October 2026

Dear Karsten,
It's coming up on two years since you died. I don't need a calendar to know this: the sights and smells of fall trip memories, time eddies like a river, and it feels like yesterday that I had to let you go. It's hard and sad, but a good thing has inspired me to write to you for the first time.

An award was set up in your honour through the Alberta chapter of The Wildlife Society. The award description is this: The Karsten Heuer conservation award will go to an early career biologist showing commitment to large landscape conservation, restoration and/or science communication. Successful candidates will be awarded $20,000 and it will be open ended as to what they do with the money. You always valued time over money and that's what this award buys someone-time.

What do potential applicants need to know about you and what this award could mean for them?

I think of a few major milestones where you contributed significantly to conservation: There was the Bow Valley Study and corridor restoration in the early 90's, the Yellowstone to Yukon Hike, our five-month journey across the arctic 'Being Caribou', and the Banff Bison reintroduction. It was biological work, but woven throughout was the notion of activism. Harvey Locke captured this so well in his speech at your memorial.

> *Karsten lived life as a verb: dynamic, changing, never static, thrumming. Activism is a recognition of that life force. It's a recognition that you participate in the life of your community and you participate in the life of all our relations. That we work for what we know that we love and what matters to us.*

You were an activist who also thought deeply about how to inspire and activate others about nature through your books. And you didn't just write about it, you were also willing to step up and take the lead. Dillon Watt spoke about you as a leader of the Banff Bison reintroduction at your memorial. He described your style as both bold and quietly calm. You were willing to take risks, you expected failures and you retained your sense of humour.

Another one of your great qualities was openness. I think back on 'Being Caribou' and how we didn't know what would make people care about protecting the caribou calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. When we planned to spend five months following the herd across the arctic, we could never have imagined we would experience 'thrumming' and see the future in our dreams.

I know you would also be open to new ways of storytelling, and you wouldn't necessarily want someone to write a book or make a film. There are things we've never thought of that will keep people engaged and inspired. That possibility is something that makes this award exciting.

You were always good at taking time to retreat and be renewed by spending time outside. Fall was your favourite time of year and you would have loved this clear blue sky day with the colours at their peak. I miss you every day, but today it feels good to be working on this. For the next five years, let's see who comes forward. From the ramblings of this letter, it looks as if this award is water for a seed that can be nurtured by creativity, joy, effort, leadership and commitment.

Rest in peace always, Karsten.
Love,
Leanne