1955. Dr Mitchell's original office was a small workbench and stool in the Zoology Department at UofA. Here, among others, George received wisdom and guidance from Dr William Rowan, chairman of the department and already an established international leader in wildlife biology and research.

Dr Mitchell secured a two-year leave of absence to attend Washington State University (1960-62) and completed a PhD with ground-breaking research on pronghorn that culminated in a seminal book that remains essential reading for anyone working or wondering about pronghorn biology. On return to Alberta he was elevated to the position of Chief Wildlife Biologist in charge of planning, developing, and regulating wildlife research, management, and policies; supervising 8 capable wildlife biologists (including ACTWS charter member, Bill Wishart), and carrying out a myriad of tasks and programs associated with the game unit of the relatively new Fish and Wildlife Division established in 1959.

Dr Mitchell resigned from F&W in 1966 to become an Associate Professor in Biology at the University of Saskatchewan in Regina. Throughout his career, George also was a constant supporter and member of TWS and was bestowed the TWS Distinguished Service Award in 2014. His background firmly entrenched in his experiences in Alberta served him well in teaching and mentoring all those who listened, formally and informally. As with so many of those early wildlifers, Dr Mitchell left an indelible impact on our profession.

m.j. pybus

[Much of the material above is garnered from Chapter 2 in *Fish Fur and Feathers* (2005), a 100 yr overview of fish and wildlife conservation in Alberta]

## Fish and Wildlife Bombardier Snow Bus

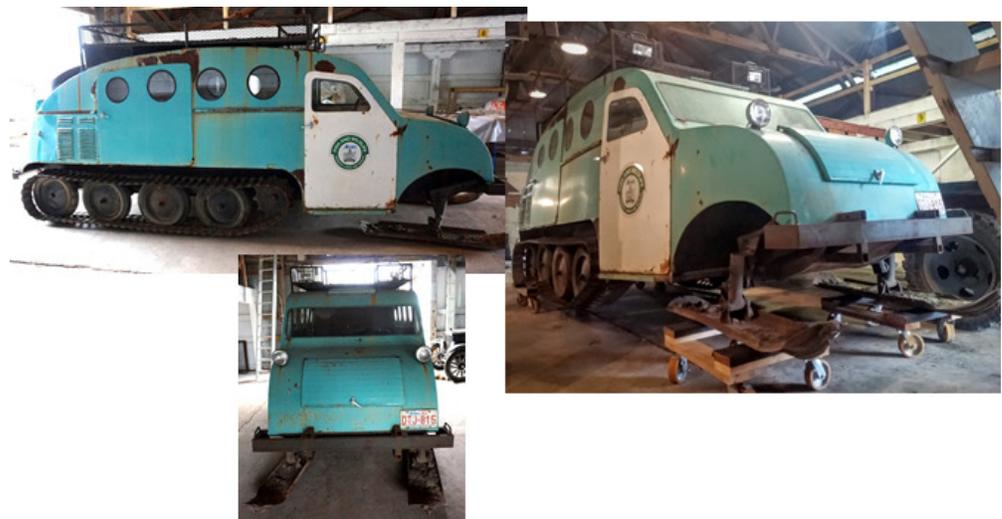
*Wikipedia, April 2017- Snow Coach:*

*An early example of a snow coach was the Snow Bus, built by Bombardier in Canada. It was equipped with front skis and rear tracks and typically could seat 12 passengers. Alternatively, the front skis could be removed and replaced with front wheels. The Bombardier Snow Bus was used as a school bus, for mail delivery and as emergency vehicles, but was also used for tours and transportation in snowbound areas.*

*The Bombardier Snow Bus has been described as the ultimate Canadian machine. These utility vehicles have been around a long long time (circa early 1950s) and perhaps their persistence in part reflects their reliability and durability. These trusted machines, known as bombis by those who used them, were used by Fish and Wildlife officers in northern regions to support remote winter patrols, commercial fishing checks, trapline patrols, and apparently some not-so-official uses.*

*The following information was provided by various Alberta officers who had the opportunity to use and abuse buses in the Fish and Wildlife fleet spanning a period from the early 1960s until now. One snow bus, Unit WBF0143, currently is undergoing restoration for eventual display in the Fort McMurray Heritage Museum. An enquiry aimed at verifying appropriate colours and door decals blossomed into a series of brief memories and escapades that together breathe new life into the old snow buses.*

*m.j. Pybus*



These photos were taken in 2016 as WBF0143 was readied for restoration in Ft McMurray

## Snow Bus continued....

### **Jack Williams**

My name is Jack Williams. F&W officer Joe Williams was my father. I grew up in the culture and knew many of the early officers well. The picture is of Joe and the bombardier on Lac La Biche in 1964. It was dark blue and had a 6 cylinder industrial Chrysler engine. It was used a lot and was kept in the garage attached to the office on the South side of Main Street.

My Dad is not holding a coyote, it's a "bluebill" (worth \$5 in the round ).

### **Wayne Brown**

I remember a dark blue Bombardier in the Cold Lake Warehouse in 1967 when I was there. It looked "shiny new" to me and Chuck Scott may have used it once or twice - - I never rode in it though. Reading the other comments, I wonder if there may have been several such units sprinkled around the north districts with large lakes [[ Indeed, there were]].

### **Jim Nichols Badge 34, 1**

I believe the machine currently in Ft McMurray is a 1965 Bombardier that I used for patrol work in Fort Chip from 1968 to 1970. It was blue in Color and did not have any door decals on it as we didn't mark our vehicles at that time. It had a Chrysler 318 motor in it and was serviced just like any other truck of that time period. Every 3000 miles as I recall. It was a great vehicle and I used it to patrol as far as Uranium City from Fort Chip on a joint patrol with the RCMP. The RCMP bombi broke a ski but this one made the trip unscathed. It took us three days to make the trip across Lake Athabasca. I also made several trips down the Athabasca River to check trappers and collect fur tax at Pelton's Store at the Embarras Portage. Unfortunately I don't have any photos.

This unit was different from the others in service at the time because it was a wide gauge and the others were narrow gauge. No idea when it was removed from service, but I believe it was reconditioned after I used it. Ron Boyer our head mechanic at the time would know a lot more of the history or perhaps Ian McInnis.

### **Dennis Giggs Badge 41**

Dennis Weisser and I used the Blue machine Jim Nichols was referring to few times on Lake Athabasca. Spent the night on the lake one time when we threw a track. Ended up with a couple of frost bitten toes, nothing serious.

### **Dave Robertson Badge 66**

This photo was taken in 1974 on Lesser Slave Lake just east of Canyon Creek. Dog Island is in the background. This bombardier was built in the 1950s, I believe 1952 but not quite sure. I believe it had a 6 cylinder Chrysler engine and a three on the tree transmission. This Unit was a narrow gauge and was stationed at Slave Lake District. It was still in use when I left in 1975. Fish and Wildlife vehicle unit colours didn't come in until the late 1970s [[1980s]] so I have no knowledge if this unit was ever painted.



**Lesser  
Slave Lake 1974**



## Snow Bus continued....

### ***Doug Nothstein Badge 90***

Ron Black and I used the machine Dave Robertson referred to at Slave Lake District in 1974. There had been a fire inside the machine that happened when Ron Hanson and Dennis Weisser used it during the fall (perhaps moose hunting ?!). In December 1975 Ron [Black], Murray Bates, and I used the machine on the Peerless Lake Fishery and unfortunately that was Ron's last patrol – he had a sudden heart attack and passed away on December 14.

In March 1977 Gerry Labrie and I were on Utikuma Lake checking Commercial Fishermen when the engine quit. Got pulled off by a larger machine owned by Cadrones (a local commercial fishing outfit).

### ***Murray Bates Badge 76***

I used the old F/W 'Bombardier' in the Slave Lake detachment in the '70s. During this time it was blue (an original factory color). It was also quite run down with most of the factory parts needing an upgrade. It had a six cylinder motor, three speed manual transmission, and two skis for the front in winter, or two interchangeable wheels for use on harder surfaces. We used it mostly (entirely) for commercial fisheries supervision on lakes in the Slave Lake detachment in the 1970s. These included, but would not be limited to: Lesser Slave Lake, Burnt Lake (most people don't even know where this lake is (some 40 miles S.W. of Wood Buffalo Park). We also took it to the Wabascas, Sandy, Peerless, Graham, Equisetum, Utikuma, Nipisi, Macmillan (Lily - local name), Brintnell, Muskwa, Cranberry, Chip, and Cranberry lakes. Of course most if not all of these lakes had a commercial fishery, although on some we used it for sport fishing or hunting patrols. One of its last uses at Slave Lake was on 14 December 1975. We were loading the snow bus onto the trailer when Ron Black had a massive heart attack. Officer Nothstein and I used a snowmobile skimmer to move Officer Black to the warmth of a native's cabin to wait for a medi-vac plane on skis; however, our best efforts of CPR and wilderness first aid were not successful. He was 39.

This machine was in terrible condition and after the incident in December '75, it was removed to Peace River to be repaired, painted with a high visibility 'bright' paint job, and refurbished. The Slave Lake sub-division was the largest, having no less than 18 lakes which were open most years to various types of commercial fishing. Unfortunately, I was transferred before the machine made it back to Slave Lake, where the heaviest demand for its use was, and possibly still is.

### ***Kim McAdam Badge 149***

Not sure if it is the same machine or not, but Dennis Weisser and I used it or one just like it on Lake Athabasca a few times in the mid 1980s. I think he put it to good use!

## continued.....

### **Gerry Labrie Badge 29**

I started my career in 1964 as a forest officer as I was too young to be a Fish and Wildlife officer. I transferred to F&W in 1967 and was posted to Lac La Biche. There was a dark blue snow bus there with new narrow gauge skis and sprockets. This was Unit # GL-670. In February '68 I used it for fisheries patrols on Beaver Lake. By end of February we replaced the skis with wheels, an annual end of season event.

In 1976 when I was stationed in Manning the division acquired a brand new yellow Bombardier snowmobile (bus). This machine was brand new and powered by an industrial Chrysler 318 V8 Engine. It was a wide track machine with metal skis. It was placed in the Peace River Region as a pool vehicle to be used by the districts which had commercial fisheries to supervise, namely High Prairie, High Level, and Slave Lake. As I had some prior experience with these machines, in March 1976 I hauled the machine from Peace River to Manning, High Level, and on to Bistcho Lake for the maiden patrol of the new bus. I assisted Al Farrants with the commercial fishery. Farrants and I actually slept in the machine in -40 degree weather. Things were pretty frosty in the mornings.

I was transferred to Slave Lake in July 1976 and learned that we had an older narrow gauge Bombardier [[as described by Dave Robertson]] on inventory which was also used mainly for commercial fishery supervision. This machine was dark blue in colour and was powered by a 6 cylinder Chrysler engine. This old machine was used on Slave Lake but was also used on Peerless Lake and Utikuma Lake.

It was used sparingly as it had seen better days. We had the good fortune of being able to access the Forestry mechanic, Don Willier to help us keep the old girl running. We installed a circulating propane heater to help with starting on the cold days. I once heard that the fire, previously mentioned [[by Doug Nothstein]], happened when someone tried to warm the engine with a torch in order to get it started – it always was hard to start these buses in cold weather. And they often frosted up on the inside so when they did finally warm up, there was a steady rain as the frost melted. The old bombi was still at Slave Lake in 1980 but it was very temperamental.

In the winter of 1977 we had the use of the new pool vehicle from Peace River for the fishery on Utikuma Lake. I am attaching a photo of Officer Murray Bates holding a 35 lb. pike caught in a net on Utikuma Lake by Robert Herroux a commercial fisherman at Faust. I bought that fish and mounted it myself. It hung in the office in Slave Lake until I left the Dept. in June of 1980.

I believe there was a Bombardier in the St. Paul region also that was used on Lac La Biche and many of the other lakes in that region.



*Officer Murray Bates and the NEW bombardier on Utikuma Lake, winter 1977*

## Snow Bus continued....

**Ian Tarr    Badge 62**

To put in another two-bits on the saga, from 1985-1990 I made many trips to Ft. Chip both when we had an officer there but mostly when it was vacant, we used the bombardier 5-6 times. It had a set of wheels that changed out with the skis. I think it was the winter of 1988 we found budget money (thanks to Dennis Giggs) to repair and modify it. We had the unit low-boyed over the ice road to Ron [Boyer] & Ian [McInnis] at the warehouse. The modifications I recall discussing with Ian, were regular maintenance & engine repair, paint in Fish & Wildlife Enforcement green & white, modify the seats to make fold down beds, install a kerosene heater, extra fuel tanks carried on the roof rack, and removable rack on front and rear to carry two Elans. The premise for this was to allow for trapline patrols off Lake Athabasca---or maybe it was for "fish sampling" in isolated areas???

I also recall when it was low-boyed out that National Parks in Chip was getting new units to replace their bombardiers and donated all their spare parts to us.

Went thru my photos but couldn't find any of the re-done unit. I did find one of Jim Songhurst and myself in front of the new Ft. Chip hotel just before we left on patrol to Old Fort Point on 20 January 1988.

***Officers Jim Songhurst and Ian Tarr, Ft Chip,  
Jan 1988***



**Doug Slatnik    Badge 59**

In the late eighties Len Butler and I brought this machine [[the one currently in the Ft McM museum]] out from Ft Chip on the winter road using the flat deck truck from Ron Boyer's shop. Len had also procured an almost identical machine from Wood Buffalo National Park. The park machine was robbed of parts for our machine. After Len left, I am not sure if anyone ever used the unit. I know several commercial fishermen in Ft Chip would have loved to have it!

**Larry Bergeron    Badge 175**

After Len [Butler] departed Ft Chip. I used the bombi for a few trips out to Jack Fish cabin and did some joint patrols with the Wood Buffalo wardens along the north shore. It ran great and afforded lots of memories.

## continued.....

**Don English Badge 141**

[photo only]

**Officer Don English, Fort Chip late 1980s, Unit WBF0143**



**J Ron Boyer**

Yes we did various repairs and modifications on a number of bombardier snow track machines over the years in the F&W shops. Most repairs involved tracks, wheels, and installation of solid tires (no air), as well as engine tune-ups, transmission and drive line repairs, and sometimes an engine replacement. We also did body repairs and installed auxiliary heaters, as the heaters that were installed at the factory did not have enough output to keep our officers warm on long extended trips. Work was done on both the narrow and wide gauge machines. Most of these machines were located at Fort Chip, Cold Lake, Slave Lake, Lac La Biche, and I also think there was one in the Peace River country at one time. [[stories herein from each of these locations]]

All the best to all our former F&W employees, I always enjoyed working with them.

**Trevor Sellin Badge 254**

I believe the initial thought of restoring Unit WBF0143 came from the Officers in Fort McMurray at the time. Local officers repeatedly gave public presentations at Heritage Park and during passing conversations with the museum folks the suggestion came up about restoring the old snow bus. Among other things, we thought it would be great to use as an item in the Santa Claus parade – since it had the skis and all. But we knew it needed to be spruced up before it could ever go back in front of the public.

Between 2006-2008 I was approached by Ft McMurray Heritage Park on a restoration initiative. They had personnel on hand that were interested in refurbishing the old F&W bombardier snow bus and putting it on display. They had a look at it and confirmed they would accept it. We had it transported to the park where it sat ever since. A loan agreement was signed and not much was done with it after that. [[... until 2016]]

**Danny Boyco Badge 151**

As of January 2017, the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch has three bombardiers on current inventory – the one at Ft. McMurray and two in the Northwest Region. These machines were used primarily by Fish and Wildlife officers to monitor commercial fisheries; however, I have little doubt they were used for other things from time to time. The green and white colour scheme belongs to the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch (then called Enforcement-Field Services) and was in use for at least 20 years. I believe the unique greenish colour pantone was owned by the Branch. You may recall that all of our marked patrol units were this colour. At one time, only the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch used the door decal (we were the only branch in the department that used law enforcement markings on our vehicles). It has, since then, been adopted in various forms by other branches in Environment and Parks.

## Snow Bus continued....

*The useful bombis also provided valuable service to forestry and biological staff in Alberta... and in other provinces. They were no doubt put to good use all across the country. These two stories provide additional perspective on these versatile iconic Canadian machines.*

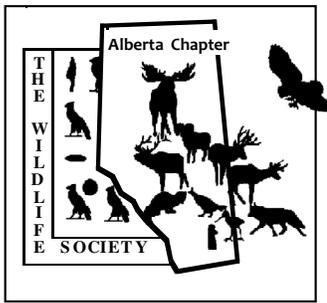
**Rob Galon** [[ AFS – Forestry]]

We have three yellow and brown tracked bombis at the Forestry Museum in Hinton. Two run, one is suspect. All have damage and need parts. No idea on maintenance. I used them timber cruising, loved them when they worked, cursed them when they left me stranded, and always came home with a lump on my forehead, or bruised knees and a sore rear end. To my recollection, phase out started in the late eighties when elans, and twin tracks were becoming more prevalent. I used a bombi until early 1994, but parts and keeping them running was a challenge.

**Hugh Wollis** *F&W Biologist, retired*

Lest you think officers were the only ones who got to drive around in cool bombardiers back before ATVs were (sadly) invented. We used this one for work on muskegs in the northern Interlake region of Manitoba. The year was 1968, my first summer working in wildlife, after thankfully extricating myself from the fisheries work I had done the previous year. The long pole I was carrying was used to push into the muskeg through the veg into the water beneath, which scared the pants off me.





## **Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society**

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on Facebook**

## **Upcoming Events**

**Riverfest** will be held in Devon, beginning Sept 15, 4-8 pm

**24th Annual Conference of the Wildlife Society** will be held in Albuquerque, New Mexico on September 23-27, 2017.

**2nd International Wolf and Carnivore Conference** will be held in Thompson, Manitoba on Oct 18-19, 2017

**ACTWS Annual Meeting** will be held in Lethbridge, on March 9-11, 2018

**North American Congress for Conservation Biology** will be held in Toronto, Ontario on July 21-26, 2018

## **Footnotes** from the Editor



Interested in helping your chapter participate in important outreach events? Contact Delinda Ryerson <[execdirector@actws.ca](mailto:execdirector@actws.ca)>

The first event is Riverfest, in Devon, on September 15 from 4-8pm. Come out and share your knowledge and passion for wildlife!