

# WCS Canada report calls for more protection for vulnerable wildlife in Southern Canadian Rockies of Alberta

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A new report from the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada (WCS Canada) calls for the designation of new Wildland Provincial Parks in the Southern Canadian Rockies of Alberta to protect vulnerable wildlife and provide for their safe passage in an increasingly fragmented landscape. The report focused on determining important, secure habitats ("safe havens") and landscape connections ("safe passages") for six species—bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, grizzly bears, wolverines, mountain goats and bighorn sheep. These species are vulnerable to loss of secure habitat from industrial land uses and/or climate change.

Nestled between Banff and Waterton parks, the Southern Canadian Rockies in Alberta has been overshadowed by these two iconic national parks. Yet this area contains spectacular landscapes, supports one of the most diverse communities of big animals in North America, and is a stronghold for the six [vulnerable species](#) that have been vanquished in much of their range further south.

In the report entitled Protecting and Connecting Headwater Havens, WCS Canada's award-winning Conservation Scientist, Dr. John Weaver concluded that "Once abundant populations have disappeared from some regions, but remnant ones persist in remaining strongholds. These represent hope and opportunity to protect and recover the wildlife heritage of Alberta. Designation of new Wildland Provincial Parks would demonstrate stronger commitment to safeguard these headwater

havens of wildlife and water treasures in the Southern Canadian Rockies of Alberta."

Weaver assessed 6,452 square kilometres of land to determine its [conservation value](#) for the vulnerable species and the cumulative challenges of expanding industrial resource extraction and mechanized recreation facing each of them. For example, about 20 percent of the land is prime habitat for the threatened grizzly bear but may serve as 'attractive traps' due to the high density of roads. As climate changes, warmer winters will reduce mountain snow cover and suitable habitat for the rare wolverine, a species highly adapted to persistent snow pack. Reduced stream flow and warmer stream temperatures will diminish habitat for westslope [cutthroat trout](#) and bull trout, native fish adapted well to cold waters - while favouring introduced rainbow trout and brook trout.

Weaver recommends designating 257,065 ha of Crown land as Wildland Provincial Parks because it would be a smart investment that would conserve 66 percent of important habitats on 40 percent of the land. Vital places with particular concentration of present and future habitat include Castle Special Place, lands on the north and south of the Crowsnest Pass, the headwaters of the Oldman River, and the headwater basins of the Highwood River. The new direction would recognize the value of wildlife diversity and headwater sources of clean water but require improved management of other land uses.

"This report will help inform discussions and decisions about land management in the Southern Canadian Rockies of Alberta," said Weaver. "These spectacular landscapes provide some of the best remaining strongholds for vulnerable fish and wildlife. Protecting lands for conservation will help ensure that this rich diversity of fish and [wildlife](#) will be enjoyed by people today and generations yet to come."

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Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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