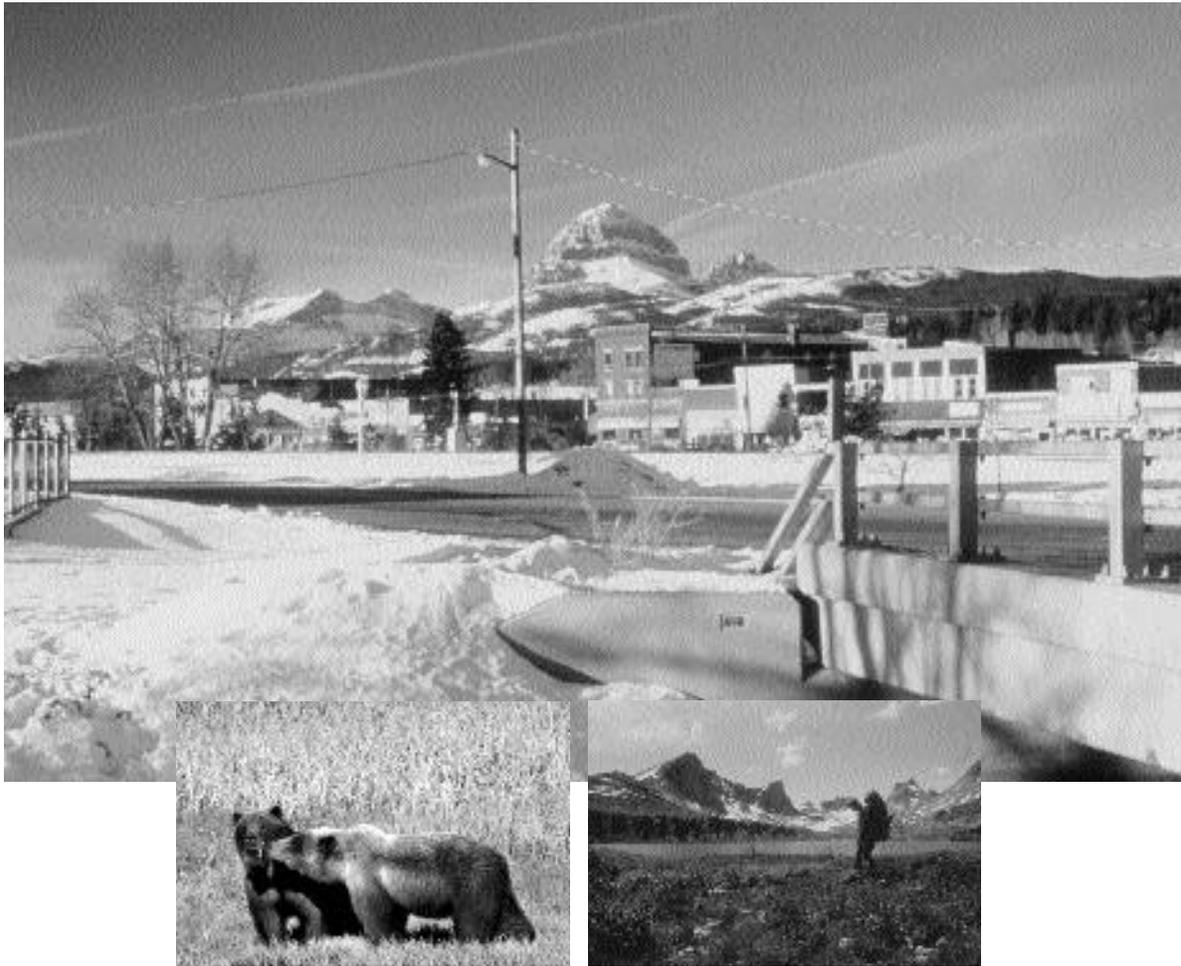


# BRINGING CONSERVATION HOME:

Caring for Land, Economies and Communities in Western Canada

By Jeff Gailus



A Project of the Sonoran Institute and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

**The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative** (Y2Y) works to maintain and restore the unique natural heritage of the Yellowstone to Yukon region. Combining science and stewardship, Y2Y seeks to ensure that the world-renowned wilderness, wildlife, native plants, and natural processes of the Yellowstone to Yukon region continue to function as an inter-connected web of life, capable of supporting all of the natural and human communities that reside within it, for now and for future generations. Y2Y can be reached at 403-609-2666 or [hub@y2y.net](mailto:hub@y2y.net).

**The Sonoran Institute** (SI) is a nonprofit organization that works with communities in western North America to conserve and restore their unique natural landscapes, wildlife, and cultural values. The lasting benefits of the Sonoran Institute's community stewardship work are healthy landscapes and vibrant, livable communities that embrace conservation as an integral element of their quality of life and economic vitality. The Institute is committed to testing a wide range of approaches to community-based conservation, and adapting these approaches based on real experiences. The Institute is also dedicated to widely disseminating both its findings and the tools it develops. The Sonoran Institute has offices in Tucson, Arizona, and Bozeman, Montana. SI can be reached at 406-587-7331 or [sonoran@sonoran.org](mailto:sonoran@sonoran.org).

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Printed in United States

Copies of this document may be ordered from the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

*“Change is inevitable, but it does not have to  
come at the expense of what citizens and communities value.”*

- Jim Howe, Ed McMahon and Luther Propst,  
*Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**T**he list of people to thank is a long one. At the top is Gary Holub, a graduate intern from York University who kicked off this project with two months of research and initial drafts of both the Revelstoke and Canmore chapters. Thank you, Gary, for making my job easier.

Special thanks to the interviewees who later critiqued and commented on draft versions of these case studies. In Revelstoke this included Geoffery Battersby, Gail Bernacki, Bob Clarke, Jim Cook, Jenny Feick, Susan Hall, Hank Krawczyk, Francis Maltby, Bruce McLellan, Cindy Pearce, Debby Robinson and Doug Weir. Willing participants from Canmore included Tom Atkinson, Ron Casey, Brenda Davison, Bertram Dyck, Felicity Edwards, Jon Jorgenson, André Gareau, Frank Liszczak, Dave Nielson, Gareth Thomson and Melanie Watt. Those involved in the

Muskwa-Kechika study included John Cashore, Brian Churchill, Karen Goodings, Barry Holland, Bruce McKnight, David Menzies, Ross Peck, Dave Porter, Wayne Sawchuck, George Smith and Dave Stuart. Without the input and commitment of these people, who donated many precious hours to these studies, they could never have been written.

Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks for the generous support of the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, whose financial resources allowed us to present these hopeful stories about caring communities.

And of course we cannot leave off without acknowledging the staff of the Sonoran Institute and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, whose support, encouragement, and insight helped to turn money and vision into what I hope you, the reader, will find an interesting and useful document.

# PREFACE

Communities all over North America are tackling one of the most important challenges of our age: How to retain and even improve community-wide quality of life while simultaneously maintaining the health of the natural environment in which we live.

Nowhere is this challenge more pressing than in the Rocky Mountains from Yellowstone to the Yukon.

Here, many rural landscapes and wildlands have become magnets for new residents, seeking to escape the congestion and stress of urban life. In a number of these communities, the local economies are in transition from dependence on traditional resource extraction toward more diversified economies that include technology, service, and knowledge-based industries.

This rapid change is bringing many new challenges to communities in the region. Increasing pressure for growth and development, uncertain economic futures for some long-time residents, and increasing conflict over appropriate uses of our lands threaten both our sense of community and the landscapes we value. Often this change fails to protect the natural environment, economic well-being or community assets of our homes. However, an increasing number of communities are experimenting successfully with local initiatives that address these problems.

The solutions are not easy. They are as complex as the natural ecosystems that we call home. But the good news is that there is hope, and there are answers.

The Sonoran Institute (SI) and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) have joined forces to profile

Hayley Locke



three western Canadian communities that have redefined their respective futures through community stewardship efforts—locally driven initiatives to protect the ecological and cultural values of an area while striving to meet economic and social needs. Community stewardship can sound both daunting and idealistic. Yet, the stories of Revelstoke, British Columbia; Canmore, Alberta; and the Muskwa-Kechika area in northeastern

British Columbia demonstrate that it is already happening. In their own ways, all three communities have taken bold steps to build healthy communities in healthy landscapes.

The case studies that follow provide an in-depth look at the challenges of change and the mechanisms used to manage it in a way that reflects the values of each community. Our goal, in telling these stories, is to illustrate the tools and strategies available to community members seeking to care for all of their resources – their community, their environment and their economy. Together, these stories demonstrate that there are many ways for local citizens to pro-actively protect the character, economic vitality, ecological well-being and quality of life of their communities.

In these stories, we hope that communities facing similar challenges will find ideas that work, and the encouragement to turn those ideas into positive action. By learning from others' experiences, we may finally, as Canadian-born author Wallace Stegner wrote, "create a society to match our scenery."

Barb Cestero  
*Sonoran Institute*

Peter Aengst  
*Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative*

*"... create a society to match our scenery."*

- Wallace Stegner

*Community stewardship is more than just saving land or protecting wildlife; it also must consider the economic and social needs of the local people who live on that land, with that wildlife.*



### **Case Studies in Western Canada**

# INTRODUCTION

**T**here is only one constant in this world, and that is change. Landscapes, species, languages, cultures—they are always in a state of perpetual evolution. The only surety is that things do change, slowly, sometimes imperceptibly, but immutably. This is Nature's *modus operandi*.

But change in the twentieth century was marked more by revolution than evolution, and the twenty-first century should, by all accounts, make its predecessor look like a slow-motion film. Humans influence even the farthest reaches of the planet, and the sweep of the Industrial Revolution has given way to the rocket-like acceleration of the Technological Revolution. Such change is often positive; it has improved our quality of life. Advances in medicine save lives around the world every day, and computers allow us to solve problems that were impossible even a decade ago.

Inevitably, with change comes consequences. Ecosystems are being transformed, species eradicated, and communities that traditionally have had little to say about their future are altered—socially, economically, environmentally. And often for the worse.

These case studies tell the stories of three communities that have adopted the notion of “community stewardship” to try to manage such change and take control of their futures. Many voices were needed to tell these stories. We interviewed dozens of community members—from mayors to miners, from environmentalists to industrialists—who are active in their respective communities. These interviews were then compiled into draft case studies, which, in the name of accuracy and clarity, were returned to the interviewees so facts could be checked and comments made. The final product, then, is a result of hundreds of hours of work by people who believe that local citizens can, and should, make good decisions about what is best for their communities.

It is apropos that the input of so many people was necessary to write these stories, for community stewardship must involve more than the customary decision makers. It also must involve representatives from the public at large, rallying together to bring health and prosperity to their respective locales and



Harvey Locke

regions. Community stewardship is not an environmental concept. It is more than just saving land or protecting wildlife; it also must consider the economic and social needs of the local people who live on that land, with that wildlife. Community stewardship recognizes that communities can be good “stewards” of all their resources—their economies, their people, and

their environments. Without community stewardship, we run the risk of losing more than grizzly bears and wolves; we risk losing our homes. In these pages are real-life examples of how citizens have used community stewardship to make their homes better places to live.

Both the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) and the Sonoran Institute (SI) promote community stewardship as a means to promote healthy communities that can manage the negative effects of rapid social, economic, and environmental change. Y2Y is a bold new vision to maintain and restore the unique natural heritage of the Yellowstone-to-Yukon region that follows the Rocky Mountains from Yellowstone National Park in the south to the Mackenzie Mountains in the north. Combining science and stewardship, Y2Y seeks to ensure that the world-renowned wilderness, wildlife, native plants, and natural processes of the Yellowstone-to-Yukon region continue to function as an interconnected web of life, capable of supporting all of the natural and human communities that reside within it, for now and for future generations. The vision is immense: a mountainous region of land and water that hosts not only a rich diversity of wild habitats and creatures, but also Native cultures and rural communities that have been shaped by the power of this wild landscape. In short, it is a geography that challenges our ability to understand it, and dares us to create for it a different future than what befell the tamed and tilled landscapes of North America.

Y2Y has joined forces with the Sonoran Institute (SI) to look at ways in which community members, not just policy-makers and scientists and conservationists, can become visionaries intent on caring for the places and landscapes in which they live. SI is dedicated to promoting community-based strategies that preserve the ecological integrity of protected

lands while simultaneously meeting the economic aspirations of adjoining landowners and communities. Underlying SI's mission is the conviction that community-driven and inclusive approaches to conservation produce the most effective results. This approach borrows extensively from community-based conservation successes in developing countries, where local people are involved in conservation initiatives that make them the custodians and beneficiaries of these initiatives.

For the past 10 years, SI has assisted more than 20 communities in the western U.S. and northwestern Mexico to realize local conservation and community goals identified through meaningful public dialogue. Residents and conservationists in Canada, like their neighbours to the south, also must contend with and manage environmental and social change that threaten both communities and wild landscapes. As a result, SI is beginning to work with several communities in the Canadian portion of the Y2Y region that are interested in forging innovative and lasting solutions to local conservation problems.

Y2Y and SI began this project to better understand how community stewardship works in Canada. The best way to do that is to learn from people who have already tried it. The lessons they uncovered were so instructive that they felt it was necessary to celebrate and share the stories of these three western Canadian community efforts with a broader audience.

There is something here for every mountain community in North America. Each case is as different as the communities that implemented them, but they all work toward the same goal: managing change for the betterment of community and landscape alike. In Revelstoke, B.C., citizens rally together during an economic crisis to create and implement a vision for the future. What they come up with is a Vision Statement that

*Each case is as different as the communities that implemented them, but they all work toward the same goal: managing change for the betterment of community and landscape alike.*

is taking a healthier Revelstoke into the twenty-first century. Residents from Canmore, Alberta come together to figure out how to manage development in a town that happens to be in the middle of an important wildlife corridor on the edge of Banff National Park. An active public uses several tools, including a Growth Management Strategy and conservation easements, to make the Bow Valley a better place to live for both humans and wildlife. The chapter on the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area in northeastern B.C. provides a concrete example of how to bring conservationists, politicians and industrialists together to preserve wildlife and wilderness values without compromising the health of the region's economy. Following the case studies is a discussion on the important lessons these communities have learned during their respective visioning processes. It is no surprise to learn that, although the stories are different, the lessons are often the same.

It is stories like these, rich with creativity and foresight, that will protect what is left of North America's wildlife and wild places.



# PART ONE: CASE STUDIES

**Revelstoke, British Columbia**

**Canmore, Alberta**

**Muskwa-Kechika, British Columbia**

*“In the early ‘90s when things weren’t very good, there was a sort of doom and gloom (in Revelstoke). We needed to have some kind of focus on what was good and positive, and what we wanted our community to be.”*

Gail Bernacki  
former town councillor



**Revelstoke, British Columbia**

# REVELSTOKE:

## Re-visioning the Capital of Canada's Alps

**R**evelstoke's Vision Statement is a prominent fixture in the town once known as the capital of Canada's alps. It adorns the walls of the council chambers and serves as the introduction to city planning documents and project proposals. At first glance it is nothing more than black ink on a sheet of crisp, white paper.

Examined closely, it becomes a map by which Revelstoke has found its way in the tumultuous landscape of late-twentieth century British Columbia.

Nestled in the majestic Columbia Valley, between the snow-capped peaks of the Selkirk and Monashee mountain ranges an hour west of the Continental Divide, Revelstoke retains much of its natural charm. In the spring, waves of migrating birds settle on nearby wetlands, either to nest and raise their young or, depending on the species, to rest on the long journey north. Long, warm summers boast beautiful flower gardens that decorate the yards of well-kept heritage homes. Autumns are bountiful and pleasant, once luring Native groups in search of spawning salmon and ripe huckleberries. But winter brought these visits to an abrupt end, for the snows are deep around Revelstoke, the avalanches many and perilous.

The snow, now famous throughout the skiing world, still falls by the ton, and the avalanches still roar unhindered from the heavens, but they have become boons, not busts, to a community trying to re-imagine itself in the wake of drastic economic change. Modern Revelstoke, population 8,000, faces the same challenges that confront many other mountain towns in the interior of British Columbia. It has witnessed a recent downturn in what was primarily a resource-based economy. Mines and mills were closed, large infrastructure projects were completed, and the railway was modernized, leaving Revelstoke in the throes of social, economic and environmental chaos.

"In the early '90s when things weren't very good, there was a sort of doom and gloom (in Revelstoke)," recalls former town councilor Gail Bernacki. "We needed to have some kind of focus on what was good and positive, and what we wanted our community to be."



So, in 1991, community leaders and citizens of Revelstoke initiated a vision-setting process that they hoped would guide the town sustainably into the twenty-first century. The result was an articulated statement of values, a Vision Statement that defined Revelstoke's multi-year commitment to community building, economic development and

environmental integrity, and gave its citizens a renewed sense of self-determination.

### Re-visioning a Community in Transition

Revelstoke was established in 1899 as a Columbia Mountains midpoint for the Canadian Pacific Railway. It flourished as a lumber and mining town in the early years, enjoying steady growth during the first half of the twentieth century—until the Columbia River Treaty, signed in 1965, changed Revelstoke forever. The treaty resulted in several major construction projects, including the Mica Hydroelectric Dam, the Revelstoke Dam, and the Keenleyside Dam at Castlegar, that created a host of well-paying jobs in the region, which in turn boosted the local economy. But as these projects came to a close, Revelstoke's boom vanished as quickly as it came. In the early 1980s, with the most productive agricultural and forestry land in the valley flooded by the Keenleyside Dam, and mines and sawmills closing, Revelstoke went bust. The unemployment rate soared, the population plummeted, and Revelstoke suffered through a plague of social and economic problems the likes of which it had never seen.

By 1985, local politicians and community leaders recognized that the people of Revelstoke had to take control of their own destiny and define a new direction for the town, despite the fact no one had ever done anything like it before. "At the time we did this, there wasn't any information out there on visioning and how to do it," said Doug Weir, Revelstoke's economic development commissioner. "We would've been much faster if we had some guidelines for the process."

Opinions differed about which way to turn. Some citizens felt that Revelstoke should court the pulp-and-paper industry and secure a pulp mill that would provide jobs and

drive the economy. Others felt that the burgeoning tourism industry was the right direction. Some even wanted to try both. To involve the entire community in the search for direction, then-Mayor Geoffrey Battersby wrote personal letters to individual citizens, inviting them to serve on a committee that would help develop a vision for the future of Revelstoke. This brought together a vision committee with a diverse mix of perspectives. Members ranged from professionals in the fields of biology and business to environmentalists, social activists, and educators. In particular, Revelstoke boasts a large number of provincial and regional district offices, including the British Columbia ministries of forests, health, transportation, and highways, as well as Parks Canada, offices that all provided consultants who helped to inform decisions made at the local level.

Despite their obvious differences, committee members shared a common set of values as well as a desire to mitigate the negative consequences associated with the mega-projects of the past. Historically, Revelstoke has proven to be resilient and self-reliant in the face of economic adversity. Cindy Pearce, staff coordinator for the Minister's Advisory Committee on Land-Use Planning (MAC), which was formed after Revelstoke's Vision Statement was written, believes this is a result of Revelstoke's geographic and economic isolation from other major centers. "The community does not automatically trust anyone from outside its borders," Pearce said. "They take total responsibility for what goes on here, and they take responsibility to know best."

The vision committee persevered through two years of brainstorming sessions and workshops, coming up with a series of draft vision statements that involved and reflected the values of the entire community, not just the usual decision makers.

"Participation is always a challenge," said Jim Cook, program administrator of the Okanagan University College and an active participant in the MAC process that followed the visioning process. "Making sure that you're representing all of the citizens is a pretty tricky task, particularly the disadvantaged ones who, traditionally, don't participate in that type of exercise. I think we managed that."

Bruce McLellan, a well-respected wildlife habitat ecologist



Revelstoke Chamber of Commerce

who works for the B.C. Forest Service and alongside Parks Canada, informed the MAC committee on environmental issues affecting the region surrounding Revelstoke. He agrees that ensuring such broad-based representation, if not participation, wasn't easy. From his perspective, people didn't always see eye to eye, and not everyone was equally involved in the process.

"In Revelstoke, we have two national parks and a Parks [Canada] office. There are many employees who have lived their whole lives and respective careers in national parks. Because of that, they have a different view of how the world should unfold than people who work in the logging industry. You've got two opposed cultures living in one town."

Despite these challenges, Revelstoke's vision committee stayed the course. The group recognized the importance of open and civil dialogue among a broad spectrum of participants, and of a process that would use the best available

## *Revelstoke Vision*

*Revelstoke will be a leader in achieving a sustainable community by balancing environmental, social and economic values within a local, regional and global context.*

*Building on its rich heritage and natural beauty, this historic mountain community will pursue quality and excellence. Revelstoke will be seen as vibrant, healthy, clean, hospitable, resilient and forward-thinking. It will be committed to exercising its rights with respect to decisions affecting the North Columbia Mountain Region.*

*Community priorities include: opportunities for youth; economic growth and stability; environmental citizenship; personal safety and security; a responsible and caring social support system; a first-class education system; local access to life-long learning, spiritual and cultural values; and diverse forms of recreation.*

*All residents and visitors shall have access to the opportunities afforded by this community.*

May 10, 1994  
Revelstoke City Council  
Mayor Shelby Harvey

information to arrive at consensus-based decisions. While not every citizen in the community may have been personally involved with the community visioning process, the outcome was widely accepted as representative of the community as a whole. The vision committee consulted with the entire community in the summer of 1993 to solicit feedback on the prepared draft of the vision statement. Finally, in November 1993, two years after its genesis, the vision committee presented Revelstoke's community vision statement to the public.

## **True Community Ownership**

Revelstoke has had several opportunities to test drive its vision statement. One of the first presented itself in 1992, while the visioning process was still underway. A significant tract of land north of Revelstoke, Tree Farm License (TFL) #55, came up for sale. Hoping to claim ownership of its forest resources, secure a better future for local industry, and improve forestry practices in the area, Revelstoke proposed the idea of bidding on the southern portion of the land. The community considered the motion at a local referendum, recognizing that this unique opportunity was consistent with the values expressed in the community's developing vision. The answer was an overwhelming yes.

"The referendum attracted a 70 per cent voter turnout, and garnered a 70 per cent 'yes' vote," said Battersby. "You're lucky to get 60 per cent out to a general election. This just shows what kind of support we had."

By early 1993, in an unprecedented move, the community acquired a portion of the land, secured tenure of the license, and created a community-owned corporation to administer the newly designated TFL #56. Revelstoke established the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation (RCFC) as a limited company, operating it in partnership with three local sawmills that helped finance the bid.

The project has been a booming economic success. Bob Clarke, general manager of the RCFC, boasted that the "RCFC has generated a net profit every year since its inception." With its profits, the RCFC funds research and development into responsible silviculture techniques and the implementation of value-added practices among local operators. TFL #56 also provides substantial social and environmental benefits to the community. Residents and visitors use the land, which is important wildlife habitat for grizzly bears and a local herd of mountain caribou, for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities. These diverse uses, as well as the TFL's proximity to popular Mount Revelstoke and Glacier national parks, have encouraged the RCFC to use innovative forestry practices such as helicopter logging. RCFC's commitment to balancing the need to operate a profitable business while respecting the natural capabilities of the land has made it a model for sustainable forestry practices.

*"The community does not automatically trust anyone from outside its borders. They take total responsibility for what goes on here, and they take responsibility to know best."*

- Cindy Pearce,  
Staff Coordinator, MAC

But not everyone is satisfied with the RCFC's performance. Some feel it has simply preserved the same forestry practices that let down the community in the past, to the detriment of more diverse economic and community-based interests. Francis Maltby, a long-term resident of Revelstoke and an ardent environmentalist, is a vigilant observer of the forestry industry and a vocal proponent of wider environmental and social values in the community. He remains cautious about local government and its ties to the forest industry.

"Ever since the RCFC (was founded) we pay inordinate homage to the forest industry," said Maltby. "Basically, city council is a forestry council overwhelmingly beholden to whatever the forest industry needs."

Maltby's requests for public access to information and decision making within the RCFC so far have been frustrated. Although this closed-door approach may be consistent with business or industry, he says it causes suspicion among residents and is not acceptable for local government.

Despite Maltby's criticism, the economic benefits of the project have proven significant, much of which Mayor Battersby said is due to the work of Doug Weir. But Weir recognizes the equally important roles of both environmental and social values. Much of the emphasis in implementing Revelstoke's vision "over the last 15 years has been directed to the economic side," Weir said. "It's obviously time for social and environmental concerns to be addressed."

That "time" came in the mid-1990s. An alarmingly high bear mortality rate in the area surrounding Revelstoke prompted a group of local citizens to form a bear management committee. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, the committee developed the Bear Awareness Program, a series of strategies aimed at reducing the number of bears destroyed or relocated because of human-bear conflicts.

In 1996 the committee hired Debby Robinson, now Bear Awareness Program coordinator and the town's bear manager, to educate citizens about bear-proofing their property and, eventually, the entire town. The education component has

worked, though she says the biggest challenge is generating community-wide compliance regarding garbage disposal and containment.

“There is good support for what the bear program is doing now, but it’s been a gradual process,” Robinson said. “My title as bear manager should really be changed to human manager.” She does believe her presence in the community has helped reduce the number of bears destroyed every year. Citizens are now more tolerant, she said, less afraid of bears, and more likely to contact the Bear Aware Hotline rather than conservation officers when a bear appears.

The numbers are the best indication the program is working: Bear management kills have dropped from a high of 33 in 1994 to only four in 1998. Robinson believes the awareness campaign, championed by local businesses, schools and residents, is largely responsible for the reduced number of bear complaints in and around Revelstoke.

*The numbers are the best indication  
the program is working: Bear  
management kills have dropped  
from a high of 33 in 1994  
to only four in 1998.*

### **Taking the Vision to the Top**

Revelstoke’s community vision states that Revelstoke “will be seen as healthy, clean ... [and] will be committed to exercising its rights with respect to decisions affecting the North Columbia Mountain Region.” Some of those decisions, however, are made in Victoria, B.C.’s provincial capital, far away from Revelstoke and its engaged citizenry.

In the summer of 1992, the B.C. government announced new safe drinking water legislation that ordered the chlorination of surface streams throughout British Columbia. The community, proud of its pristine water, banded together and refused to implement the new legislation. In response to Revelstoke’s unanimous and rather rebellious stand, the provincial government amended its legislation, granting Revelstoke an exemption that recognized its watershed as clean and unfettered.

This wasn’t the last time Revelstoke took on the provincial government. While Revelstoke conceived and implemented its community vision process, the B.C. government launched a provincial land-use planning initiative led by the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE). Begun in 1992, this highly technical commission of provincial experts attempted to consolidate resource extraction and other

land values across the region into a single management strategy that would then develop regional land-use plans. But the CORE plan, announced in 1995, elicited wide-spread criticism from the community, illustrating the failure of nonparticipatory processes.

In the end, Revelstoke rejected the Kootenay Boundary Land-Use Plan, which came out of the CORE process, because many in the community felt it failed to reflect the wishes of Revelstoke citizens in terms of forestry economics—the CORE model would have reduced Annual Allowable Cuts by 40 per cent, which would have meant lost jobs and another economic downturn for Revelstoke. Paradoxically, many of Revelstoke’s citizens also were concerned that the CORE plan didn’t account for environmental concerns associated with the preservation of old growth habitat for mountain caribou.

“We wanted the ministry to allow us to come up with an alternative plan,” said Mayor Battersby.

This cry did not go unheard. As a result of Revelstoke’s communal displeasure, the B.C. Minister of Forests endorsed the creation of the Minister’s Advisory Committee on Land-Use Planning (MAC). It was an opportunity for Revelstoke to develop a home-grown solution to land-use planning by developing acceptable maps and guidelines that would work for both the forestry industry and the rest of the community. Guided by local experts, MAC members came up with a set of recommendations, including only a modest reduction in Annual Allowable Cuts. The B.C. government has yet to rule on the matter, but MAC members hope the province will adopt their recommendations as a special subset of the Kootenay Boundary Land-Use Plan—one that was developed by and for the people of Revelstoke.

### **From the Environment to the Community**

Social values, and the promotion of those values within a community, are closely linked to the economic and environmental qualities of a community, and they often occur as a result of community initiatives directed at economic or environmental concerns. But the social implications of these initiatives are often hard to measure.

Revelstoke has been a community in transition for more than a decade. Jim Cook, Okanagan University College’s program administrator, witnessed the transformation of Revelstoke from an economy based primarily on resource extraction to a more diversified one. He explained that as Revelstoke’s economy expanded and changed, the level of education required by workers increased: “We needed to be able to address that [need for] training fairly quickly.”

In 1995, another community initiative, the Revelstoke Community Skills Centre, attempted to address this need at the local level. Revelstoke created an education centre in part-

nership with the Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC). Founded in 1988, the CFDC is a non-profit, community-based agency that uses a \$3.5 million revolving loan fund to assist and enhance community-based small-business and social initiatives. The skills centre works with local industries and small businesses to develop programs for technical skills enhancement and re-training. It offers educational opportunities to the entire community, including forest workers, small businesses, social assistance recipients and high school students.

“That’s another place where we took control of our own



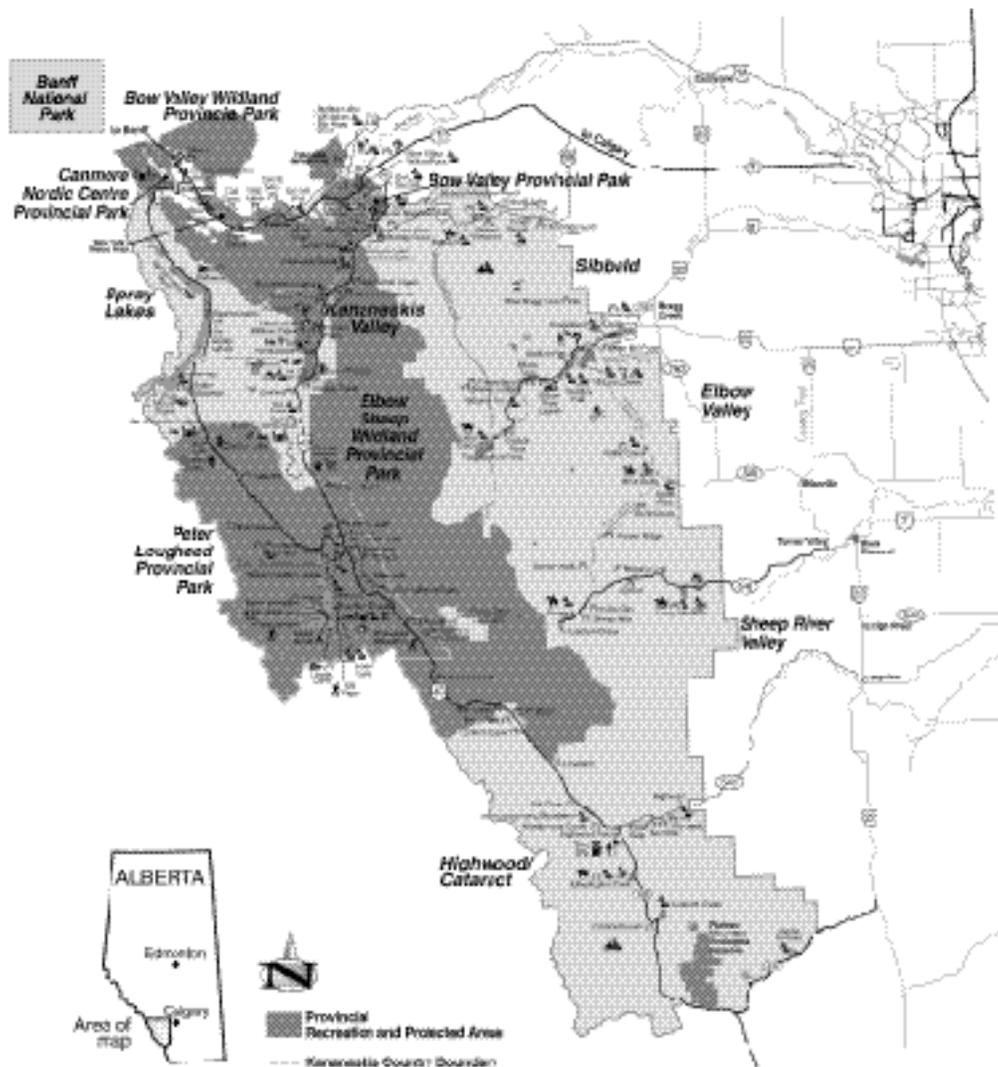
Bear Asight

that this remote mountain town has done for itself in the past decade—an uplifted economy that is less dependent on resource extraction and government-sponsored mega-projects; a thriving, no-nuisance bear population; a more cohesive community—and all that it can do in the future.

destiny,” said former councillor Bernacki, who was involved with the creation of the Skills Centre. “We created a skills centre that is a model for the province. It does it better than any one else. Why? Because we made it do what we wanted.”

The skills centre, then, is more than just another successful community initiative in Revelstoke. It stands as a symbol for all

*In many ways, Canmore's struggle to achieve a balance between development and conservation serves as a microcosm for the challenges faced by many communities in the Y2Y region.*



**Canmore, Alberta**

# CANMORE:

## A Study in CORRIDORS and COMPROMISE

**K**arsten Heuer knows a thing or two about wildlife corridors and conservation.

Heuer, a seasonal backcountry warden in Banff National Park, recently completed the Yellowstone to Yukon Walk for Wildlands, an epic journey that involved hiking, skiing, canoeing and horseback riding 3,400 kilometres of the Rocky Mountains, from Yellowstone

National Park in Wyoming to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory. During his trek Heuer encountered all that symbolizes the future of our remaining wildlands—national parks and wilderness areas divided by fences, railways and highways, and plenty of wildlife, from wolves to wolverines and everything in between. On most days, Heuer either saw grizzly bears or evidence of grizzlies, leading him to dub the wilderness he traveled through the “Geography of Hope.”

Heuer took more than 100 breaks to speak with local residents in communities along the way about the importance of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), a bold and visionary initiative forwarded by scientists, economists, and more than 200 conservation groups in Canada and the US. One of the communities Heuer spoke in was Canmore, his home. Canmore sits low in the Bow Valley, a key ecological component of the greater Rocky Mountain ecosystem threatened by continued development. The Bow Valley cradles much of the region’s montane habitat, critical for supporting a vast diversity of mammal and bird species.

“The Bow Valley is a major movement corridor and an important link between critical winter and summer habitat, one of only three east-west pinch points in the Canadian Rockies that allow wildlife to move from one north-south corridor to the other in search of suitable food and mates,” says Heuer. “It also serves as a vital linkage corridor for large mammals traveling between core protected areas, Kananaskis Country and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park to the south and Banff and Jasper national parks to the north.”

Heuer knows Canmore is a key component of the Y2Y vision. A community of 10,000 residents, Canmore is undergoing rapid population growth as a result of a decade of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational expansion. In many ways, Canmore’s struggle to achieve a balance between



development and conservation serves as a microcosm for the challenges faced by many communities in the Y2Y region. It is also a good example of a community striving to protect the ecological integrity of the Bow Valley while maintaining the quality of life that attracted its residents to the area in the first place.

### A Diamond in the Rough

Like diamonds, Canmore was born of coal and pressure. The Bow Valley was nothing but wilderness until the late 1800s, when the Canadian Pacific Railway pushed west from the fur trade settlement of Calgary. Traders and railway workers left the prairies and foothills behind to explore farther and farther into the precious montane of the Bow Valley, valuable habitat to the grizzly bears, elk and wolves that lived there. But the wide, flat valley bottom was also an ideal place for a railroad; that, and an abundance of fresh, clean water, led to the settlement of Canmore in 1883. Thick, black seams of high-quality coal soon were discovered nearby, turning Canmore into a primary coal supplier for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Locomotives stopped in Canmore before making the big push west through the Rocky Mountains, to Banff, Golden, Rogers Pass and Revelstoke. In less than a decade Canmore’s population rose from virtually zero to 450 people.

After this early boom, Canmore avoided international attention—any attention at all really—for more than a century. Few people outside the coal industry or the railway ever came to Canmore, except perhaps the odd sled-dog racer or absent-minded tourist who forgot to fill up with gas in Calgary. Canmore Mines Ltd. was the town’s major employer for nearly 80 years. In 1969 the mine was sold to an American company, but when coal prices plummeted the mines gradually shut down. When the last shaft was closed for good in 1979, Canmore was little more than a ghost town.

Then the entire world came to Canmore. When Calgary won its bid to host the 1988 Winter Olympics, Canmore was chosen as the site of the Nordic skiing and biathlon events. The construction of the Canmore Nordic Centre prefaced the flooding of the Bow Valley with thousands of sports fans and athletes. The resulting international exposure turned this

sleepy little coal town into a boom town. All of a sudden Canmore, just a 15-minute drive from world-famous Banff Townsite and a 1.5-hour drive from the international airport in Calgary, became a magnet for developers and tourists. Ten years later the population of Canmore hit 10,000, enough to give it the dubious honour of being a city should its resistant residents ever decide to call it that.

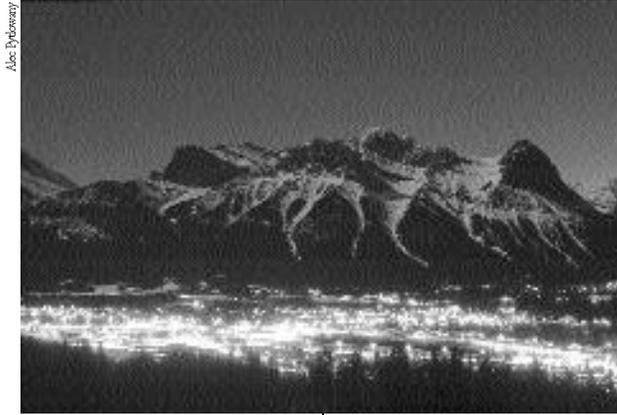
“Very few people even knew that Canmore existed before the Olympics,” said Canmore Mayor Ron Casey, who has witnessed the town change over the 26 years he has lived there. “All of a sudden, these huge vistas were being broadcast around the world. We never looked back.”

The pressures were enormous. Almost overnight Canmore became an ideal mountain recreation area and resort haven for both local and international tourists. The potential for international prestige and huge investment returns prompted resort and condo developers to eye Canmore as the next Vail or Aspen. In 1989 Three Sisters Resorts, now called Destination Resorts Inc., purchased 2,500 acres of land on the south side of the valley, just east of the Canmore Nordic Centre. Two years after the 1988 Olympics, as the demand for housing and tourist accommodations skyrocketed, Three Sisters came forward with a \$1.5 billion development proposal for the land. Council accepted the proposal and began subdividing the land for development. The proposal drastically altered the landscape of the valley and effectively doubled the population, a move that put enormous economic, environmental and social pressure on the small community.

“The Council was very pro-development,” said Gareth Thomson, who sat on Canmore’s Town Council from 1992 to 1995. “It was during the transition from the old Canmore to the new. They could have sent more discouraging signals than they did. But in ‘89 and ‘90 they said, ‘Come on in.’”

Not everyone welcomed the possibility of huge commercial and tourism development. In fact, as former Mayor Bert Dyck remembers, “There was significant polarization between those who were developing and those who wanted to see greater controls put on development.” Long-term residents, who wished the developers would just go away, felt as if they were living in a town full of strangers.

At the same time a considerable amount of new information, primarily scientific research about the Bow Valley’s wildlife populations, began to emerge. Faced with the idea that further development would threaten the survival of many of



the valley’s wildlife species, public sentiment shifted toward conserving these ecological values and controlling development. Citizens banded together to form local environmental groups that protested developments such as the Three Sisters proposal.

But it was too late. The deals had been done, the contracts signed. Canmore had already become one of the fastest growing communities

in Canada. And because most of the proposed development was slated for private land, there was little the community could do to discourage it.

Or so it seemed.

## Legacy of the NRCB

Community hostility toward development came to a head when Three Sisters proposed to include in its project a resort development at the east end of the parcel, on a piece of land in Wind Valley. This valley is a key ecological component of the Bow Valley system. It links important habitat in Banff National Park to habitat in Kananaskis Country to the south, providing one of only a few low-elevation montane movement corridors in the southern Canadian Rockies. It is also a favourite hiking area used almost exclusively by locals. The scale of the development, the ecological significance of the area, and the outcry from concerned citizens prompted the Alberta government to send the entire proposal to a series of public hearing before the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) in 1992.

The Three Sisters proposal certainly fit under the NRCB umbrella. The NRCB was set up by the Alberta government as a forum for Albertans to participate in the review of development projects that have a large potential impact on natural resources in the area. Projects reviewed under the NRCB Act include those from the forest, recreation and tourism, and mining industries, as well as water management projects and projects referred to the NRCB by the provincial cabinet. The NRCB decides if these projects are in the public interest; in making this decision it considers social, economic and environmental effects.

Recognizing the significance of the Bow Valley to the future of Alberta’s tourism industry, this newly appointed environmental watchdog for the province reviewed the project on the grounds that its impact would affect the Alberta economy far beyond Canmore. Local environmental groups, such as the Bow Corridor Organization for Responsible Development

(BowCORD), and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and the Alpine Club of Canada, attended the hearings as intervenors. Together, they argued that this resort mega-project would destroy important habitat and sever an irreplaceable movement corridor used regularly by grizzlies, black bears, cougars, wolves, wolverines, bighorn sheep and elk. The hearing dragged on for almost a month, much longer than anyone had expected. The bill, which the NRCB Act stipulates must be paid by the applicant, exceeded \$5 million.

In November 1992 the NRCB gave Three Sisters Resorts the benefit of the doubt and allowed them to proceed with the planned development, with one exception: It must avoid the Wind Valley area because of its ecological significance. (The area was later made into a protected natural area). Part of the decision against Three Sisters involved compensation. In return for giving up their plans for Wind Valley, Three Sisters received future considerations for other pieces of land in the Bow Valley, including an area near the Nordic Centre that the town later leased back and turned into a park.

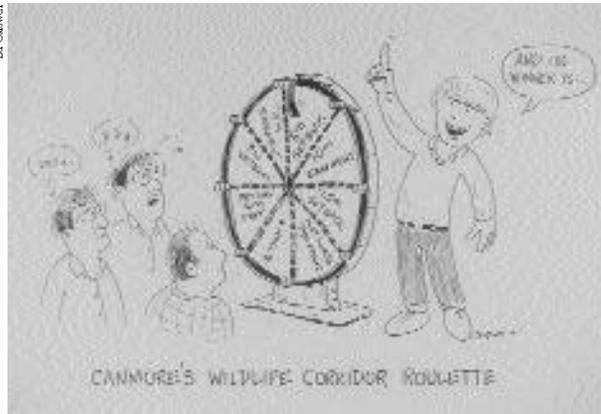
"It was a win some-lose some situation," said Thomson, a conservationist and former councillor who would have liked to see the entire proposal turned down. "We tried to convince the NRCB that any large-scale development in the Bow Valley was not in the interest of Albertans. But we didn't win that."

The NRCB hearings also created a volatile arena for debate. Although the hearing provided a forum for intervening groups to express their concerns regarding development, by design the process was adversarial. It only served to aggravate a them-and-us attitude throughout the valley.

"It did what public hearings always do," said Felicity Edwards, a professional facilitator who would later act as a negotiator during the development of Canmore's Growth Management Strategy. "It polarized public opinion."

Despite the fact the NRCB process encouraged animosity and favoured development, the hearing benefited the community in two significant ways. First, the Wind Valley ruling recognized the importance of wildlife corridors, a notion that had not yet been widely incorporated into local or provincial decision making. Second, because the adversarial hearing process was unpleasant for both the developer and the community, it provided the impetus to seek more cooperative means of arriving at agreements over future development in the valley. These two themes have combined to form the basis of community environmental stewardship in Canmore over the past decade.

Ed Carmel



## Wildlife Corridors

In 1992, Bert Dyck was elected into his first term as Mayor of Canmore. Dyck had lived and hiked in the valley for over 20 years, and he understood the seasonal migration of wildlife. For this reason he recognized the importance of designating and preserving wildlife corridors. "Originally, wildlife didn't follow corridors," he said. "They just moved up and

down the valley because there was enough open landscape. Corridors are something that has been forced on animals by man's development."

With the support of the mayor, the Wildlife Corridor Task Force, made up of biologists throughout the valley and chaired by Councilor Gareth Thomson, was established to solve the wildlife corridor problem in the valley by facilitating cooperation between Parks Canada, the Town of Canmore, the Municipal District of Bighorn, and the provincial government. The task force produced maps of the valley, delineating the sensitive habitat areas and wildlife corridors that ran directly through Canmore and across lands slated for development. The map was clear: If development proceeded as planned, remaining wildlife corridors would be severed, restricting wildlife to islands of habitat and threatening their survival.

Recognizing that the scenic and natural qualities of their property had economic value, developers worked with Town Council to set aside portions of their land for wildlife corridors. However, the developers would only consider such measures if they were convinced that similar efforts would be made to preserve corridors on federal and provincial lands surrounding private lands. Private developers and landowners saw no benefit to protecting their portion of a corridor if the government would not do the same.

The NRCB decision ignited a process that began with the Wildlife Corridor Task Force. "When the NRCB issued its report on the Three Sisters project, there was a need identified for an overall planning and development coordination mechanism for the provincial lands within the Bow Corridor," said David Nielson, director of the Bow Region for the Natural Resources Service of Alberta Environment (AENR).

That mechanism was the establishment of the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG), of which Nielson is chair. Established in 1995, this multi-jurisdictional body consists of senior planning personnel from every level of government: the Municipal District of Bighorn, the towns of Banff and Canmore, Alberta Environment, Alberta Economic Development, Alberta Resource Development, Alberta Public

Lands and Banff National Park. Informed by the work of the Wildlife Corridor Task Force and other research, the role of the group is to identify wildlife movement corridors from Banff National Park to Wind Valley and ultimately into Kananaskis Country.

In an attempt to do so, BCEAG released two definitive documents in 1997 and 1999 that consolidate all of the current information about wildlife corridors and habitat patches in the Bow Valley. *Wildlife Corridor and Habitat Patch Guidelines* and its accompanying *Guidelines for Human Use Within Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Patches* provide detailed descriptions of existing wildlife corridors in the valley and prescribe approaches to coordinated management of human use activities within them. Every jurisdictional body that manages land within the Bow Valley and is represented on BCEAG is in the process of implementing these guidelines. Although these guidelines do not apply to private land or the developers who control that land, they are intended to inform private land decisions within the Bow Valley as well. It is hoped that by acknowledging a map and some universally accepted guidelines, functional wildlife corridors will be maintained in perpetuity.

## Growth Management Committee

High growth rates not only exert pressure on the surrounding environment, they also threaten the economic and social fabric of a community, even one as dynamic and progressive as Canmore. "Too much growth changes the whole character and flavour of your community," former Mayor Dyck said. "It causes turbulence. You don't know people anymore, there's an increase in crime, increase in vandalism, lack of loyalty to community, its networks and systems of help."

The 1992 NRCB decision taught the community that, like it or not, continued growth was here to stay. A petition asking Canmore's town council to look closely at how growth would affect the community landed on Mayor Dyck's desk in the spring of 1993. Sensitive to the growth issues facing Canmore, Council took the question of growth management back to the community.

"We decided that a community consultation on growth management [was the best way] to find some consensus on how, where and at what pace we should grow," Dyck said.

By early 1994 the Growth Management Committee (GMC) had been formed. Council itself declined to participate in the GMC, electing instead to leave the question in the

Tourism: Canmore-Kananaskis



hands of committee members who would fairly represent the diverse interests in the community. Three Sisters Resorts, Canmore developers' associations, and Stone Creek Properties, another major developer in Canmore, represented development interests. Representing environmental interests were groups such as BowCORD, the Alpine Club of Canada and the Bow Valley Riding Association. There were also representatives from Kananaskis Country and Canmore's Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Bow Valley Women's Resource Centre, Trailminders, the Canmore Seniors' Association, and the 8th and 8th River Road Neighbourhood Association.

Felicity Edwards, one of two consultants hired by the Town of Canmore to facilitate the process, believes the committee represented the entire community. "People felt their interests were going to be affected by this, so we created an environment in which they could create groups [of 25 like-minded individuals] through which their interests would be heard."

*"We decided that a community consultation on growth management [was the best way] to find some consensus on how, where and at what pace we should grow,"*

- Bert Dyck,  
former Canmore mayor

In total, the GMC consisted of 41 individuals representing 21 different interest groups. "We did a head count one night [in an attempt to assess the breadth of representation across the committee]," said Edwards. "Of the 7,000 people who lived in the community at the time, we reckoned that we represented 5,900 of them—and the remainder consisted mostly of children. The group became very confident that they represented almost every person in some way."

The committee was charged with an enormous task—develop a Growth Management Strategy (GMS) for Canmore that would address the environmental, economic and social issues associated with growth, and help guide future decisions related to development.

"It put environmental groups and the development groups in the same room for the first time," present mayor Ron Casey said. "It put the Chamber of Commerce, construction people and recreation users together, and for the first time we had to talk about what we wanted for this town."

At first the room seemed much too small. Unpleasant memories of the NRCB hearings were still fresh in the minds of GMC members, particularly the developers. Tom Atkinson, a Three Sisters representative on the committee, admitted the resort developer came into the growth management process with "great apprehension." For this reason, facilitators went out of their way to create a climate of civil and open dialogue.

"We insisted the process be inclusive, be created by the participants themselves, be full of timelines, and be conducted so that when the group reaches agreement, there must be consensus," said Edwards.

Consensus was important if the GMS was to have any lasting influence on decision making in Canmore. The consensus approach was beneficial in many ways: It encouraged open and honest discussion, helped reveal common goals and shared interests, and as a result, significantly diffused past negative relationships among committee members. Then-Mayor Dyck was astonished at how effectively the consensus approach soothed previously hostile relationships. "People who had never talked to each other, who had only read about each other's positions and shot missiles in the newspaper, were suddenly at the table negotiating issues. Surprisingly, some ended up liking one another."

Where agreement could not be achieved, the consensus approach forced the committee to consider and gain an appreciation for diverse viewpoints. "If you were an entrenched environmentalist, or an entrenched developer, or an entrenched social advocate," explained Casey, "you had to either convince the others that you were right, which was unlikely, or you had to take into consideration other views and feelings."

Brenda Davison, a teacher in Canmore and a member of BowCORD at the time, sat on the committee as a representative of the Canadian Rockies School Division. She supported the environmental position as well as the social platform of education, and said the consensus approach was lengthy: "It took a lot longer than we thought it would take. Consensus is an unwieldy way to do it, but it is a fair way."

## **A Strategy for Growth Management**

After eleven months of negotiation the committee produced a rough guideline for growth management. Building on the previous work of AEP biologists such as Jon Jorgenson, and the Wildlife Corridor Task Force, the GMC created a common map of the valley. It preceded the efforts of BCEAG by six years and identified environmentally significant areas

within the valley. Gareth Thomson applauded the success of the growth management process in persuading "even the developers to draw up a map and agree upon, as the wording goes, 'areas that shall remain forever green.' "

Other terms of reference were also necessary to allow the committee to discuss the various social, economic, and environmental issues associated with growth management. So much information was necessary to make sound decisions that the GMC organized information sessions for GMC members. Experts came in and talked about indicators associated with growth management, such as social statistics on crime and education levels, economic forecasts on real estate and commercial markets, and environmental concerns dealing with water quality and waste disposal. These information gathering sessions flagged the need for an organized, accessible public resource centre that could collate information regarding the Bow Valley. In response, the GMC proposed the formation of a valley-wide Biosphere Institute that collects, consolidates and, where possible, facilitates economic, environmental and social research in the valley.

This desire to seek a balance between urban growth and

*It "wasn't a win or a loss for anyone in particular. It was just a very good consensus document."*

Ron Casey,  
Canmore Mayor

maintaining ecological integrity drove the GMC to identify a reasonable annual growth rate for Canmore. The committee felt that in order to produce a prescriptive strategy for growth management, it had to set a threshold rate of growth that recognized the current demand for new housing development while sustaining Canmore's sense of community and maintaining the integrity of surrounding natural communities.

In 1992, the year preceding the growth management process, Canmore's census measured growth at 10.5 per cent, at that time the highest historical figure to date. But growth is a double-edged sword. Let it proceed uncontrolled and it can have catastrophic social, environmental and economic impacts on a community. Control it too much and the cost of living skyrockets, making it a community in which most people can ill afford to live.

"We were growing so fast we couldn't get the schools on line," said Brenda Davison, who represented the Canadian Rockies School Division. "Another concern was that if we restricted growth the school division wouldn't be able to find

teachers because it would cost too much to live here.”

The GMC fiercely debated an appropriate amount of growth. In the end, the committee agreed it would target a six per cent growth rate by 1999. Current Mayor Ron Casey wasn't optimistic that the 1999 census would reveal a six per cent growth rate, but it did. He's still not convinced, however, that the GMS was solely responsible. Whatever the reasons, he is still confident that Canmore has successfully slowed growth and avoided the high growth rates of the past. “You might not ever be able to sustain the six per cent, but you hold it as a goal.”

To ensure a long-term commitment to managing growth in Canmore, the committee recommended the establishment of a Thresholds and Monitoring Committee (TMC) to monitor the progress of the implementation of the strategy in decision making. Scheduled to convene annually, the TMC provides analysis and recommendations on the state of growth management in Canmore and the Bow Valley.

Currently, the TMC is producing a series of threshold indicators and criteria for monitoring changes in levels of growth throughout the valley. These thresholds—levels of crime, statistics on education, real estate prices, number of development permits, measurements of water quality, waste disposal, and information regarding wildlife movements—will then serve as regular indicators of the state of the valley to provide decision makers with useful information regarding growth levels in and around Canmore.

Committed to ensuring that the growth management

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Brenda Davison  
Canadian Rockies School Division Representative

process be inclusive and earn the support of the whole community, the GMC “decided they wanted the GMS to be discussed by a wider audience,” said Edwards. They took the draft guidelines to the public. Over a period of weeks, the committee held several open houses, presenting the group's strategy, answering questions, and discussing the issues with community members.

More than two years after the process began, and after gaining the support of the entire community, the committee completed its task. In the fall of 1995, Canmore's Town

Council adopted the Growth Management Strategy as a policy document.

It “wasn't a win or a loss for anyone in particular,” declared present Mayor Casey. “It was just a very good consensus document.”

## **Bow Valley Wildland Park**

As work proceeded on the Growth Management Strategy, Gareth Thomson recognized the inherent weakness in trying to protect land already slated for development. Drawing from his work as a councillor and chair of the Wildlife Corridor Task Force, he believed that the answer to habitat conservation in the Bow Valley lay not in reaction but in pro-active initiatives.

“The traditional game in Canmore up to then had been to react to proposed developments and try to mitigate the impacts,” Thomson said. “This reactive game is a game in which the decision makers make a compromised decision and you only lose half of what the developer wanted.”

In late 1995, Thomson and other community members met with environmental lawyer Harvey Locke, an active member of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and a staunch supporter of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and CPAWS staff member Wendy Francis. With an understanding of the Bow Valley as an integral part of the larger Rocky Mountain ecosystem, the group launched a campaign to protect Crown land in the Bow Valley under the provincial Special Places 2000 initiative. Special Places was a strategy to complete the provincial protected areas system by preserving representative examples of each of the province's six natural regions and 20 sub-regions by the year 2000. The program attempted to balance preservation with three other cornerstone goals—heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation, and tourism and economic development—and relied on Albertans' direct input about how to best preserve the natural heritage features of their province. Thomson and his colleagues saw it as an opportunity to protect what was left of the Bow Valley.

Together they nominated a large parcel of public land that spanned the Bow Valley from the eastern boundary of Banff National Park to Highway 40. Surrounded by Banff National Park to the west, Kananaskis Country to the south, the Stoney Indian Reserve to the east, and the Ghost River Wilderness Area to the north, the proposed park included the Bow Flats Natural Area, Bow Valley Provincial Park, the Canmore Flats Natural Area, the Wind Valley Natural Area, and the Yamnuska Natural Area, as well as 46,000 acres of unprotected land.

“We saw an opportunity to nominate an area for protection, to take a big landscape approach and try to protect what is left of this valley,” Thomson said.

The Special Places 2000 negotiation process relied on the

establishment of a Local Coordinating Committee (LCC). Thomson and others made several presentations to community groups, which resulted in a series of letters of support that eventually persuaded Alberta's minister of environment to create an LCC composed of local stakeholders from the Municipal District of Bighorn that surrounds Canmore, the rock industry that operates in the Bow Valley, the Town of Canmore, recreationists and environmentalists. After lengthy deliberations, the LCC came to a consensual agreement that recognized the ecological significance of the proposed Bow Valley protected area and its importance to the greater community.

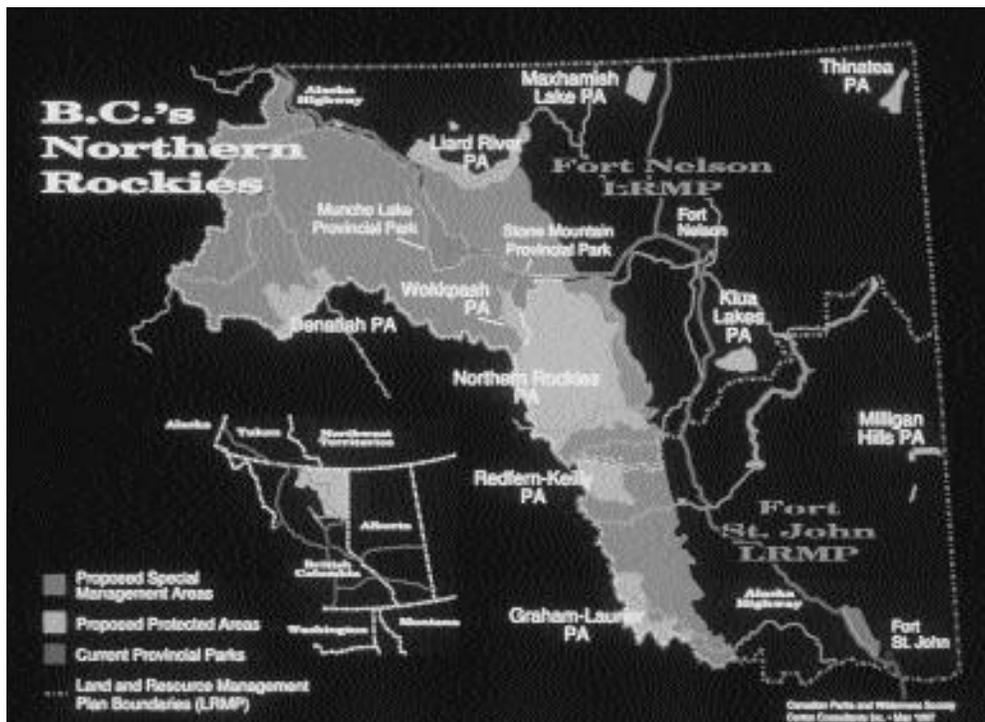
In December 1998, three years after the project was initiated, the provincial government announced the creation of the Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park, a new park that included 41,000 acres of previously unprotected land, plus the expansion of existing protected areas by approximately 5,000 acres. "It

was a heck of a nice Christmas present," said Thomson.

Few communities in North America have been able to slow, much less stop, the loss of habitat to development. But Canmore stands out as a community that has made an effort to mitigate the impact of development with the understanding that responsible stewardship of its environmental, economic and social values is in their long-term best interest. Whether or not these efforts will keep wildlife corridors open and enough critical habitat intact has yet to be seen. But the effort Canmore's citizens have made over the past 10 years to maintain ecological integrity in the face of growth have far surpassed anything attempted elsewhere. However, it may yet be the tip of a very large iceberg. Hopefully what Canmore has attempted will be refined by other communities, such as Invermere, B.C. and Crowsnest Pass, Alberta, that face the same challenges.

*“As far as large mammal diversity and an intact ecosystem goes,  
there’s no place like the Northern Rockies outside Africa.  
It is a global treasure.”*

- Dr. Bruce McLellan,  
British Columbia Forest Service



**Muskwa-Kechika Management Area**

# MUSKWA-KECHIKA:

Birth of a vision

**T**he Muskwa-Kechika is defined by rivers. Pronounced (MUSK-quah ke-CHEE-kah), it is a

matrix of some 50 roadless watersheds in the far northeast corner of British Columbia. Each watershed—the Toad, Frog and Rabbit; the Muskwa, Prophet and Sikanni Chief; the Kechika and Gataga, to name but a few—is more than 5,000 hectares in size. Together they form what locals call the Big E (for “Big Ecosystem”), at eight million hectares (20 million acres) one of the largest remnants of untouched wilderness in North America. It is roughly half of this wild landscape that conservationists, politicians and industrialists recently asked the B.C. government to turn into the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area (MKMA). This area, larger than Switzerland, is a creative new approach to conservation-based land management that expands the “community” in community stewardship into a grand design dwarfed only by the social and ecological significance of this wild section of northeastern B.C.

The Kechika River watershed, at 2.2 million undeveloped hectares (5 million acres), is the heart of the MKMA. Known locally as “the muddy river,” the Kechika is a B.C. heritage river of primary import, treasured for its ecological importance to the wilderness of the province and its cultural significance to B.C.’s First Nations peoples. The headwaters of the Kechika, which means “big windy” in Sikanni, lie in the remote northern Rocky Mountain trench, about 400 kilometres north of Mackenzie, B.C. It flows north between the Cassiar Mountains and the northern portion of the Rocky Mountains, through forests of spruce and pine, groves of aspen and cottonwood, before draining into the Liard River just north of the MKMA.

The Muskwa, on the other hand, defines the eastern boundary of the MKMA west of Fort Nelson. It joins the Prophet and Sikanni Chief rivers to form the Fort Nelson River, which meets the waters of the Kechika in the Liard River before continuing north into the Mackenzie River and ending, finally, in the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean, just north of the Arctic Circle. At an elevation of 300 metres, the



Muskwa marks the lowest point of the Alaska Highway; in the spring it often rises more than 20 feet and floods the surrounding countryside.

Together these watersheds support the largest intact predator-prey system in North America. They connect highlands to valley bottoms, alpine headwaters to lowland marshes, east to west and north to south. More importantly, they provide critical habitat and movement corridors for the most abundant and diverse population of large, wild mammals on the continent. Four thousand caribou, 15,000 elk, 22,000 moose, 5,000 mountain goats and 7,000 Stone’s sheep share the MKMA with the only Plains bison population in B.C. Carnivores—wolves, coyotes,

wolverines, cougars and more than 3,000 black and grizzly bears—provide balance. This significance, bound together by a monumental act of foresight and cooperation by conservationists, industrialists and recreationists, has secured the MKMA a legacy as “the Serengeti of the North.”

“As far as large mammal diversity and an intact ecosystem goes, there’s no place like the Northern Rockies outside Africa,” Dr. Bruce McLellan told *Beautiful British Columbia* magazine shortly before the B.C. government officially established the MKMA. “It is a global treasure.”

It isn’t necessary to visit the northern Canadian Rockies to understand the MKMA’s singularity—it’s there in the name. It’s not a national or provincial park or a wilderness area. It is all of these things and none, a unique *management* area contrived by a diverse group of stakeholders that applied the theoretical framework of conservation biology. Together, they created a landscape in which humans and wildlife can not only coexist but thrive in an ecological repository of global significance.

“To my knowledge, this has never happened before anywhere in the world,” said John Cashore, a member of B.C.’s Legislative Assembly (MLA) and former B.C. Minister of Environment who now chairs the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board. “A modern land-use plan has emerged from the grassroots and been endorsed at the provincial level without modification—it’s a ‘Made in the North’ approach that honours the importance of ecological integrity continuing in a healthy state for years to come.”

## The First Step

The Muskwa and Kechika rivers have defined the northern Rockies for millennia, but it wasn't until the early 1970s that the local hunting fraternity banded together to express its concern over the future of the northern Rockies. Together they called themselves CONCERN (Consider Our Northern Communities and Resources Now), and they put forward a paper about preserving what is now the MKMA. Twenty years later George Smith, national conservation director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), and Wayne Sawchuk, founder of the Chetwynd Environmental Society, voiced similar concerns and launched a campaign to keep the area in its natural state forever.

"When people like George Smith got finished with the Tatshenshini [campaign], they looked around to see what they were going to do next," said Brian Churchill, contract coordinator for the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board (MKAB) and one of the key negotiators in the MKMA process. "They said, 'Holy smokes, here's the northern Rockies.' "

The problem in the Muskwa-Kechika area wasn't necessarily people; it was roads. Before 1992 the only folks other than Native Canadians who ventured away from the Alaska Highway and into the backcountry were hardcore hunters and backpackers looking for trophy sheep and solitude. But the industries of extraction were laying down more miles of road every year, making large tracts of wilderness increasingly available to anyone with a combustible engine. According to the B.C. government, the Muskwa-Kechika borders an area that has one of the richest oil and gas reserves in the province. In recent years, total oil and gas revenues have exceeded \$200 million annually. Permanent employment in the oil and gas sector accounts for almost 20 per cent of the local economy. The central and western areas of the Muskwa-Kechika have significant quantities of metallic and non-metallic resources; mining companies have established exploration projects and extract sand and gravel on a small scale. Forty per cent of the Fort Nelson economy is driven by the forest sector, which accounts for almost 800 jobs. These industries were important to the local economy but, left unchecked, they threatened to undermine the ecological integrity of the area. So Smith teamed with Sawchuk, a 38-year-old trapper, guide and conservationist who has lived in Chetwynd, B.C. his whole life, to develop a strategy that would protect what they consider to be one of the most important wilderness and wildlife areas on the planet.

"This is 'the Big E.' This is the place where we have the opportunity to do it right," Smith told a reporter in 1994, two years after they had launched the campaign. "This is eight million hectares of primordial wilderness as the explorers saw it. Not doing everything we can to protect it would be irresponsible."

"We were pioneers, but we didn't know it," said Sawchuk, who remembers the days when there were no roads

in the valleys around Chetwynd, south of the MKMA.

"Now almost every valley is roaded and logged. That's why I absolutely feel we have to do something."

One of the first things Smith and Sawchuk did was bring together a community of groups interested in the conservation of the northern Rockies, from the B.C. Wildlife Federation, the Federation of B.C. Naturalists, the Sierra Club, and the Chetwynd Environmental Society (of which Sawchuk is president) to the Fort Ware Indian Band, the Northern B.C. Guides Association, the Outdoor Recreation Club of B.C., and the B.C. Trappers Association. Although the members of this ad hoc community were from all over B.C., their goal was the same—protect the Big E. Their first task was to craft a mission statement that everyone could live with, something simple yet profound that defined, in just a few words, the reason they had met in the first place. The result was a vision that laid the groundwork for a new era of conservation: "To work towards a permanent, sustainable wildlife and wilderness arrangement for Canada's Northern Rockies and surrounding wilderness areas: one that will stand the test of time, forever."

*"To my knowledge, this has never happened before anywhere in the world. A modern land-use plan has emerged from the grassroots and been endorsed at the provincial level without modification—it's a 'Made in the North' approach that honours the importance of ecological integrity continuing in a healthy state for years to come."*

- John Cashore,  
member of British Columbia's Legislative Assembly

In 1994, with all of this in mind, Smith and Sawchuk led groups of biologists, environmentalists and media people into the northern Rockies to generate support for their vision. Among the visitors were Harvey Locke, then national president of CPAWS, and a staunch supporter of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative; Stuart Elgie, a lawyer with the Sierra Legal Defence Fund; Ric Careless and Donna Reel with World Wildlife Fund; and numerous writers and photographers committed to bringing the Muskwa-Kechika to

the forefront of the region's environmental agenda.

"The Big E article in [CPAWS's] *Borealis* magazine was probably the first public acknowledgement of that area," Churchill said. "From then on the catchwords at the [Land and Resource Management Plan] tables were 'globally significant wilderness and wildlife values, globally significant oil and gas values.'"

Smith and Sawchuk wanted to avoid the battleground mentality that had dominated the fight between environmentalists and the logging industry over the Clayoquot Sound, on B.C.'s west coast. Instead, Smith saw this as an opportunity to negotiate a peaceful compromise that would protect the landscape over the long term, while at the same time satisfying the various stakeholders—miners, loggers, hunters, and conservationists alike.

"This is not an environment-versus-development, win-or-lose battle," Smith wrote in the Winter 1996 issue of *Beautiful British Columbia* magazine. "There is enough land and enough time, and there are enough committed individuals to work out a reasonable plan of action."

Smith was right. While he and Sawchuk took into the B.C. backcountry anyone who cared to go, the provincial government imposed a two-year restriction on new vehicle access in the area. The reason? Officials wanted to work out the details of a new planning initiative that would eventually put the Muskwa-Kechika area on the international conservation map.

## Legacy of the LRMPs

In the early 1990s, the B.C. government recognized the need for a fundamental change in its approach to land-use planning across the province. It established a strategic planning process for all of B.C.'s Crown land in an effort to ensure a sustainable future for the province's environment, economy and communities. As a result, Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) were set up across the province. These LRMPs were developed primarily by local people who rely on the land and its resources in their daily lives. Planning tables were made up of representatives from industry; conservation; recreation; local, provincial and federal governments; and other public interest groups, such as independent contractors, non-commercial hunters, and guide/outfitters. LRMPs are now being implemented from Vancouver Island to the Rocky Mountains and everywhere in between, covering almost 80 per cent of the B.C. landscape.

Yellowknife to Yukon Conservation Initiative



The Muskwa-Kechika area was not itself an LRMP. Instead, it lay on the border of two of the province's biggest LRMPs: Fort St. John and Fort Nelson. The Fort St. John LRMP is one of the largest sub-regional land use plans in B.C. As its name suggests, it includes the Town of Fort St. John. It straddles the Alaska Highway and covers 4.6 million hectares (11.5 million acres) south of the

MKMA—five per cent of the provincial land base, or almost one-and-a-half times the size of Vancouver Island. The land east of the highway is flat, part of the extensive Alberta Plateau that extends east past the Alberta-B.C. boundary. West of the highway the terrain becomes increasingly rugged and inaccessible. It is much of this area—approximately 648,000 hectares (1.3 million acres)—that overlaps with the MKMA.

The Fort Nelson LRMP is even bigger. It covers approximately 10 per cent of the entire province, twice as big as the Fort St. John LRMP directly to the south and almost three times the size of Vancouver Island. This diverse combination of plateau foothills and mountains encompasses the entire northeast corner of B.C. and includes the Town of Fort Nelson and the settlements of Prophet River, Toad River, Muncho Lake and Coal River. The economy is dominated by forestry, oil and gas, government jobs and tourism, all of which provide livelihoods for more than 5,500 inhabitants. The Fort Nelson LRMP is also central to the MKMA—approximately 3.8 million hectares (9.7 million acres) of this area make up 83 per cent of the MKMA.

This made for a complex matrix of stakeholders, organizations and government institutions from two different LRMPs that had to come together to figure out how best to preserve the long-term ecological integrity of the Muskwa-Kechika area without significantly compromising the region's economy. For four years representatives of these groups essentially worked as two teams toward the same goal. Each planning table played by the same rules as set out by the provincial government: Take as long as you need to reach full consensus on the final planning document, but protect the area without crippling the economy.

"The importance of the government's role cannot be understated," said CPAWS's Smith. "They allowed the process to happen by setting up the LRMPs, and then they legislated both funding and protection into existence. That doesn't exist anywhere else in the world."

To begin, those involved in the decision-making process had to be shown what was at stake, said Barry Holland, who

represented the North Peace Rod and Gun Club in the Muskwa-Kechika process. Members of the Fort St. John LRMP, many of whom had never really seen the northern Rockies, were flown over the planning area by a local charter company as part of the LRMP process. The flight, he said, was crucial in allowing them to understand what they were trying to manage.

“The landmark impression on those people was the fact that once you go west of the Alaska Highway, all of a sudden the oil and gas activity stops, the logging blocks stop, and from there on it looks like it probably has for the last 1,000 years. That was probably the most enlightening thing for the people who didn't really understand what was out there, what the difference was between wilderness areas and what development can really do. It helped them to visualize what could happen if we keep pushing further and further into the mountains. It was probably the turning point of their philosophy and their acceptance of the fact that it is different out there.”

The exposure worked. By 1997 both planning tables had completed LRMPs that included a variety of Resource Management Zones (RMZs), from high-intensity enhanced resource development zones and agricultural/settlement areas to special management areas and protected areas. Of particular import to Smith and Sawchuk was the unanimous decision at both planning tables to approve unique special management zones that allowed for both conservation and sustainable resource extraction. Both the Fort St. John and Fort Nelson LRMPs agreed that the Muskwa-Kechika was unique and should be managed as a special management area that would allow resource development to continue, at the same time recognizing, accommodating and protecting important wildlife and environmental values. The B.C. government accepted the “Made in the North” decision without debate, and in October 1997, legislated the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area into existence.

“Without exaggeration, we are announcing the most important and far-reaching land-use decision of its kind in North America,” said then-Premier Glen Clark at a news conference. “There are few places like it left on Earth. What a gift we are presenting to the world.”

That gift was the 4.4-million-hectare (11-million-acre) Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, what the B.C. government is calling “one of North America's last true wildernesses

Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative



south of the 60th parallel.” Core protected areas have been connected by transition areas and buffer zones that allow for a number of sustainable human activities. Eleven new protected areas, including the 645,000-hectare (1.3-million-acre) Northern Rocky Mountains Park, permanently protect some one million hectares of old-growth forest, alpine lakes, waterfalls and hot

springs, and major wetlands. Special Management Zones (SMZs) totaling more than three million hectares surround these islands of preservation, maintaining wilderness and wildlife habitat while allowing some ecologically sensitive logging, mining, and oil and gas operations. Such a management plan balances resource management with conservation, making it an excellent example of how interests that were once in competition—loggers and conservationists, hunters and environmentalists, everybody and government—can find a way to co-exist on the land.

“Imagine, you're a large group of stakeholders sitting around the table and you represent a variety of interests; the fact is, you look at the other people at the table and you probably don't agree with them very much. However, there's one thing you all do agree on and that is you really get pissed off when governments make decisions that impact this part of the world. Therefore you're united in your belief that it's better that solutions be made in the North than that they be made elsewhere,” said Cashore. “Basically what we said was, ‘If you don't come up with a plan, we'll do it for you.’ “The interests were addressed and we were delighted with what they came up with.”

Part of the decision involved setting up the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board (MKAB) to oversee implementation of the plan. The MKAB conducts semi-annual reviews to evaluate how well plan objectives have been achieved and the degree to which local strategic plans have been implemented. The MKAB also oversees an annual \$2 million trust fund that supports government spending on planning initiatives and special projects in the MKMA. These projects might include anything from enhancing wildlife populations and habitat and conducting research into wildlife biology to supporting planning initiatives for resource development activities.

Agreeing on such a progressive, ground-breaking initiative wasn't easy. Because the process was 100 per cent consensual, every participant had to compromise. “After years of negotia-

tions it became clear to all table members that a compromise solution would have to be reached," Sawchuk wrote in an overview of the process. "Although no one's first choice, the two land use plans ... were the best, and perhaps the only, solutions acceptable to all."

### **Building Consensus Across the Board**

While "community" may seem like an odd term to use for an area that is as big as some countries, it's important to note that all of the stakeholders involved in the decision-making process had a stake in the outcome of the decisions made at the LRMPs. Loggers or hunters, drillers or hikers, each group of stakeholders had a vested interest in what happened to the Muskwa-Kechika. In the end, they all had a say in the matter, for the decision-making process was by consensus. It forced stakeholders to listen to what other interest groups had to say and then bend their own positions to accommodate the interests of others. In this way the decision that came out the far end of the pipe was accepted by everyone, conservationist and industrialist alike. This made the plan not only implementable, but sustainable over the long term, which is, after all, what community stewardship is all about.

"The planning process did a great job in accommodating the diverse interests at the table," said Ross Peck, a guide-fitter representative at the Fort Nelson planning table and vice chair of the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board. "The consensus-based decision-making process was important, and although all sectors had to give on original positions, considerable effort was expended to find accommodating solutions."

One of the driving forces behind the whole process was the oil and gas sector. In fact, Brian Churchill said the "attitude of the oil and gas industry was instrumental" in the formation and approval of the MKMA. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) characterized the process as a "sound and innovative partnership between industry, government and communities to ensure balanced and effective development of the Muskwa-Kechika area."

"The Muskwa-Kechika Management Plan provides an internationally significant model for integrating the management of protected areas (where no industrial development will be allowed) and special management areas (where industrial development will be allowed). The plan is also a model of cooperation that will ensure the economic and environmental advancement of British Columbia's northeastern region," continued Churchill.

"I think we've become far more understanding of what the sensitive wildlife issues are in the area," said Mobil Oil's Bill Parsons, in the 1994 Borealis article. "We think there are solutions to that. We think we can work together.... There are going to be some (issues) that probably won't be resolved, but

*"Without exaggeration, we are announcing the most important and far-reaching land-use decision of its kind in North America. There are few places like it left on Earth. What a gift we are presenting to the world."*

Glen Clark,  
former Premier of British Columbia

we're going to resolve most of it to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders."

But solutions require funding. Part of the government's commitment to the project was to match—dollar-for-dollar, up to a maximum of \$400,000—money donated by non-governmental organizations to a special MK trust fund. So far, the only donors have been from the oil and gas sector—Alliance Pipeline, Canadian Hunter, Husky Oil, PetroCanada and Westcoast Energy each have kicked in tens of thousands of dollars, and Amoco donated a large chunk of land.

The forestry industry also supported the creation of the MKMA—as long as its economic interests were respected and accommodated. "We support the MK only on the basis that it is established as envisioned and approved at the Fort St. John LRMP," said David Menzies of Canadian Forest Products, the forestry sector representative at the Fort St. John LRMP. "That is, that the primary goal of the special management zones would be to allow activity in a way that protects long-term environmental goals, with a major emphasis on access controls. The MK was supported by the forestry sector as part of a total LRMP which would allow more intensive activity in other areas.

"The primary concern was the critical wildlife areas, maintaining visual quality and biodiversity, and removing access following harvesting to return areas to a natural state as soon as possible. Industrial development was not fully accommodated, but as a forestry sector representative I was satisfied that if the LRMP intent was followed through for the MK, reasonable activities could eventually take place."

The only sector that found the process intolerable was the mining sector. In March 1995, conservation groups called for a combined protected area/special management zone designation for the Muskwa-Kechika area. The mining industry expressed concern that such a model would seriously hurt the mining economy in the area. Industry representatives approached the premier, who promptly deferred to the LRMPs to sort it out. The mining sector continued to

participate in the LRMP process until the very end, negotiating hard and agreeing to the MK model. It even received a certain number of concessions from the other members of the group. But by the time the planning tables reported with their “consensus-based” LRMPs two years later, the mining sector had pulled out, complaining that the consensus wasn’t a consensus at all, but a sham that saw dissenters ignored and the process pushed through. The B.C. and Yukon Chamber of Mines has since pulled out of every LRMP in the province, refusing to participate in a process that it feels is unfair.

“We are very critical of the LRMP process,” said Bruce McKnight, executive director of the B.C. Yukon Chamber of Mines. “The LRMPs were not, in our view, [based on consensus]. They claim to be, and all the official literature coming out of LUCO (the Land Use Coordinating Office) will say that it was a consensus-based plan, but we believe that it is fraudulent. In fact, there was no consensus—consensus was redefined to mean everybody that they didn’t agree with was out.”

“Mining should not be included in the land-use planning process because it does not fit, it’s a hidden treasure, it’s very site specific. And it takes up a tiny portion of the land area of the province.”

Many participants were disappointed that the mining sector pulled out of the process at such a late date, long after it had given the nod to the protected areas. “They [the mining sector] were represented at the table by the Ministry of Mines and by members of their association,” Churchill said. “Their concern is that any regulation inhibits them, and that’s true. But they did agree to the protected areas. The mining industry as a whole, particularly the hawks [explorers] in the mining industry, is struggling with the vision of special management. They have since come out and said that special management is just a closet protected area.”

“We were led to believe at the table that the mining community agreed with the process,” said CPAWS’s George Smith. “However, it’s my belief that for political reasons or for whatever reasons they chose afterwards to attack the LRMPs as if they were not represented. That’s not true.

“There were a number of changes made along the way to suit the mining representatives who were there, some very critical ones. We made these changes and then they claimed that they were not involved. This was very difficult.”

While Smith feels the process was fair, he did lament the fact First Nations groups were not more involved. “I think in general there were fair opportunities for most people to get involved. As far as processes go it was far better than most, although First Nations people were not represented during the LRMPs.”

There are nine First Nations who traditionally reside within the Fort Nelson and Fort St. John LRMPs, and all of

*The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) characterized the process as a “sound and innovative partnership between industry, government and communities to ensure balanced and effective development of the Muskwa-Kechika area.”*

them were invited to the planning tables. But they decided to abstain from the discussions, largely for political reasons, said former Minister of Environment John Cashore. Although First Nations were not directly involved in the LRMP process, they were kept informed of progress made through personal contacts, formal communications, and monthly information packages.

“B.C. was becoming involved with settling land claims, and because a process had been set up whereby land claims could be settled through the B.C. Treaty Commission, which would lead to negotiations between the province and First Nations and the federal government, First Nations would not participate when it came to LRMPs,” Cashore said. “They felt that they would be consenting to scenarios that would compromise the types of settlements they wanted.”

While they were not willing to participate in the Fort Nelson LRMP process, the Kaska Dena did sign a letter of understanding with the provincial government outlining their willingness to participate in the implementation of the plan once it had been accepted. The Kaska Dena’s traditional lands that fall within the Muskwa-Kechika area are called Dena Kéyieh, which means “people’s land” in the Kaska Dena language. The letter of understanding ensures that the Kaska Dena and British Columbia government will work cooperatively to implement the land use planning objectives established in the Fort Nelson LRMP. More than that, it was a formal acceptance by the Kaska Dena of all that had gone on in their absence.

“That written letter of understanding means the Kaska Dena are prepared to embrace the outcome of the LRMP, which set up the MKAB that would have administrative responsibility for the \$2 million annual provincial [trust] fund,” Cashore said.

It wasn’t long before CPAWS’ Smith got his wish. The Kaska now hold four seats on the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board and are active participants in the process.

## From MKMA to Y2Y

No one really knows how the MKMA will work out in the long term. It is, in the words of Churchill, a “globally significant experiment” that has yet to yield long-term results. “Even those people that had a clear vision really don’t know how this whole thing is gonna come out in the wash. It’ll depend on the recognition and support it gets internationally, both in terms of feedback to the government and in terms of worldwide resources, dollar resources, research resources, intelligence resources being applied here.”

Some people already have doubts. David Menzies, who represents the forestry sector on the MKAB, said the success or failure of the MKMA rests on whether the objectives and strategies that were developed at the LRMPs are implemented.

“We’ll have to wait and see how it works out for a couple of years. The real challenge is to be able interpret the intent of the compromised objectives and strategies...and implement them without the original stakeholders feeling like they are getting shafted.”

“The MK is an experiment, but it already has some troubling signs—members of the (MK) advisory board who were not involved in the LRMPs have a different vision for this area, as indicated by their continual reference to it as one big park. No significant activity has occurred in this area since proclamation [sic] due to significant onerous additional planning requirements.”

Others are more confident the experiment will yield results that everyone at the table will be able to accept. But it will require continued cooperation, mutual understanding, and a lot of hard work.

“The challenge for us at the (Muskwa-Kechika Advisory) Board will be to carry forward the spirit of cooperation that was established during the formation of the MK into the long-term management of the area,” said PetroCanada’s Dave Stuart, who represents the oil and gas industry on the MKAB. “We in the oil and gas industry recognize the wilderness value of large parts of the MK area, and at the same time we know there are areas where we can extract the potential oil and gas resource in an environmentally responsible fashion.”

If the optimists are right and everything does go according to plan, the MKMA could herald the dawn of a new era in land-use planning, when conservationists, recreationists and industrialists work together to create large-scale management areas that allow for both sustainable resource development and the preservation of functional wildlife habitat and wilderness. In



Wayne Sawchuk

the light of such hope, it’s no surprise the MKMA is being compared to the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), a bold and visionary initiative forwarded by scientists, economists and more than 200 conservation groups in Canada and the United States. Y2Y hopes to establish corridors and transition areas that would connect isolated

parks and wilderness reserves in the Rockies into a swath of functional wildlife habitat that stretches north from Yellowstone National Park into Canada’s Yukon Territory. Perhaps the most important aspect of the vision is that this model will accommodate both humans and wildlife, which is exactly what Muskwa-Kechika has done in northeastern B.C.

“The principles of conservation biology upon which Y2Y rests were applied to the northern Rockies,” Smith said. “The concept of Y2Y is compatible with virtually everything that came out of MK.”

Can the same model that was born in the north be relocated farther south? Perhaps. But it won’t be easy.

“The pie has already been divided in the southern Rockies,” Churchill said. “The [Fort Nelson and Fort St. John] LRMPs were in the very fortunate position of not having to roll the map back [because of excessive development]. They had the opportunity to look ahead and establish land-use patterns for the north.”

“It’s going to be a real challenge to try to regain the values that have been lost in some parts of the Rocky Mountains,” said non-commercial hunter Barry Holland. “We’re lucky enough that we got in ahead of the game up here before we had too much impact on the land. When you have more disturbance in the land base you’re gonna have more entrenched interest groups with their own agendas. It will be more difficult to get consensus.”

If it does work out, the MKMA will play a key role as a reservoir of biodiversity and abundance that will feed the Rockies as far south as Yellowstone National Park—as long as connectivity is maintained all the way down the spine of the Rockies.

The potential success of the MKMA bodes well not only for the grizzlies and wolves that live at the northern terminus of North America’s grandest mountain range. It will also empower those visionaries who hope to apply the same model to an area more than 10 times the size of the MKMA—the Yellowstone to Yukon region.

*“If you have an engaged, active, aggressive, and involved citizenry,  
they will keep you on course.”*

- Bert Dyck,  
former Mayor of Canmore, Alberta

Wayne Swetlock





# PART TWO: LESSONS LEARNED

**Foster Public Participation**

**Build on Local Assets**

**Encourage Strong Community Leaders**

**Gather and Share Quality Information**

**Foster Cooperation and Dialogue**

**Create New Approaches**

**Implement Your Visions**

# LESSONS LEARNED

These stories indicate that community stewardship is a relatively new concept in Canada's Rocky Mountains, but that didn't stop the citizens profiled in these case studies from taking bold steps that redefined what it means to be a community. When Revelstoke hit rock bottom during an economic bust in the late 1980s, active community members hammered out a Vision Statement and a practical action plan—even though they had never heard of such a thing before. In Canmore, increased tourism and resort development have meant enormous growth in the Bow Valley over the past decade. Unsatisfied with the provincial decision-making process, Canmore took conservation into its own hands, creating a growth management strategy and other community stewardship initiatives. Farther north, in the northeast corner of British Columbia, conservationists, recreationists, industrialists and government officials came together to secure the long-term integrity of one of the last great chunks of wilderness left on the North American continent, the 4.4 million hectare Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.

Each of these stories is unique, but the lessons learned in these distinct communities reflects the fact that there are certain elements common to effective community stewardship initiatives. The citizens of Revelstoke set up their own small timber operation, Canmore residents designated wildlife corridors within the town's boundaries, and the stakeholders from the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area came up with a unique land management system to create one of the largest protected areas in North America. But in each case, the same tools were used—creative thinking, strong leaders, public participation, information sharing, and cooperation and dialogue. What follows is an exploration of the lessons that were learned from three different community experiences. Read them over and take home with you what is relevant to your community.

## Foster Public Participation

All the stories profiled here have at their heart one common element—public participation. In every case, a diverse range of citizens and stakeholders who were not normally decision makers became involved in the process to ensure their voices and opinions were heard.

In a small community such as Revelstoke, committed volunteers and visible members of the community are often the people at the centre of local initiatives. Individuals such as Francis Maltby and Bruce McLellan both represented various

special interest groups, and their participation in community processes has affected their outcomes. Although theirs is not always the opinion of the majority, it is important to recognize that different individuals possess equally valid viewpoints and the ability to make valuable contributions.

"The reality of small-town dynamics is that power and influence drive a permanent stake into the status quo," Maltby said. He said he expresses his opinion freely and often to emphasize the importance of community-wide participation as a balance, or counter-balance, to the influence of the town's leaders.

It is necessary for decision makers and community members alike to recognize their relative strengths in terms of representing the greater community. The involvement of the entire Revelstoke community, and not just a privileged few, has ensured that decision-making processes remain honest and representative.

The same has been true in Canmore. Successful conservation initiatives require community-wide support and broad participation. "If you have an engaged, active, aggressive, and involved citizenry," said former Mayor Bert Dyck, "they will keep you on course."

Environmental educator and ex-councillor Gareth Thomson agrees. He said an environmentally literate and active public, motivated by keen and savvy grassroots organizers, is the key to affecting decision making. "If you want to ensure the effective management of the Bow Valley, the province cannot do it alone," he said. "They need groups like CPAWS to lobby for strong protection."

Thomson should know. He has been involved in various community-based environmental initiatives both as a councillor and as a private citizen concerned about the fate of the Bow Valley. Thomson and the rest of his CPAWS colleagues were instrumental in having the remaining undeveloped lands around Canmore protected as a wildland park.

In northeastern B.C., the government and the citizenry worked together to hammer out a solution. Although the process used to negotiate the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area into existence was set up by the B.C. government, Brian Churchill, one of the key negotiators, was quick to point out that it was not government driven. It involved a number of public groups and commercial interests, and it was such broad-based local involvement that really made the process work. Once the issue was recognized as important, the government stepped in to provide a framework, and later ratified decisions that were made by and for the people.

Broad-based representation also ensured that no one segment of the population dominated the decision-making process. The more voices that are heard, said Barry Holland, the better the outcome of the process. "You gotta get the people at the table who have a cross-section of interests of the land base. I could see it develop into a problem if you have a person sitting on the land-use planning group who represented a special interest and who suffered from tunnel vision."

Public participation is essential to the success of community-based initiatives. It not only results in positive, well-thought-out decisions, it also means whatever decisions are reached will be more acceptable to the community as a whole. This makes them not only more popular but easier to implement and, in the long run, more effective.

## Build on Local Assets

Every community is a unique collection of economic, environmental and social assets. For a community to grow together, it must identify these assets and define its shared values. Once this is done, a community can articulate its goals and implement strategies that make them not only possible, but achievable. This is the principle of community stewardship that has informed decision making and driven community initiatives in Revelstoke for the past five years.

"Don't skimp on the visioning process," said Jim Cook, an active participant in the MAC process that followed the visioning process. "Take the time to do it right because, although it may seem airy-fairy, it will be the key to everything that follows."

Canmore learned a similar lesson. As development pressures increased in the Bow Valley, the community-based Growth Management Strategy (GMS) became central to the success of conservation. "Environmental sensitivity is not just the purview of mountain communities," former Mayor Dyck said. "People in Regina, Saskatchewan, have similar concerns. You have to frame [community stewardship] around the reality of each particular community, and around the culture of each community."

Similarly, community stewardship can be thought of as a collection of specific community-based economic, environmental and social initiatives that aim to conserve unique social values. Dyck said that what has worked in Canmore will not necessarily work in other communities. Communities must "first be able to articulate their vision, and secondly mobilize [to enact] their vision."



With the creation of the GMS, Canmore took a significant step toward promoting community stewardship. Canmore is now approaching the fifth anniversary of the release of the GMS. Although Canmore has a long way to go to completely realize the vision set out in the strategy, success so far has largely been in terms of creating dialogue among various

stakeholders and engaging active public participation in community decision making.

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area is a "made-in-the-North" solution that relied on the expertise and commitment of local people. All of the stakeholders, whether they were conservationists or loggers, realized the value of this exceptional wilderness area and were willing to commit to a lengthy process that would result in long-term solutions.

But "local" in northeastern B.C., where the population is small and spread out, is different than it is in Revelstoke or Canmore. The MKMA is not a community initiative, it is a regional one. What made it feasible, said Sawchuk, was the manageable size of the planning area over which "local" interests and stakeholders had control.

"If a planning area is too large [as in the Commission on Resources and Environment processes], too many sectors and issues will be encompassed than can successfully be dealt with," Sawchuk wrote in his overview of the process. "If the area is too large and too contentious, 'hired guns' will be brought in from outside as sector representatives. Unlike representatives from the community, these negotiators often tend to have little interest in lasting solutions, but instead firmly 'hold the line,' making consensus difficult to achieve."

So, according to Sawchuk, the appropriate geographical scope is an important consideration if the decision-making process is to be by consensus with the support of local stakeholders.

Public participation allows communities to use local expertise to solve local problems. Those citizens who aren't experts can still have a say in what goes on by supporting (or disagreeing with) those who, because of their respective strengths and qualifications, become more involved. This is much more effective than relying on strangers, who may not have the best interests of your community at heart, to solve problems that will affect you and your community.

## Encourage Strong Community Leaders

Community-based initiatives rarely get off the ground without strong leaders. In Revelstoke, community leaders

played an integral role in promoting innovative and future-oriented ideas and in mobilizing community action. Geoffrey Battersby served as mayor during most of the 1990s. He has received considerable support from the Revelstoke community over the years, which helped initiate the visioning process in 1991 and continues to facilitate its implementation.

“He’s a mayor with a vision,” one resident said. “He’s a charismatic person and he’s a bright guy who influences people.”

Other individuals rose as leaders in the community by virtue of their position and their dedication to community initiatives. Among them were Economic Development Commissioner Doug Weir, Jon Healey, a senior member of the Community Futures Development Corporation, and Gail Bernacki, a particularly active member of city council at the time. Both Weir and Healey were instrumental in generating original support for the community visioning idea. Bernacki has been an active member of the community for many years as a solicitor, a town councilor, and as the chair of numerous community boards and advisory groups.

The Muskwa-Kechika campaign was a big-time initiative that required big-time leaders. George Smith and Wayne Sawchuk initiated the process with a conservation campaign to save the northern Rockies from continued development.

*“Don’t skimp on the visioning process. Take the time to do it right because, although it may seem airy-fairy, it will be the key to everything that follows.”*

- Jim Cook

“I think the integrity of the process was influenced by people such as George (Smith) and Wayne Sawchuk,” former B.C. Minister of Environment John Cashore said. They made sure that “the common good of ensuring that predator-prey relationships remained intact—no matter what.”

Others maintained a strong leadership role throughout the process. Smith points to guide-outfitter Ross Peck, resident hunter Barry Holland, and the oil and gas sector as key players in the creation of the MKMA. “Part of leadership is looking beyond sectorial interest,” said Smith “The oil and gas industry did that.”

Smith also pointed to Dave Porter of the Kaska Dena, whom he called a “visionary and a leader.” Porter, one of four Kaska on the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board, was instrumental in garnering the support of his people and hammering out a deal with the B.C. government.

Community initiatives require public participation, but they also need individual initiative. So don’t be afraid to bring

your ideas to the attention of others, or to push for something that bucks tradition. You’d be surprised how many people think the same way but are afraid to take the leadership role.

## **Gather and Share Quality Information**

One of the best ways to foster community stewardship is to actively promote public access to the best available information. This leads to informed participation and, as a result, good decision making. In Revelstoke, the second chapter in the CORE story provides a perfect example of how access to information can generate community support and quality decision making. The Revelstoke citizens who participated in the Minister’s Advisory Committee (MAC), which dealt with many of the same technical issues as the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE), were not experts in land-use management. Instead, committee members used a team of specialists to inform them about the issues relevant to their task.

Bruce McLellan, a wildlife habitat ecologist, was a member of the technical team. His research on a local population of mountain caribou near Revelstoke revealed to the MAC committee the importance of protecting habitat for this sensitive and unique species. As a result, one MAC recommendation incorporated significant caribou management guidelines into the management plans for the Revelstoke area.

Community support for environmental conservation in Canmore and the Bow Valley stems from broad public awareness of the importance of wildlife corridors. Biological research on wildlife corridors, dating to the early 1990s, has perpetuated a groundswell of further research on regional connectivity and the importance of habitat corridors to wildlife communities throughout the Rocky Mountains. This, also, is the premise behind the vision of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

The widely publicized NRCB decision to curtail development in Wind Valley recognized the importance of wildlife corridors in the Bow Valley. Since then, sensitivity to wildlife movement through the valley has influenced every level of decision making. The establishment of a wildlife corridor map of the valley, the designation of the Bow Valley Wildland Park, and the creation of *Guidelines for Corridors and Habitat Patches* illustrate how science, when shared with local citizens and community groups, can improve decision making.

The establishment of a community information centre such as the Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley (BIBV) is also an important tool for good, broad-based decision making. Making the best-available information available to the public fosters public participation and encourages a diverse number of citizens to contribute their knowledge and opinions to the decision-making process. “Get your science together, and then

get it all under one roof and in a format that everybody can commonly retrieve,” said Dave Nielson, the director of the Bow Region for Alberta Environmental Protection, who supported the establishment of a community information centre and advises other communities to do the same.

Most participants in the MKMA process said scientific information wasn't the only factor in the decision-making process, but it was an important one.

“We wrote in [to the plan] the notion of conservation biology, which is a combination of protected areas and special management areas,” said George Smith, who maintained that a lot of research was brought to the table by government biologists. “There's a lot of science involved, but [the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area] wasn't entirely based on science.”

That information was made readily available, both to those at the tables and to the public in general. This, said John Cashore, is important to anyone involved in a similar process, and will be one of the focuses of a land-use planning symposium that has developed out of the MKMA decision. “I would encourage them to [share information], and pledge cooperation in making information available,” he said. “The whole concept of the symposium is to recognize the importance of interconnectedness and sharing of information and ideas.”

Information, especially scientific information, is the foundation upon which strong environmental and community decisions are made. And collecting it is just the first step; it must be actively shared and made available to the public so citizens can participate in the decision-making process.

## Foster Cooperation and Open Dialogue

In a democracy there are two ways to plan for the future: Fight about it or negotiate it. In 1993, former Canmore Mayor Bert Dyck challenged the Growth Management Committee (GMC) to choose which tack they would take to plan the future of Canmore. “If you take the boxing ring approach, then you know for sure that there's a winner and a loser. If you lose, you could very well lose everything. It is smarter to negotiate and make deals on your future than to fight and not know what your future will be.”

The GMC took his advice, and eventually worked out a Growth Management Strategy that was endorsed by both town council and the public at large. This is not a unique example. The municipal government, industry, and citizen groups in Canmore often talk together about issues to come up with the solution that best represents the wishes of the community.



But it is the Muskwa-Kechika process that best illustrates the need for cooperation and dialogue. With so many disparate interests involved in a consensus-based decision-making process, there was no other way to reach a decision. By fostering dialogue and reaching decisions based on consensus, everyone committed more fully to both the process and the decisions reached. In the end, the relationships built during the process will help to ensure the long-term success of the plan because it has buy-in from almost every sector.

“It was a consensus basis, so over time you had to learn to appreciate and understand the other person's point of view and then come to some kind of resolution that everybody can live with about what you're actually going to do with the land base,” said hunter Barry Holland.

Consensus “meant that all interests had to be accommodated in the final plan. No sector could be marginalized and ignored through a vote, or by any other mechanism,” Sawchuk wrote in his overview.

Ultimately, consensus is impossible unless it is accompanied by compromise, on all sides. As Ross Peck said, the LRMP planning process accommodated everyone's interests: “The consensus-based decision-making process was important, and although all sectors had to give on original positions, considerable effort was expended to find accommodating solutions.”

What made consensus possible was the absence of a binding time limit and the establishment of guidelines by the B.C. government. With unlimited time, stakeholders could work out their differences without feeling pressured to rush into decisions they felt weren't in their best interests. “Essentially,” wrote Sawchuk, “the only way to complete the process was to reach agreement.”

If public participation is the foundation of community stewardship, then cooperation and open dialogue are the cornerstones. Because public participation involves an infinite number of differing opinions, good communication and cooperation are necessary to turn these disparate points of view into a unified and mutually acceptable resolution.

## Create New Approaches

Difficult problems require creative solutions. In Canmore, land development has a long legacy of short-term thinking. “There have been decisions made over many decades in this valley that we have to live with and that we have to honour,” said Dave Nielson. The NRCB decision in 1992 clearly demonstrated to the community that past political

decisions could not be reversed. However, since 1992, community initiatives in Canmore have sought to circumvent assumptions about inevitable development. The growth management process and the campaign that resulted in the establishment of the Bow Valley Wildland Park, both creative new initiatives proposed and developed by community members, demonstrate the significant impact that community-based stewardship can have on decision making at many levels.

And the process never really ends. Gareth Thomson and other community members that were involved in establishing the Bow Valley Wildland Park are now focused on the development and adoption of a management plan for the area. CPAWS is currently lobbying for greater protection, enforcement, and education within many designated park areas, including the Bow Valley Wildland Park. "It's not over when you have a park on paper," Thomson said. "What's the use of having a paper park? It's up to us to make sure that governments live up to their commitments to look after and protect these lands."

Creative solutions can come from every sector of society and all levels of government. The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area (MKMA) might not exist if the B.C. government hadn't developed the LRMP process, a creative new way to develop regional land-use plans with local support.

"The importance of the government's role cannot be understated," said CPAWS's Smith. "They allowed the process to happen by setting up the LRMPs, and then they legislated both funding and protection into existence. That doesn't exist anywhere else in the world."

Once the process was up and working, local stakeholders came up with "special management zones," a new concept that allows limited industrial activity to continue while simultaneously protecting the ecological integrity of the area through strict access controls and other measures. This innovative approach was key to allowing such a varied group of stakeholders with specific agendas to find an agreeable decision based on consensus.

## **Implement Your Visions**

In the end, a vision is only as good as its implementation. Cindy Pearce believes community visioning in Revelstoke "was a really useful and valuable process, but it needs to be implemented into the next steps on a regular basis." But implementation usually requires considerable financial resources, which are all too often in short supply.

"All the ideas in the world won't do any good if you don't have money to make them happen," former Revelstoke Mayor Geoffery Battersby said.

For the past ten years, the Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) has provided much of the funding support for community-based initiatives such as the

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- Barry Holland,  
hunter

Community Skills Centre. However, its emphasis on economic issues limits the role of the CFDC to support projects with other focuses. Fortunately, another source of funding is on the horizon for such projects in Revelstoke. In 1995, the B.C. government established the Columbia Basin Trust Fund (CBTF) to financially support communities suffering the negative impacts left behind by the dam-building rush that followed the 1965 Columbia River Treaty. Revelstoke, for instance, will receive roughly \$200,000 per year for two years to support community-based projects addressing local environmental, economic and social issues in the area. Many grassroots initiatives and community projects in Revelstoke are currently designing proposals to secure funding from the CBTF.

"The priorities [in the environmental arena] are on green stewardship, community-level projects and grassroots environmental education," said Parks Canada's Susan Hall, who is looking to the CBTF to support the Bear Awareness Program. But she foresees major issues arising among competing groups, forcing her to wonder, "How do you choose between watershed monitoring and greenway enhancement?"

Through broad-based cooperation, says council, which has challenged competing groups to come together to identify and prioritize social and environmental needs so it can distribute the money efficiently and effectively, giving Revelstoke the biggest stewardship bang for the buck.

In northeastern B.C., the visionaries of the MKMA used specific tools to ensure their vision became a reality. They established the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board to monitor the management of the area, and encouraged the B.C. government to set up an annual trust fund that helps finance initiatives related to maintaining the integrity of the MKMA.

It is not enough to gather community support for a particular vision. Tools and processes must be developed to allow those visions to become practical realities. Funding mechanisms, advisory boards, strategies, and implementation plans all make it possible to achieve tangible results.

# EPILOGUE

*A Few Words from Margaret Mead*

American anthropologist and acclaimed author Margaret Mead said it best: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

What we find between these pages is evidence that Mead was on the right track.

These stories are not about mega-corporations or national governments imposing their wills arbitrarily on nameless, faceless individuals. Instead, we find local citizens banding together to make their communities better, healthier places to live.

Change, however, comes slowly; it takes commitment and hard work. One of the biggest challenges for the citizens of Revelstoke was that their desire for self-determination and self-governance often flew in the face of regional control over decision making and natural resources, which often made implementing Revelstoke’s vision statement difficult. “The problem with communities having more influence on the (management of) resources is that they don’t legally own the resources,” McLellan said.

But this shouldn’t dissuade residents from getting involved. Former councillor Gail Bernacki recognizes the limited power municipalities have on the regional decision-making process, but she also recognizes the ability of a community to influence what should be regional decisions. “We can’t make any rules or laws about anything outside [Revelstoke], but as citizens living and working here, we can make a lot of noise about what goes on.”

As a community, Revelstoke’s citizens challenged legislation and policies that were being foisted upon them by the provincial government. They refused to chlorinate surface streams because they believed their water was already safe to drink, and they rejected the final CORE plan because it failed

Yukon Conservation Initiative



to represent the values and needs of the community. In both cases, the provincial government backed down and allowed Revelstoke citizens to have a say in the future of their community.

In Canmore, “thoughtful, committed citizens” petitioned the local government to look at the implications of rapid growth. As a result, Canmore

now has a Growth Management Strategy and the tools that were constructed to make it work, including the information-based Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley and the Thresholds and Monitoring Committee. Together, these initiatives have allowed the people of Canmore to control many of the negative impacts of rapid growth that have burdened other communities and mountain environments.

Perhaps most impressive is the story of the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, where the concerns of a few local hunters and two ardent conservationists infected a host of other stakeholders—miners and loggers and roughnecks among them—with something called conservation. Together they worked what many would call a miracle: A 4.4-million hectare special management area that protects one of North America’s wildest and richest natural wildlife sanctuaries south of the 60th parallel. Most incredible of all is the fact it was blessed with consensus by various groups that are traditionally in opposition, and then legislated into existence by the B.C. government.

It’s easy to look back at success and see why the citizens of Revelstoke, Canmore and northeastern B.C. bothered to try to change their respective worlds. They did it because they knew, or at least hoped, they could make a difference. And they did.

Mead, who died in 1978 after having lived a rich life, would have been proud.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead

