



ALBERTA  
SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Office of the Minister  
MLA, Grande Prairie - Smoky

AR24698

April 22, 2010

Mr. James Tweedie  
Conservation Director  
Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition  
Box 2621  
Pincher Creek, AB T0K 1W0

Dear Mr. Tweedie:

Thank you for your March 26, 2010 email regarding Spray Lakes Sawmill's proposed timber harvesting in the Castle Special Management Area. I welcome the opportunity to provide the following information.

The government manages the Castle area as a multiple use area that supports a variety of activities, including timber harvesting, oil and gas production and recreational opportunities. Historically, landscape-level disturbances such as forest fires have shaped the forests in southwest Alberta. With no major wildfires since the early 1900s, these forests are now dominated by large blocks of old trees that are vulnerable to extreme fire and insect attacks.

The current forest management planning process includes watershed analysis and various operational conditions meant to protect watershed integrity. The analysis that department staff completed during this planning process far exceeds the background work that was completed for the Oldman Watershed Integrated Management Plan and the Oldman River – State of the Watershed. As well, the department is a primary sponsor for an extensive watershed study in the Castle Area and the department continues to support this study through funding and technical advice.

All timber operators in the province carry out harvesting activities in accordance with approved operating plans and area specific operating ground rules. These plans and operating rules set high industry standards for sustainability and recognize the importance of protecting watersheds and wildlife habitat. Sustainable Resource Development monitors the companies to make sure they are following legislation, forest management policies, and operating ground rules. The legislation that Alberta has in place regarding harvesting and reforestation will ensure the sustainability of our forests, which is a common goal for all of us.

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Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas legislation does not include a "Special Places" designation for any form of park or protected area. The Special Places initiative was a program where citizens or groups could nominate areas for consideration for possible protection. The local community advisory group did indeed nominate the Castle area, however, they expressed that they did not want a park designation. Their suggestion was for a higher form of management that would control unwanted behaviour but still provide for the wide range of uses to which people in the area had grown accustomed. This was achieved through the *Forests Act* and the creation of the Castle Special Management Area.

The Castle Access Management Plan was accepted and implemented in 1996. A review of the plan has been carried out and although administrative and language changes were made, the overall management intent for the Castle area remained the same. The local committee supported sustainable multiple use of the area and recommended the management of the area to follow the guidelines of an updated Castle Integrated Resource Management Plan. The local committee also asked that the government provide access restrictions under legislation. The government accepted the committee's report and recommendations for implementation in March, 1998 and established the area as a Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ), primarily to restrict motorized recreational vehicles. The FLUZ designation does not, however, restrict industrial uses such as timber harvesting.

With regard to the Land-use Framework, although conservation is certainly one objective, the overarching intent of the framework is to achieve a balance between responsible economic development with environmental sustainability and recreational opportunities. Current regional land use plans permit timber harvesting and other industrial activities in the area which also provide local economic benefits. Within the proposed regional plans, the government will continue to make decisions regarding appropriate uses of particular areas within the context of a cumulative effects management framework.

I appreciate you taking the time to bring your concerns to my attention.

Sincerely,

Mel R. Knight  
Minister

cc: Evan Berger, MLA  
Livinstone-Macleod