



International pressure mounting to protect Alberta's Castle wilderness

Clearcut logging threatens Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park

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CALGARY — The international conservation community warns that Alberta's population of grizzly bears is in increasingly dire straits in the Castle wilderness just north of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. As a result, clear-cut logging slated for the Castle this summer is receiving international scrutiny.

"Unfortunately, southern Alberta is increasingly where Glacier National Park's grizzly bears go to die," said Michael Jamison, program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), in Whitefish, Montana. "Bears here are dual citizens, and what happens to habitat on one side of the border reverberates on both sides."

Biologists have warned for years that grizzly bears are on a steep decline in Alberta, due to destruction of wilderness habitat by roads and industrial development. In the United States, grizzly bears are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. Alberta lists the grizzly as threatened, and declared the Castle as a protected area "on paper" in 1998, but recently OK'd large-scale commercial logging there.

"Clear-cutting would exacerbate habitat degradation which is already harming the imperiled grizzly bears of the Castle", said Louisa Willcox, Senior Wildlife Advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Instead of rubbing salt in the wounds of Alberta's threatened grizzly bears, Alberta and the U.S. should be working more closely together to ensure a healthy future for this population."

"The science is clear," said Sarah Elmeligi of the Southern Alberta Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS SAB). "Grizzly bears need large areas of undisturbed habitat to safely raise their young."

Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park has been a symbol of international goodwill since 1932. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. "Alberta is home to the world's first transboundary park and needs to step up to protect wildlife like the grizzly bear," said Dianne Pachal of the Sierra Club of Canada.

A recent survey of the adjacent Alberta communities found 75 percent of residents opposed the logging and support fully protecting the Castle for water and wildlife as a legislated Wildland Park. More than 50,000 people from across North America recently sent letters supporting the designation of a Wildland Park in the Castle to the Alberta Government.

In 2007 the Province of Alberta and the State of Montana signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing the two governments will "collaborate and adapt environmental and natural resource management strategies to achieve the desired ecological health condition."

"It's clear that the Castle is important not only to local people, but to people from around the Crown of the Continent and beyond," says Gordon Petersen of Beaver Mines, Alberta, and President of the local Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition.

"We respect Alberta's right to set its own future, but remain very concerned about the future of the Castle," the NPCA's Jamison said. "The people of the United States and Canada share much in common, including a common desire to keep this special part of North America beautiful and natural."

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