



## Alberta Government's Castle 'special place' in southwestern Alberta no longer secure for grizzly bears

### New study finds that grizzly bear habitat security areas shrinking

EDMONTON, March 9, 2011 – A new satellite study in the biologically rich public lands of the Castle wildland (officially the Castle Special Management Area) in the Rocky Mountains of southwestern Alberta found more than 1,200 km of roads and trails. The Castle is the largest part of the province's southernmost Core Grizzly Bear Conservation Area for its Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

The Castle wildland is one of Alberta's most ecologically important areas. It receives more precipitation than any other comparably sized area in Alberta. Encompassing less than 4% of the total land area of the Oldman River Basin, it supplies an exceptional 30% of the annual water flow for the entire Basin. The basin encompasses much of southern Alberta and extends into northern Montana; consisting of 70 municipalities in Alberta, including the City of Lethbridge. Included among more than 250 rare plant, mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish and insect species in the area are westslope cutthroat trout and grizzly bear, both officially designated by the Alberta Government as Threatened.

Under its Special Places program, the Alberta Government announced the establishment of the Castle Special Management Area in 1998 and described the announcement as a "Milestone reached in preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage." As part of that protected area decision, the 1992 Access Management Plan became the Castle Special Management Area Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) regulations.

In October 2007, the Premier of Alberta and the Governor of Montana signed a *Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between the Government of the State of Montana, United States and the Government of the Province of Alberta, Canada, Respecting the Crown Managers' Partnership*, which includes this statement:

*"To improve understanding, raise awareness and promote collaboration on the management of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem, the Participants [the Province of Alberta and State of Montana] wish to pursue the following ... (d) ensure sustainable flow of economic, social and environmental benefits and preserve the ecological values of this outstanding landscape."*

The Crown of the Continent is one of only two linkages within the Yellowstone to Yukon region through which grizzly bear populations in Canada and those in the U.S. remain connected to each other.

Using high resolution satellite imagery and field survey, the study examined the extent of roads and trails within the Castle Special Management Area and analyzed these disturbances in terms of their use by motorized vehicles and their potential impact on grizzly bear habitat security areas.

“Our study found that the total length of roads and trails that are potentially used by off-highway vehicles within the Castle is 1,283 km, or a density of 1.3 km / km<sup>2</sup>,” says Peter Lee, lead author of the study and Executive Director of Global Forest Watch Canada. “This overall density for the Castle wildland area is more than double, and in some watersheds more than triple, the threshold of 0.6 km/km<sup>2</sup> within important grizzly bear areas, as recommended in the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.”

The field surveys conducted as part of this study found that many roads and trails mapped as closed by the Alberta Government under the FLUZ regulations were being used by off-highway vehicles. In addition, this study identified the existence of trails used by off highway vehicles that are not shown on maps published by the Alberta Government. Of the area field surveyed, the study found that there were about twice as many roads and trails being used by off highway vehicles than were authorized by the Alberta Government.

“In 1998, when the Alberta Government announced the Castle area as a protected area under their Special Places program, there was already a density of linear disturbances that substantially exceeded recommended thresholds for grizzly bears,” Lee states, “Since then, there are an estimated 81 km of new anthropogenic disturbances. Additional disturbances will occur following Alberta Government-approved commercial logging, which will entail new roads.”

The report concludes that the Castle Special Management Area is no longer secure for grizzly bears and that sustainable environmental management of the Castle wilderness is not occurring.

Lee says: “In this Castle study, we conducted satellite mapping and field-work to examine roads and motorized trails in the Castle. We measured the numbers of roads that are being used by motorized vehicles. We found more roads being used by motorized vehicles than what we saw being reported in Alberta Government’s maps, reports and data. We looked at and compared the Alberta Government’s recommendations for grizzly bear protection with our on-the-ground evidence and found the amount of linear disturbances used by motorized vehicles substantially exceeded the Alberta Government’s statements, plans and regulations.”

Lee concludes that: “Global Forest Watch Canada could find no Alberta Government information on the monitoring of motorized vehicle use in the Castle area.”

*Download the research report at: [www.globalforestwatch.ca](http://www.globalforestwatch.ca)*

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## Alberta Government's management and policy intentions compared to Global Forest Watch Canada's findings

ALBERTA GOVERNMENT STATED INTENTIONS	GLOBAL FOREST WATCH CANADA FINDINGS
<b>Protecting Grizzly Bears</b>	
<p>(2002 and 2010) In 2002, Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended the status of the provincial population of grizzly bear as Threatened ("<b><i>a species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction</i></b>"). The recommendation to list this species as Threatened under Alberta's Wildlife Act was accepted by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in June 2010.</p>	<p>The linear disturbance density averages more than double the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan's recommended threshold of 0.6 km/km<sup>2</sup> and more than triple the threshold in several watersheds and within several important grizzly bear areas.</p>
<b>International Agreement</b>	
<p>(2007) "<b><i>.... preserve the ecological values of this outstanding landscape.</i></b>" (2007 Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between the Government of the State of Montana, United States and the Government of the Province of Alberta, Canada, Respecting the Crown Managers' Partnership)</p>	<p>In 1998, when the Alberta Government announced the Castle area as a protected area under their Special Places program, there was already a density of linear disturbances that substantially exceeded recommended thresholds for grizzly bears according to published studies. Since then, there are an estimated 81 km of new anthropogenic disturbances. Additional disturbances will occur following Alberta Government-approved commercial logging, which will entail new roads.</p>
<b>Legal Purpose of Protection of Castle</b>	
<p>(1998) Purpose of Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone is to: "<b><i>Restrict motorized access to certain areas, and protect ecologically sensitive backcountry areas from the adverse effects of such activity.</i></b>"</p>	<p>There is almost double the amount of linear disturbance access points being used by motorized vehicles than have been authorized by the Alberta Government. There is no evidence of meaningful restriction or enforcement on motorized vehicles.</p>
<b>Milestone in Preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage</b>	
<p>(1998) The establishment of the 1,003 km<sup>2</sup> Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone and the Alberta Government described the announcement as a "<b><i>Milestone reached in preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage</i></b>" which will "<b><i>Provide immediate legislated protection through a Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) which will regulate the existing access management plan, previously managed on a voluntary basis.</i></b>" (Alberta Government. Alberta Environmental protection. 1998. Milestone Reached in Preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage. News Release March 18 1998 No. 98-024. Available at: <a href="http://alberta.ca/home/NewsFrame.cfm?ReleaseID=/acn/199803/5992.html">http://alberta.ca/home/NewsFrame.cfm?ReleaseID=/acn/199803/5992.html</a>)</p>	<p>The Castle Area Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone portion of the larger Castle Grizzly Bear Core Conservation Area is not secure for grizzly bears according to thresholds for disturbances in core habitat – only small fragments of it are secure. The Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone is not being managed according to its mandate, regulations or stated purpose. Access is not being controlled, and is a threat to all other public values of this area.</p>
<b>Protecting Alberta's Key Ecosystems</b>	

<p>(1995) <b><i>"It is important that the ecological integrity of montane landscapes not be compromised or severely modified through inappropriate or incompatible development or other land uses."</i></b> Alberta Environmental Protection. 1995. Alberta's Montane Subregion, Special Places 2000 and the Significance of the Whaleback Montane. Nov. 1995. Heritage Protection &amp; Education Branch, Parks Management Support Div., Natural Resources Service, Alberta Environmental Protection, Edmonton, AB.</p>	<p>There is almost double the amount of linear disturbance access points being used by motorized vehicles than have been authorized by the Alberta Government.</p>
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**Commitment to Provide Highest Level of Protection to Key Ecological Areas**

<p>(1985) Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones <b><i>"provide the highest level of protection for those areas which are known to form the unique character of the Eastern Slopes."</i></b> (Alberta Government. 1985 Castle River Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan (Castle IRP) and in A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes Region Revised 1984 (Eastern Slopes policy) (Map 2).</p>	<p>The Castle area contains large areas of Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones. The Castle area is ecologically very important: <i>(It is located within the Montane Natural Sub-Region of Alberta; a sub-region comprising less than 1% of the land area of Alberta. The montane is disproportionately important for the conservation of biological diversity; The Castle area is biologically rich, containing for examples: half of Alberta's vascular plant species, half of them rare; the majority of Alberta's butterfly species; substantial populations of relatively pure, unhybridized westslope cutthroat trout; rare mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians; The Castle area receives more precipitation than any other comparably sized area in Alberta. Encompassing less than 4% of the total land area of the Oldman River Basin, it supplies an exceptional 30% of the annual water flow for the entire Basin. The basin encompasses much of southern Alberta and extends into northern Montana; consisting of 70 municipalities in Alberta, including the City of Lethbridge; The Alberta Government's Environmentally Significant Area assessments have rated landscapes of the Castle area as provincially and nationally ecologically significant; The Castle area is also an integral part of the international Crown of the Continent ecosystem; The Castle area is located within and is a subset of the Castle Grizzly Bear Core Conservation Area; Under its Special Places program, the Alberta Government announced the establishment of the Castle Area Forest Land use Zone in 1998 and described the announcement as a "Milestone reached in preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage." Special Places was the Government of Alberta's protected areas policy.)</i></p>
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**Protecting Critical Wildlife Zones of the Eastern Slopes**

<p>The intent of Critical Wildlife Zone <b><i>"to protect ranges or terrestrial and aquatic habitats that are crucial to the maintenance of specific fish and wildlife populations."</i></b> (Alberta Government. 1984. A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes: Revised 1984. Available at: <a href="http://www.srd.alberta.ca/ManagingPrograms/Lands/Planning/documents/IntegratedResourcePlan-EasterSlopes1-1984.pdf">http://www.srd.alberta.ca/ManagingPrograms/Lands/Planning/documents/IntegratedResourcePlan-EasterSlopes1-1984.pdf</a>. (Pp. 10.)</p>	<p>The total length of linear disturbances within the 1,003 km<sup>2</sup> Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone is 1,283 km. The density of linear disturbances is 1.3 km / km<sup>2</sup> and one of the larger watersheds has a linear disturbance density exceeding 2.0 km / km<sup>2</sup>.</p>
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