

15. Conservation in the Crown

Thinking about Tomorrow

We hope a thoughtful reading of this profile will reveal that the Crown of the Continent is truly a treasure worth conserving. Modern history has few examples of places where people have



“It matters not at all that other species do not possess a degree of consciousness like ours, do not experience feelings in the way we do. They are part of our world, we are part of theirs. Our

lived in a landscape without depleting it. Fewer and fewer places on Earth host ecosystems with all their native, natural components and processes unimpaired. The Crown of the Continent is one of the last essentially intact ecosystems in North America. As such, the Crown offers an opportunity to demonstrate a different vision of how people interact with the land.



greater intellect may confer on us an enhanced ability to exploit the natural resources of the world, but...it also lays on us an enhanced responsibility to husband those resources carefully, to be sensitive to the knowledge that a species, once extinct, is destroyed forever. By impoverishing the environment, we impoverish our own lives.”

The Crown of the Continent is not only a refuge for wild species. It is a refuge for the human spirit. Millions come from the world over, seeking the challenge of wilderness and an opportunity to experience the beauty and solitude this landscape provides in an increasingly crowded world.

Alberta author Andy Russell wrote eloquently about the magic of this area:

“It leaves its lasting impression as one stands beside a murmuring river under a canopy of a million stars, the infinite depths of the universe framing the peaks on every side. These are the moments of witchery experienced by those who live with senses tuned, seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling the ever-changing expressions of the mountains.... It takes time to develop appreciation,



The Crown of the Continent offers a variety of natural resources for humans to appreciate and enjoy. It is not only a place to hear the howl of the wolf, or to ponder the power of the grizzly bear, but also a place to hear the joyous winter song of the water dipper, or to consider

the quiet might of the avalanche lily sprouting through the late spring snow. Consider the words of paleontologist Richard Leakey:

understanding and love.”

As of 2001, the planet’s human population passed the 6 billion mark, having doubled in the previous 40 years. Natural communities



Today, people live increasingly urban lives, disconnected from the natural world. While modernity has many benefits, it carries its own burden of stresses and worries. A

century ago, conservationist John Muir praised the Crown of the Continent as a tonic for these stresses—a century filled with unprecedented advances in technology, industry, and information and tremendous growth in human populations. The coming century promises just as much change. Gary Nabhan writes in *Geography of Childhood*:

“An increasingly large proportion of inner-city children will never gain access to unpeopled places.... Most of them will never experience the land upon which their food is grown, let alone terrains

worldwide are under increasing pressure, as more and more people attempt to eke out a living or strive to amass material wealth. Species are disappearing at an alarming rate.

One of the great challenges humans face is to continue to improve the real standard of living for all, while maintaining the natural components and processes upon which life depends.

The Crown of the Continent may hold lessons that are

applicable in many places around the globe.

An important idea contained in this ecosystem profile is that of connectivity. Living organisms are connected to the non-living, or physical, environment. One block of habitat is connected to another, as one body of water is connected to a larger watershed. Predators are connected to prey, and vice versa. But there is another connection well worth considering.



inhabited by species other than our own....

These children will grow up without nature as their measure because the environments they inhabit will be largely those of human design. Call them habitats shaped by and for only one species. That, perhaps, is the most profound difference between wildlands and anthropogenic environments such as cities.”

A photographer or painter can only hope to capture a small portion of a landscape. Likewise, the written word can only capture a tiny part of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. We can talk about the wildlife, the rivers, the mountains, the people. We can record the temperatures. We can measure and document changes in a forest or meadow. We can try to understand how the different components and processes of the natural world merge to become an ecosystem. In the end, all our efforts will be incomplete. Yet, like the artistic painting or photograph, an effort need not be complete to be worthwhile.

The idea that all things are connected in a global web of life is not new, yet it remains revolutionary. The great scientist Copernicus sparked one intellectual revolution when he discovered that the Earth is not the

center of the Universe. Centuries later, Charles Darwin sparked another intellectual revolution when he hypothesized that species change over time—adapting by natural selection to a broad range of evolutionary pressures.

We are still striving to understand the consequences of the Darwinian revolution. In a time filled with dazzling technological advances, infinite lessons remain to be



learned from the natural world. We are still learning to understand the concept of an ecosystem and how to maintain its integrity, and we will continue to learn, far into the future. We are still trying to find our place on the land, so that we may leave future generations a natural legacy as rich as the one we inherited. It's bound to be a long journey, but the Crown of the Continent is a fine place to start.

Sources

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