



## Livingstone Landowners Guild

P.O. Box 148  
Cowley, Alberta T0K 0P0

February 16, 2017

The Honourable Rachel Notley  
Premier of Alberta  
307 Legislature Building  
10800-97 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

### **Re: Land Use planning in the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone Planning regions**

Dear Premier Notley:

The Livingstone Landowners are a group of private property owners in the upper Oldman River drainage. We include ranchers, farmers, acreage-owners, small business operators and others who work hard to be good stewards of our property. We work together to protect the interests of the many rural landholders whose efforts keep the world-class landscape on both sides of Alberta's Cowboy Trail — Highway 22 — teeming with wildlife and rich in scenic beauty.

Along with other Alberta landowner groups, conservation groups and individuals, the LLG signed a communique to the Alberta government in 2016 calling for more responsible management of motorized recreation on the public lands that lie upstream from, and often immediately adjacent to, our members' private holdings. This position aligns closely with values held widely by citizens and local governments in our region as reflected consistently in public opinion surveys over the past quarter century (summary attached).

We were subsequently invited to offer input into a landscape disturbance management plan for the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone area. Previous government planning initiatives have too often led to disappointing results but we felt it important to give this one a chance, especially as we were assured this would become a sub-regional plan under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) and, as such, carry regulatory weight. This work is now well underway. Planners have assured us that motorized off-road activity will be reduced to sustainable levels based on science (not to exceed a density of 0.6 km of open linear disturbance per square kilometer of land, and an even lower density near trout streams) and moved to parts of the landscape most capable of sustaining vehicle use without damage. This has our full support; it's an approach that is long overdue.

Recently, however, we have watched with concern the off-highway vehicle user community's strong reaction to the government's decision to phase motorized use out of the new Castle parks. The LLG does not take a position on the Castle parks, as they lie outside of our area of interest, but we wish to make our position very clear that **the controversy should not be allowed to create a loss of momentum or diminished commitment to complete and implement a sub-regional plan that will restore landscape health to the badly-damaged public forest lands in the south Porcupine Hills and the upper Oldman River and Livingstone areas.** We have worked with the government in good faith and we believe that a single special-interest group should not be allowed to render our efforts, and the efforts of so many

other diverse stakeholders, meaningless – especially when our concern is land and water stewardship in the public interest, not narrow self-interest.

Although motorized recreation is practiced by less than 5% of Alberta's population, it has vastly disproportionate effects on the quality of our native vegetation, community watersheds, fisheries, wildlife and recreational opportunities for the much larger number of Albertans who enjoy public lands on foot and horseback. More than thirty years of virtually no effective management of this activity throughout our region has resulted in deeply-rutted landscapes, badly silted streams, spreading infestations of noxious weeds that thrive on disturbance, and conflict with other users and neighbouring landholders. A culture of vandalism and entitlement has developed among a substantial number of motorized users that makes enforcement of existing rules difficult and causes stress and safety fears for many other land users.

While damage is widespread and increasing, stewardship activities by OHV users have been minimal and for the most part have involved small projects likely intended more to stake a physical claim on the land as to help it heal. The extent of the damage needs to be seen to be believed; should you have the time, our members would be more than happy to show you what this small group has done to land and waters in this region.

Specific concerns that our members have concerning motorized off-road use include:

- displacement of wildlife like elk and bears from heavily travelled public forest lands onto adjacent private lands where conflicts commonly result
- weed infestations that spread from damaged public land soils into carefully-managed native rangelands on our properties, especially along streams
- reduced groundwater recharge because of rapid drainage of runoff down numerous eroding OHV trails. This not only puts essential well water supplies at risk, it increases spring flooding and reduces the summer flows of water in small, but essential streams that rural communities and native fish and wildlife rely upon.
- trespass of motorized off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on private land and grazing leases, sometimes involving cut fences or gates left open that allow livestock to escape.
- disturbance and stress to domestic cattle on public land grazing permit areas
- noise, dust and other disturbances that diminish the ability of local residents who dwell near public land to enjoy their private property in piece
- increased wear and tear on area roads from OHV-laden trailers hauled behind private vehicles day after day; local residents are the ones taxed to pay for the increased maintenance costs

The rural community in our area has proven itself to be committed to careful stewardship of native rangeland and riparian areas. Native wildlife considered at risk elsewhere — species like ferruginous hawk, long-billed curlew, badger and grizzly bear — thrive in many parts of our area. Private property owners have worked with land trusts to permanently protect the conservation values of over 60,000 acres of private land in the region. This represents over \$100 million in land value in which the province has invested approximately \$17 million. Many members work with organizations like Cows and Fish to restore and protect riparian health. All this private and community work and commitment is at risk if the Alberta government's fails to limit and manage motorized recreation effectively on public land.

In our view, OHV recreation should be limited to those parts of Alberta's public lands not reserved as parks or classified as Critical Wildlife or Prime Protection areas under the Eastern Slopes Policy, and prohibited in areas critical to the survival of threatened species like the Westslope Cutthroat trout. In the places where OHV use can be permitted, their recreational use should be limited to a few properly designed trails. There should be closed seasons when soils are wet and restrictions on the size, noise and speed of off-highway vehicles. Our members who pasture cattle on public land must adhere to restrictions and stewardship requirements or lose their grazing rights. All land users should be subject to comparable conditions.

We are encouraged to see recent improvement to Alberta's public lands enforcement program that appears to be making headway on problems of stream vandalism and abuse of random camping privileges. Continued improvement in protection and enforcement, instead of rewarding bad behaviour, would show respect for the many responsible trail users and neighbouring land holders whose commitment to land and watershed health leads them to choose restraint and respect.

For all these reasons we encourage you to take a firm stand in support of timely completion of meaningful and effective subregional plans that will significantly reduce the footprint of motorized vehicles on all our public lands and start to restore health to the soils, vegetation and streams that have been so badly damaged in recent years. Off-road vehicle groups have shown themselves to be good at getting attention and have historically succeeded in derailing other stakeholder-supported land planning initiatives. But they represent a very small part of our population, and an intrinsically destructive land use. We represent the interests of the many others whose see public lands not as places primarily for motorized play, but as life-sustaining land and waters in need of responsible stewardship.

We would appreciate the courtesy of a reply. If you are interested, our members would be most happy to host you for a tour of some of the public lands that have been degraded by motorized recreationists so you can see the urgency of this issue for yourself.

You have our continued best wishes and strong support for success at achieving meaningful and effective stewardship of our public lands and waters.

Sincerely,

*(original signed hard copy posted 16 February 2017)*

Ted Smith, President  
Livingstone Landowners Guild

Cc: Minister Shannon Phillips, Environment and Parks; [aep.minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:aep.minister@gov.ab.ca)  
Minister Oneil Carlier, Agriculture and Forestry; [whitecourt.steanne@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:whitecourt.steanne@assembly.ab.ca)  
Minister Margaret McCuaig-Boyd, Energy; [minister.energy@gov.ab.ca](mailto:minister.energy@gov.ab.ca)  
Deputy Premier Sarah Hoffman; [health.minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:health.minister@gov.ab.ca)  
Minister Brian Mason, Transportation; [transportation.minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:transportation.minister@gov.ab.ca)  
Minister Shaye Anderson, Municipal Affairs; [minister.municipalaffairs@gov.ab.ca](mailto:minister.municipalaffairs@gov.ab.ca)  
Minister Ricardo Miranda, Culture and Tourism; [culturetourism.minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:culturetourism.minister@gov.ab.ca)

1 Attachment: Summary of Recent Reports on Community and General Public Views  
Relevant to Land Use Planning in the Porcupine Hills