

Rocky Mountain Low

How We're Supporting You: CBT's Investment Program

Thanks to its Investment Program, CBT will deliver \$12 million in direct funding benefits to support people and communities in the Basin this year. Established to prudently invest the \$321 million endowment it received from the Province of British Columbia in 1995, the Program invests in Basin-based businesses, seniors care facilities and hydroelectric projects to generate a predictable, sustainable and appreciating income stream to fund CBT's programs and initiatives.

Working with Us

CBT exists to strengthen the well-being of the Columbia Basin and works with the communities of the region to accomplish this. Not all communities are the same, so CBT plays a variety of roles in the region.

Whether at a town meeting or an arts council or a social planning network or having coffee in the kitchen, CBT is interested in meeting and working with the many communities that make up the Columbia Basin.

Four CBT staff work out of each of the Golden, Cranbrook, Nakusp and Castlegar offices. These Community Liaisons are responsible for developing relationships in their home base community and the surrounding area. They help communities access funds and serve as a resource when communities are working through issues and taking action. Connect with us.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT COLUMBIA BASIN TRUST, VISIT WWW.CBT.ORG OR CALL 1 800 505 8998.

Office locations:

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Head Office/ Southwest Basin 300, 445-13th Ave Castlegar, BC 1.800.505.8998 1.250.365.6633 castlegar@cbt.org | Southeast Basin 828D Baker Street Cranbrook, BC 1.800.505.8998 1.250.426.8810 cranbrook@cbt.org | Northeast Basin Box 393, 512 8th Avenue North Golden, BC 1.800.505.8998 1.250.344.7065 golden@cbt.org | Northwest Basin Box 220, 220 Broadway Nakusp, BC 1.800.505.8998 1.250.265.9936 nakusp@cbt.org |
|--|--|---|---|



Photo: Craig Douce

Alberta's once unpopulated and scenic Bow Valley is currently experiencing a disconcerting rise in development and recreation. Can wildlife and recreationalists coexist?

By Amanda Follett

WHEN YOU SHARE recreation trails with large carnivores, it only takes one wrong turn to realize how low you are on the food chain.

Craig and Luwanna Douce were keenly aware of their vulnerability last July when the Canmore, Alberta, couple came face-to-face with a bear while riding the G8 Loop, a popular mountain biking trail on the Bow Valley's northern slopes. On that first hot day of summer, they were soaking their feet in a mountain stream when Luwanna ventured further up the slope to take photos. She reappeared a moment later, backing slowly down the trail, repeating "bear, bear, bear" under her breath.

The large grizzly that lumbered out of the bush toward them had likely encountered bikers on this trail before. These sunny south-facing slopes are not only a popular thoroughfare for wildlife moving between Banff National Park to the west and Kananaskis Country to the east, but high-density housing complexes on the lower benches have pushed trail users and wildlife uncomfortably closer, increasing the number of encounters considerably.

So it's no wonder, as the Douces stood shoeless and terrified, with only a canister

See what your Friends have been talking about!



Friends of Mount Revelstoke and Glacier

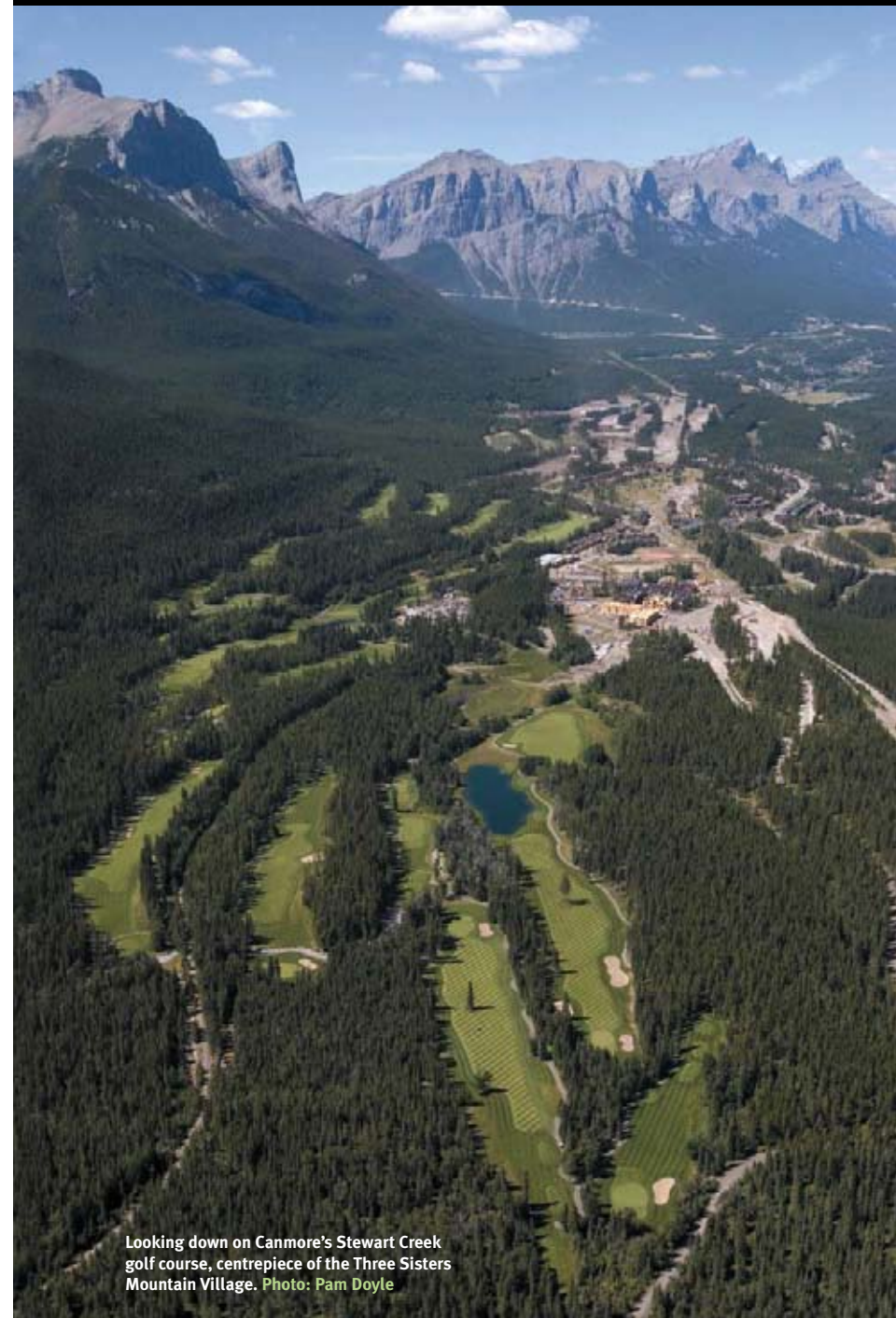


Parks Canada

Parcs Canada

www.friendsrevglacier.com

Carolyn Schellenberg



Looking down on Canmore's Stewart Creek golf course, centerpiece of the Three Sisters Mountain Village. Photo: Pam Doyle

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PREPARED TO PERMANENTLY CLOSE THE UPPER BENCH TRAIL TO A CACOPHONY OF PUBLIC PROTEST. TRAIL RIDERS WANTED TO YIELD TO WILDLIFE, BUT WHAT GALLED THE OUTDOOR COMMUNITY WERE THE GOLF CLUBS THAT CONTINUED TO SWING A FEW HUNDRED METRES BELOW AND THE DEVELOPMENT THAT CARRIED ON UNABATED.

of pepper spray and a few bear bangers for defence, that the bear appeared completely unafraid, coming to a stop less than 20 feet from where the couple stood.

When the valley's last coal mine closed in Canmore in 1979, the town's location, just outside Banff National Park and an hour drive from wealthy Calgary, put it on a collision course with success. With tourism its primary industry, Canmore's population has exploded from a few thousand residents 30 years ago to more than 17,000. Today, as developers wrestle with environmentalists over valuable space, trail users and wildlife are finding themselves squeezed out of their natural habitat.

IN THE 1980S, Canmore's beauty and low cost of living attracted artists and lifestyle seekers. Mountain bikes began to outnumber horses on the popular Upper Benchlands Trail, and the 1988 Calgary Olympics brought the once-sleepy town to the world stage. One year later, the province signed a purchase agreement to turn 600 acres on its south-facing slopes into a luxury resort and golf course.

Silvertip Resort, named for the majestic grizzlies that once ruled the Bow Valley, was established by Calgary developer Hal Walker in 1989. It was the developer who approached wildlife biologist Paul Paquet about designing Canada's first wildlife corridor outside a national park. "I received a phone call from Hal Walker, and he was interested in my thoughts and comments," Paquet remembers. "It wasn't the province, and it wasn't the town."

With the valley floor already occupied by development, wildlife corridors—untouched green spaces where wildlife can move undisturbed—are designed as secondary routes for animals making their way around Canmore as they migrate between Banff National Park and Kananaskis Country. Ideally, they are spaces where animals don't get too comfortable. Because the Bow Valley hosts large carnivores, biologists pushed for Silvertip Resort to host a wildlife corridor big enough to accommodate grizzly, wolves and cougars.

Instead, the town agreed to a narrow parcel of land, with a golf course smack in the middle, to act as the corridor. In theory, it made sense. With the golf course closed evenings and winters, the corridor would function for ungulates during the times they were on the move. But for bears, which prefer plenty of space and are most active in summer, the narrow corridor would prove to be a migratory challenge.

"We urged council, and the province

ORAN CLOTHING
BORN FROM
THE EXPERIENCE

VALHALLA PURE
OUTFITTERS

Beautiful Downtown Nelson, BC
Call us: 877.554.1006

Photo: Pam Doyle



· Wildlife · Mountaineering ·
· Hiking · Family Adventures ·

Vacation in BC this Summer at a
BACKCOUNTRY LODGE



© Craig Pulsifer



Visit our **NEW** website

www.backcountrylodgesofbc.com

as well, to start thinking more comprehensively," Paquet says about defining the corridor in the early 1990s. "I think it pretty much fell on deaf ears in many cases. There just wasn't the awareness or the concern, because nothing seemed too imminent then."

In a valley that once seemed so vast, large carnivores now had to begin moving upwards, toward the Upper Benchlands area, while the lower corridor hosted elk, deer and a steady stream of golfers. Silvertip Golf Resort, with the motto Where Nature Plays Through, is required to close its course when a bear is sighted. By today's standards, a golf course, and the extensive human use that comes with it, would never have found its way onto a wildlife corridor.

Not only is wildlife affected by increasing environmental pressures, so too are trail users, who constantly find themselves losing out. Ken Davies, a member of the local Trails Advisory Group, describes a situation where recreationalists are squeezed out as environmentalists and developers spar over land use.

PICK UP AN OLDER COPY of *Backcountry Biking in the Canadian Rockies* and it still touts Soul Brother, locally known as the Upper Bench, as "one of the best" rides in the Canmore area. Even then, the 1999 guidebook warned of the trail's uncertain future: "I hope the irony doesn't escape you—develop the hell out of the place, then tell people to go elsewhere for recreation, the environment is too fragile," the author rants.

In spring 2005, after more than five years of discussion, the provincial government prepared to permanently close the Upper Bench trail to a cacophony of public protest. Trail riders wanted to yield to wildlife, but what galled the outdoor community were the golf clubs that continued to swing a few hundred metres below and the development that carried on unabated.

To give town council its due, the municipality is continually caught between competing interests of economy and environment. A 1995 amendment to Alberta's Municipal Government Act effectively makes municipal land-use bylaws subordinate to decisions of the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Simply put, the province could order the town to issue a development approval based on its potential for tourism development.

"Is it specific to Canmore?" Mayor Ron Casey chuckles about Section 619 of the Municipal Government Act. "I think affectionately it's been called the Canmore Clause."

Parks Canada's need-to-reside requirement has restricted home ownership within the Town of Banff to those who earn a



"I HOPE THE IRONY DOESN'T ESCAPE YOU—DEVELOP THE HELL OUT OF THE PLACE, THEN TELL PEOPLE TO GO ELSEWHERE FOR RECREATION, THE ENVIRONMENT IS TOO FRAGILE."

living within the park, and housing prices have responded by rising only moderately. In Alberta's booming oil economy, the restriction pushed recreational home buyers 20 kilometres east. By 2008, Canmore's average list price was over \$705,000, compared with \$548,000 in Banff, and non-permanent residents made up nearly a third of the town's total 17,572 population.

Across the valley at Three Sisters Mountain Village (TSMV), an area structure plan put forward by the developer, and approved by town council this past January, proposed a "massive reduction" in units and density. According to TSMV's planning director Robert Ellis, they would set aside about 400 acres slated for development as wildlife corridor. From the original 1,863 units previously approved in the master bylaw, only 210 single-family homes are expected. The developer pared down another parcel from 2,500 approved units to 1,000.

In an effort to replace lost territory, recreationalists proposed a trail within the 35-metre buffer that separates the newest Three Sisters golf course from the wildlife corridor, but conservationists objected to mountain bikers and hikers in such close proximity to the wildlife corridor.

"To say you can't have a trail running parallel to a golf course, when it's OK for a golf cart to be roaring buy—I just don't buy it," says Davies of the Trails Advisory Group. "We'll just watch the stupidity going on between the environmentalists and the developers and we'll make our requests when the time is right."

PERHAPS the 198-pound male grizzly that lumbered into Silvertip on a drizzly

spring day in 2005 had seen enough. Bear 99 had already been removed once, a week before, after following a hiker. It found its way back to Silvertip Golf Resort on June 5th. There, on the course where nature plays through, it was chased away by an employee in a pickup when it followed a golfer.

Shortly after, Bear 99 was in the wildlife corridor when it came face-to-face with three runners. Isabelle Dubé, a 36-year-old mother and well-known local athlete, climbed a tree, while her friends retreated to the nearby golf course. Fish and wildlife officers arrived shortly after to find Dubé had been pulled from the tree and killed. Bear 99 was shot immediately. A month later, the Upper Bench was shut down for good.

Canmore's Rebound Cycle owner Kevin Simpson describes a "dark time" in recent Bow Valley history when mass trail closures threatened to destroy recreational opportunities. "Since then we've got three or four new trails," he explains. "I think people are over the Bench because we've got a healthy dose of new trails... What are you going to do? You can sit around complaining about it or you can go ride another trail."

Last spring, with much media ado, developer Stone Creek Properties unveiled its plans for the Village at Silvertip, a high-density condominium complex with an old-world European ambiance. Boasting 1,300 units, a spa, a conference centre, three hotels, and 200,000 visitors annually, construction was slated for this spring, but the town has yet to see a building application.

The current building market might offer some reprieve. In 2007, Canmore issued \$220 million in building permits, and in 2008, that number dropped to \$101 million. With soaring valley walls and protected areas on



Photo: Craig Douce

all sides, Canmore's growth is finite. Build-out is expected within the next decade.

Then, in March, Three Sisters shocked the community when it suddenly shut its doors, having gone into receivership. While building continues on its lands, the disappearance of Canmore's largest developer means the recently approved area structure plan—and those 400 acres set aside as wildlife corridor—will likely have to be renegotiated with the company's purchaser.

One year after Dubé's death, those close to her launched Trailx.org, a website designed to inform trail users about wildlife sightings. During summer months, the site can see multiple postings in a day reporting bear and cougar encounters. Human-wildlife conflicts are still common, but education and management strives to minimize them.

Despite his feeling of panic, and his lack of shoes, Craig Douce was able to keep cool during his grizzly encounter last summer. Removing the safety lock from his bear spray, he handed the canister to his wife and readied a bear banger. Just then, a third mountain biker appeared. Knowing there was strength in numbers, the trio stuck together, firing a banger that sent the grizzly running.

A year later, Douce recalls the tale. The bear, having negotiated the Bow Valley wildlife corridor maze, is believed to have been shot further east down the valley. The crunch continues, as wildlife, trail users and high-end housing developments all vie for their piece of the Bow Valley's coveted landscapes.

Amanda Follett is the former assistant editor of the Canmore Leader and a southern Rockies refugee now living and writing in Smithers, BC.