



Wilderness



West of Rocky Mountain House Threatened

Sunpine is in Default of FMA—no extension should be granted, FMA should be scrapped!

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by Gray Jones
Executive Director, Western Canada Wilderness
Committee-Alberta Branch

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee has been working with the Friends of the West Country on the Sunpine issue for over a year.

When I first went down to Rocky Mountain House, I found a group of local people opposed to the Sunpine Laminated Veneer Lumber plant site.

People from Strachan, which is located in a beautiful little valley, became environmentalists overnight when their immediate environment, quality of life and property values were threatened by the proposed plant site. Since that time, their concerns have spread beyond their own homes, extending to the entire Sunpine Forest Management Agreement (FMA) and indeed forest management issues in all of Alberta.

The Sunpine FMA is about the size of Prince Edward Island and extends from pine forests interspersed with natural meadows and stream environments west of Rocky Mountain House, through the rugged grandeur of the Ram River to the deep wilderness of Nordegg. This wild land is situated between Edmonton and Calgary and west from Red Deer.

Part of the forest in the Sunpine FMA



Boreal Forest in Alberta. Along the Ram River are mighty stands of old growth pine in excess of 220 years old.

Last summer with the help of Dr. Jim Butler of the University of Alberta, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee set up a biodiversity camp and did a comprehensive wildlife study within the FMA.

We recorded 123 species of birds, including six species of owls, two of which are the boreal and the great grey owls, and 23 species of mammals including wolves, elk and grizzly bears. Golden eagles hover over creeks and the howls of wolves can be heard deep in the forest at night. The area west of Rocky Mountain House boasts some of the finest brook trout fishing in the world and is home to the highly prized brown trout.

The Rocky Mountain/Clearwater Forest is in the heart of the historic David Thomson Country and forms a natural triangle for tourism with Banff and Jasper National Parks.

There are over 30 tourist and eco-tourism operations in the FMA ranging from a world class lodge to river rafting and a helicopter tour operation.

When I first went into this country I noticed that every available campsite from Rocky Mountain House to Nordegg was occupied on the weekend. An informal survey showed 97% of the campers did not want the area to be logged!

According to Faith Popcorn, a leading trend analyst, the primary pursuit of people in developed countries in the next 10 years will be "experiencing wilderness".

People from highly industrialized countries like Japan and Germany, with virtually no wilderness, seek out wilderness experiences in other countries. They bring their money along. Wilderness in itself has sustainable economic value way into the future!

The government's own statistics show tourism has increased by 17% in the area west of Rocky Mountain House in the past couple of years.

The economy of the area is already diversified with oil and gas, farming and ranching,



CLEARCUTTING NEAR SUNPINE FMA Photo: W. Shane Smith / WCWC

small mill operations and the tourist sector. The diversity of the area will be destroyed by Sunpine clear cut logging!

We already know Sunpine is a poor corporate citizen. They've drastically overcut their quota and consequently are almost out of wood in Sundre. They've cut five years worth of wood in two years. Sunpine has held Friends of the West Country hostage over their constantly changing development plans. The Friends of the West Country out of desperation have mounted expensive court cases. They need your support.

I walked Sunpine logging areas, west of

Sundre in the Spray Lakes Area. It is not quality logging; machinery has been driven through streams and massive soil disturbance has occurred. It is cut and run. Sunpine will trash the wilderness west of Rocky Mountain house in a similar way.

Please join Western Canada Wilderness Committee and Friends of the West Country in fighting Sunpine!

"The idea of wilderness needs no defence. It only needs more defenders."

- Edward Abbey

"The provincial government has once again demonstrated its desire to "play ball" with their own rules. It's a game played between big business and provincial politicians - the people of Alberta have not been asked to participate, nor were they even asked to observe from the side lines."

- Gray Jones

Rocky Mountain House

A HOUSE DIVIDED BY TURMOIL

by Dr. Tim Grier
Area resident opposed to Sunpine

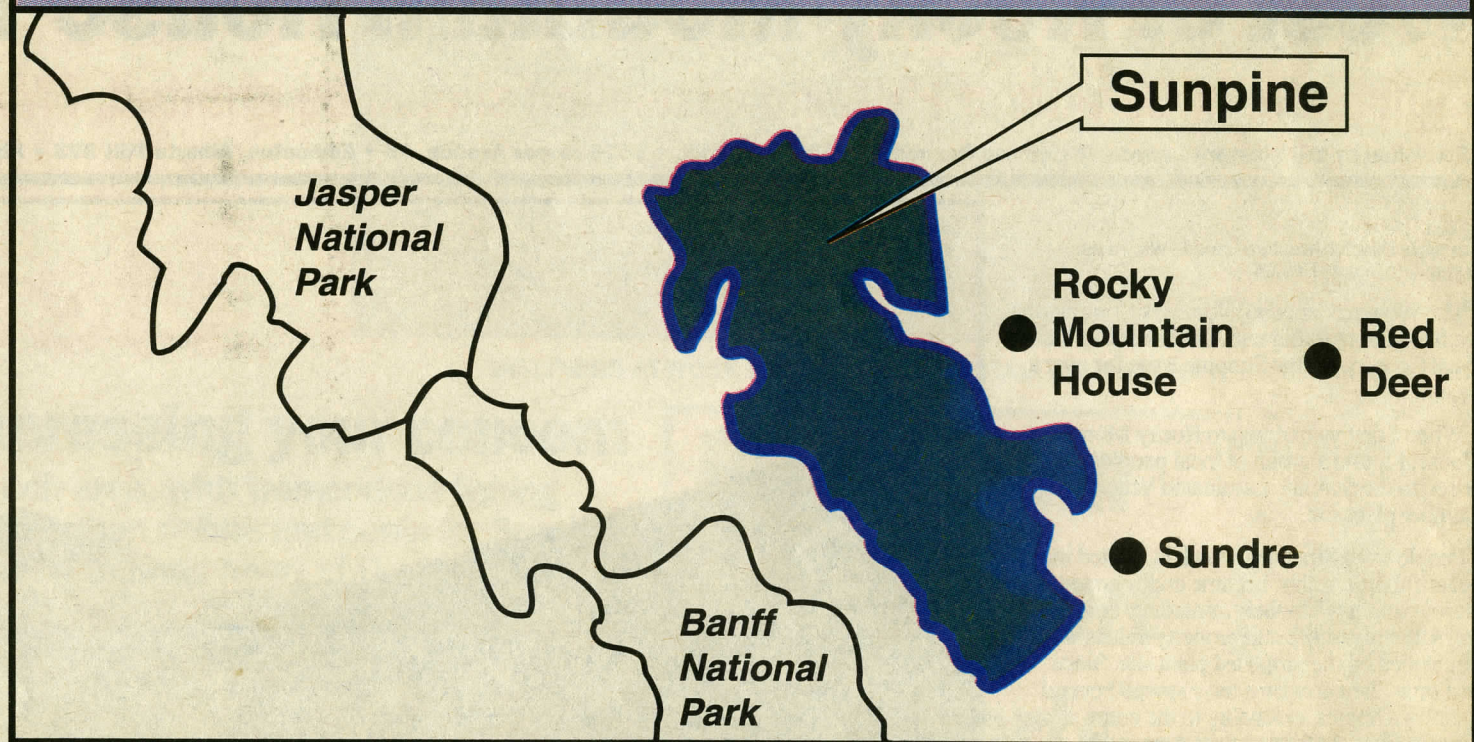
Rocky Mountain House is a house torn and divided by turmoil; it's all the fault of Ralph Klein. On the one hand, local residents and environmental groups want the sun to set on Sunpine Forest Products' secretive proposal to log 5,670 sq km of Central Alberta's Eastern Slopes. On the other, business interests see the \$32 million plant as the dawn of economic revitalization. You're either for development or you're against it. An ugly line has been drawn between friends, families, and neighbours. Ralph Klein maintains that line by continuing the secretive give-away of public resources initiated by Getty's government.

As Environmental Minister, Ralph Klein sidestepped his responsibility to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) by calling the proposal "only a sawmill." In doing so, each year 80 million board feet of public lands will be cut without one word of public input. This farce began when the Getty government initiated Integrated Resource Planning after they designated up to 80% of the area as priority timber harvesting. What little public involvement there has been occurred after the government decided to cut all timber west of Rocky Mountain House.

Still, Ralph Klein doesn't seem to know why the public wants input through an EIA and a Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) review. He should consider the questions which rage at Rocky Mountain House:

Sunpine begged for confrontation by locating the laminated veneer lumber plant in the rural residential valley of Strachan without any consultation with residents. Why couldn't the company locate in any of the thousands of square kilometers of vacant crown land further west?

Sunpine Forest Management Area (FMA) 5670 km² (Approximate size of P.E.I.)



A Natural View

by Ken Larsen
Member of the Red Deer River Naturalists

It's sometimes pointed out that only 5% of the area of the mountain parks is developed, leaving people to conclude the other 95% is left for wildlife. This is ecologically ignorant or a deliberately misleading way of stating the facts.

The trail then runs through the old growth forest. The forest isn't overly dense because of the deadfall. It supports a good understory for cover and nesting sites. Even on a wet day, one can see or hear about 20 species of bird in this valley, including grouse, warblers, thrushes, Steller's Jays, loons, Golden Crowned Kinglets and Rufous Hummingbirds.

After the gentle slopes of the Alberta side, the steepness of the terrain in the Blaeberry watershed is surprising. The Blaeberry River rushes down a rather narrow, high walled, heavily forested valley and is joined by several strong side streams, one of which joins via a high waterfall.

Sparrow, refused to release a consultant's study on tourism when repeatedly asked by letter and in the legislature. Don't Albertans have a right to know tourism's potential for this area? Shouldn't Ralph Klein release that study, paid for at public expense? What about the 30 guides, outfitters and other eco-tour company operators? Don't they have a right to know how their livelihoods will be affected?

Vegetation studies are critical in establishing wildlife habitat inventories and are necessary in predicting regeneration capacity. The Alberta Department of Forestry says these would only cost \$30,000. So why haven't they been done?

Ask the provincial Department of Forestry about a species inventory for the logging area and, with embarrassment, they'll have to refer you to a survey conducted by Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the University of Alberta's Dr. Jim Butler. They found 123 species of bird, 23 mammal species and 13 species of orchid. Amazing, but why hasn't the government inventoried the area before rushing in to log it? Doesn't the public have a right to know what will be lost, before it's gone?

Central Alberta's west country forest is a precious public resource. Ralph Klein's new government needs to prove it's different. Stop the secretive give aways of the old Getty government!

"The Rocky Mountain Corridor is worth much more ecologically and economically in its present state where tourism is a prime activity and small local logging operations already occur, than knocked down by Sunpine Forest Products."

- Gray Jones

Only 5% of the 6,600 sq km of Banff National Park is in the montane zone; the zone that provides the best habitat for the greatest number of animal and plant species. 77.9% of that small montane zone is in the Bow Valley and there is development right through it. This leaves the Howse Pass as one of the largest single blocks of undeveloped montane zone left in Banff National Park. Howse Pass is directly west of the Sunpine FMA. Currently the Rocky Mountain House area and the Howse Pass are contiguous so that animals like ungulates, wolves and bears range back and forth.

The Howse Pass area is the western end of a crucial montane eco-zone which forms a corridor extending eastward outside the Park to Kooteney Plains and westward into the Blaeberry River valley. The Howse Montane Eco-Zone contains critical breeding and winter range especially for elk and their predators.

Let's go on a quick tour of the Howse Valley and see it as the wildlife do - a living corridor through a hostile environment.

After leaving the Saskatchewan River bridge on the Banff-Jasper Highway and crossing the rather intimidating Mistaya River, we enter the montane area formed by the junctions of the Mistaya, Howse and North Saskatchewan Rivers. Here we find rolling, rather sparsely vegetated areas interspersed with open woodland and a few sloughs. There is plenty of evidence of elk and sheep; ducks are nesting on the ponds. On the wet river flats, several patches of Marsh Felwort and a rare gentian are found (only the sixth find in Alberta according to "Flora of Alberta", Moss and Packer 1983).

"As urban life becomes increasingly stressful and we become more and more dominated by the technological and electronic age, we need our wild spaces more than ever. Even when we are not able to visit them on a regular basis we need to know that the forests are there, living, breathing and able to sustain biodiversity."

- Citizen's Action Group on the Environment

Further up the valley, the montane meadows are home to goats. One can find tracks of moose, elk, coyote, wolf and bear sign on sandy patches near the river.

The berries on both sides of the Howse Pass are astonishing: strawberry, raspberry, current, gooseberry, cranberry, blueberry, huckleberry, buffaloberry and both alpine and common bearberry.

This is good bear country and the berries aren't the only reason. The deadfall provides snug denning sites when it's covered by thick blankets of snow.

Clearings down the mountain sides show the area is prone to avalanches. These slopes provide good feeding places for bears when they emerge from their dens in the spring. The bears here are well away from human interference since very few people use the valley except in mid summer.

The valley supports a wide variety of montane zone plants which continue right up into the Pass. It's possible to count nearly 40 species of flowering plants on a short walk to Lagoon Lake. This is one of only three places in Alberta where the lousewort, *Pedicularis racemosa* may be found (again according to the "Flora Of Alberta").

On the B.C. side of the Pass there are attractive grassy meadows with sloughs on which one finds occasional flocks of Northern Phalaropes. These birds are considered coastal birds. Presumably, they stop to rest here during their migration from their Arctic breeding grounds to their wintering sites on the west coast. Since Howse Pass is one of the lowest in the Rockies (1527m), it's probably used by other migrating bird species.

logging roads which stretch into the Blaeberry Valley from the TransCanada Highway near Golden.

This route was first used in 1807 by David Thompson who got stuck there in late June "impatiently waiting the melting of the snows!" The area was extensively used for hunting by the Kooteney Indians. There are 11 pre-1775 Indian sites near Saskatchewan Crossing and several more near Howse Pass.

Because of the steep walls of this valley, it forms the major wildlife corridor for animals passing between the Howse Valley in Banff Park and the wider valley lower down the Blaeberry. The thick rain forest certainly provides good cover, while the rough, steep trail and stream crossings help prevent the poaching that occurs in the more accessible areas of Banff Park.

The Sunpine FMA is part of an important buffer zone protecting the unique wilderness values of Howse Pass. Our National Parks are already under stress from other developments. The impact of Sunpine's clearcut logging will extend far beyond their FMA.

"Ask the Provincial Department of Forestry about a species inventory for the logging area and, with embarrassment, they'll have to refer you to a survey conducted by Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the University of Alberta's Dr. Jim Butler. They found 123 species of bird, 23 mammal species and 13 species of orchid."

- Dr. Tim Grier

Summary of the Brazeau Forest-Sunpine FMA issue

by Diane Szlabey,
WCWC Boreal Research Station staff

Forest Management Areas (FMAs) are public forest areas leased to logging companies to use as private lands, to clearcut. Often, as in the case with ALPac and Daishowa, FMAs are given with enormous loans, and low stumpage fees.

The massive Sunpine FMA covers an area the size of Prince Edward Island. It lies between Rocky Mountain House and Banff and Jasper National Parks. The FMA is about 30 km from the park boundaries.

It's a unique junction of three ecological regions: the southern tip of Alberta's boreal forest, the montane region and the aspen parkland. The area contains rare plants, 123 species of birds, plus elk, wolf, moose, coyote and other animals supported and protected by old growth forest.

The Rocky Mountain/Clearwater FMA was handed over to Sunpine Forest Products Ltd. on Aug. 18, 1992 without an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or a Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) hearing, although the Alberta government had promised to include these with all future FMAs as of 1991.

As then Environment Minister, Ralph Klein got out of his promise by saying it's "just a sawmill." 80 million board feet will be cut each year without any public input. The area may be completely clear cut in seven years.

The plant and animal species in the area have not been catalogued by the government or Sunpine. No benchmarks exist for successful reforestation. Species may be lost forever.

As part of the FMA, Sunpine plans a \$2.1 million expansion to its Sundre mill and a \$32 million laminated veneer lumber (LVL) plant in Rocky Mountain House.

Sunpine says the Sundre operations will create 300 jobs. But as John McInnis, environment critic for the New Democrats points out, "most of this timber will be processed in Sundre, which is way outside the Rocky Mountain House area."

"So they're going to not only export their timber and the jobs with it, but they're going to lose on the tourism potential of that region," states McInnis.

The LVL plant is another point of contention. Sunpine wants to build on the site of an old gravel pit because of existing infrastructure. The Friends of the West Country don't want the plant in their community. Over 600 people signed a petition asking for a plebiscite. Again, the government and the bureaucrats did what they wanted anyway.

Sunpine has been stalling its application for a development permit leading many to believe they don't really want to build the plant. They just want access to the forests.

Sunpine finally applied for the development permit and it was granted Feb. 23, 1993; the FMA would have expired Mar. 1, 1993 if they hadn't got the permit. However, judging from his predecessor's actions the new Environment Minister, Brian Evans, would likely have extended the deadline.

This area has seen tourism increase by 17% last year.

There are 30 guides and outfitters who make their living in the area. These



OLD GROWTH FOREST, NATURAL MEADOW WITHIN FMA Photo: Mark Arneson

businesses are in a position to grow, due to the increased interest in wilderness tourism. Their work is sustainable.

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee is not against logging. We are against clearcut logging. We advocate alternatives to single use forestry; manage the forest, not just the timber.

We want sustainable use of the forest. We want to see tourists use the area. We advocate selective logging, zipper and feather cutting. We advocate producing finished forest products right here in Alberta.

We want to see alternative ways of producing paper, such as using flax and wheat as fiber sources.

We've got to stop being "drawers of water and hewers of wood". Our resources will run out if the present rate and type of timber management continues.

NEWS UPDATE: *The provincial government gave Sunpine an ultimatum. They have been issued a letter of default. If they do not meet the terms of their FMA by September 1, 1993, they will be shut down!*

When will we open our eyes?

by Dr. Jim Butler, Professor, Department of Forest Science, University of Alberta

The Rocky Mountain/Clearwater Forest contains important scenic and biological assets which will be lost or severely compromised if the future of this region is allocated solely as a commercial timber source. I personally favour the concept of a David Thompson Country designation, similar to that of Kananaskis Country, where the primary use is outdoor recreation, accomodating alternative resource uses when it does not compromise or degrade the primary use. The primary-use-designation idea is consistent with integrated resource allocation. With such a designation, the area's tourism and biological attractions would be preserved. Scenic drives can be designated, along with interpretive signs and tour manuals. A visitor interpretive centre is needed to direct and celebrate the range of attractions.

This is the last unallocated area of wildlands along the east slopes of the Alberta Rocky Mountains, and it deserves to be considered for something different. It is the most accessible wildlands we have for outdoor recreation purposes – a place where existing access roads have not eroded the area's primal integrity. Nights here still ring with the howls of timber wolves along with the voices of Boreal and Great Grey Owls. Trumpeter Swans and grizzly still call this place home. In spring, Calypso Orchids wave in lavender seas along the forest floors. The extensive aspen and poplar-lined roads are possibly the finest autumn colour attraction in Alberta.

My favourite Alberta trout streams flow through here. Rainbow, Bull, Lake and Cutthroat trout provide a tremendous variety for fishing enthusiasts. The area boasts some of the best fishing in North America. There are mixed-wood forests, open mountain meadows, magnificent old-growth conifers, profusions of wildflowers and one of the most diverse wildlife communities. What more could we want? And what limited vision gazes at these wonders and still advocates the short-sighted view of an exclusively industrial destiny?

“When will we open our eyes to see the gifts we already possess? Probably not until they are lost through our short-sightedness. Then at least our eyes will be open, but our vision will be blurred by the tears of hindsight.”

- Dr. Jim Butler, Professor, Department of Forest Science, University of Alberta,

“This is one of Alberta's last reasonably contiguous central Alberta forests. Aerial photographs of recent block clearcutting by Sunpine are chilling. Chilling because we constantly hear from the Alberta Forest Service that Alberta no longer allows such extensive, ecologically unsound and aesthetically bereft forest operations. It isn't true. Spray Lakes is destroying the ecological and aesthetic integrity of watershed after watershed between the Bow River and the Red Deer River. Sunpine is continuing the same destructive logging from Red Deer north.”

- Vivian Pharis, Alberta Wilderness Association

Forest is More Than Timber

by Andy Miller, owl specialist and graduate student at the University of Alberta.

The Rocky Clearwater Forest is a critical juncture between forest types, representing a patch of biodiversity unequalled in Alberta. It is located at the southernmost tip of Alberta's boreal forest, bordered by montane forests to the south and aspen parkland to the east.

This forest is home to the blackpoll warbler of the boreal forest, the MacGillveray's warbler of the montane forest and to the mourning warbler of the aspen parkland. Nowhere else can these birds be found together.

Getting to know such a special place transcends mere words. The diversity of life held together by an infrastructure of water, luxurious carpets of mosses and huge expanses of forests is astounding.

One clear evening on the Rocky I was out watching for owls. I began calling the small owls first; the pygmy then the saw-whet. Then I moved on to the larger owls, the barred and the great grey. Finally, I called the largest and most tenacious of owls, the great horned. In this fashion, standing in one spot, four different species of owls began calling at once. We held up a hooting conversation which lasted into the night and sometimes bordered on cacophony. To me this conversation with the birds has meaning. It was as if they told me this place is special, unparalleled. They told me they need friends to speak up for them and represent them in the courts of humankind.



GREAT GREY OWL IN OLD GROWTH Photo: Andy Miller

Don't Let Sunpine Clearcut Brazeau Forest!



DE-LIMBER AT WORK NEAR ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE Photo: W. Shane Smith / WCWC

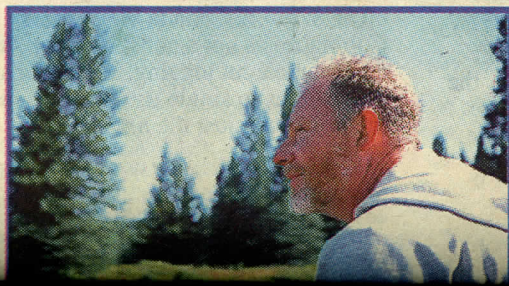
Write a letter expressing your concern

Tell them this ecologically rich area, with tremendous fishing and tourism is worth much more than dollars and cents for Sunpine. Convey to them that this is the historic heart of David Thompson Country and is not a cut block! Tell them you care.

Brian Evans
Minister of Environmental Protection, Forests, Lands and Wildlife
Legislative Building,
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7

Ralph Klein
Premier
Legislative Building,
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7

"I have many friends living in this special area. With them I have camped and fished, heard the howling of the wolves at night and watched owls flying under starlight. This area is under immediate threat by clearcut logging and could be destroyed in a few short years. Please join with us to stop this madness."



Please join and support our efforts

Boreal Forest Campaign



Boreal Forest
Research Project

The Alberta branch of the WCWC is the fastest growing branch in Canada.

With the help of Dr. Butler, we are establishing a Boreal Forest Research Station to help unravel the mysteries of Canada's unknown forest. This project started in February 1993 and we need assistance.

WCWC staff, in conjunction with the filmmaker Rick

YES! I believe that Alberta's Boreal Forests must be protected!

I would like to help protect the Rocky Mountain/Clearwater Forest by supporting The Friends of the West Country and Western Canada Wilderness Committee

Here is my tax deductible donation of _____ \$25 _____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$1000 _____ other
(Every donation helps – no matter how small)

YES I want to join Western Canada Wilderness Committee. Here is my \$30 annual membership fee. Please keep me informed about the progress of your campaigns, especially the ones to save the boreal forests of Alberta.
(Membership fee includes a 1993 calendar and is therefore not tax deductible.)

NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____
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Proceeds from this publication will help defer court costs incurred by Friends of the West Country.

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Thank you for caring!

forestry and economics in Alberta. A preliminary version of **A NATURAL SELECTION** was previewed at the Global Visions Film Festival, March 13, 1993 in Edmonton.

More than anything else, we are educating the public about the issues in order to halt the destruction of our boreal forests.

Western Canada Wilderness Committee acknowledges Dr. Jim Butler and Friends of the West Country for their dedication to this campaign.

WCWC-Alberta Wish List

fax machine, Apple Macintosh computers, cork boards, VCR, TV, reception area furniture, filing cabinets, chairs, board room table, camcorder, photocopier, shelving units, camp tents & canoes.

This issue

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by:

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THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT CO-OP FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN SAVING WILDERNESS.

Credits and Thanks

This paper is a product of the efforts of WCWC Alberta branch, the Friends of the West Country and the Boreal Forest Research Station Project.

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