



New Analysis Shows Proposed Castle Protected Areas Require Restoration

September 6, 2016 – Ottawa, Ontario: Last September, the Government of Alberta proposed the 1,038 km² Castle Special Place be protected as a combination Provincial and Wildland Park given its high level of biodiversity and importance as a water tower for Southern Alberta. An updated analysis examining the extent of human disturbance in the Castle shows the area needs restoration as well as protection.

As a new management plan for the Castle is considered, some groups are concerned that protection will do little for the area if certain activities, such as Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) access, are allowed to continue. As input to the management planning process for the new protected areas, Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC) used its own established intact forest landscapes mapping methodologies in combination with higher resolution Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) data to update disturbance and intactness information for this important ecological region.

The results show that human development in the Castle has increased since 2000. Human-caused disturbance in the area increased from 401.5 km² in 2000 to 441.4 km² in 2015. The analysis also found the extent of intact forest landscape fragments greater than 10 km² decreased by 10% over the same time period.

“We’re concerned that the reduction in intact forest patches will have serious impacts on habitat quality and connectivity for species like grizzly bears and cutthroat trout,” said Wynet Smith, Executive Director of Global Forest Watch Canada. “This analysis concretely demonstrates that the state of the Castle has worsened over the past 15 years, although the extent of disturbance was very high already in 2000.”

The results also showed that the majority of intact forest landscape fragments are in the Wildland Provincial Park, while only 11.5 km² remain in the proposed Provincial Park. Almost 76% of the intact forest landscapes in the Provincial Park in 2000 was lost by 2015.

“While intact forest greater than 10 km² in size may not be large enough to support viable populations of most native species, they are key elements in the maintenance of natural areas,” asserted Smith. “These forest patches are what will help the Castle ecosystem remain resilient in the face of climate change and other landscape scale processes. Our analysis clearly shows there is not enough intact landscapes remaining in this Special Place.”

The proposed Castle protected area has the potential to protect some of the last remaining intact forest landscapes in the Southern Alberta foothills. But as GFWC’s results show, restoration is required for this area to meet its full ecological potential.

“Protecting the Castle is a huge step in the right direction” says Smith, “but if we are truly to protect one of the greatest water sources and some of the most diverse habitat in Southern Alberta, the Government needs to actively restore this landscape.”

Contact:

Wynet Smith, Executive Director, Global Forest Watch Canada: 613-897-2007