

R.C. Elliott
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June 24, 2013

Kneehill County Council
232 Main Street
Three Hills, AB

Dear Sirs:

Re: Badlands Motorsports Resort Proposal within an Environmentally Significant Area in the Rosebud River Valley

As an environmental consultant with over 30 years of experience studying prairie ecology, and as a Kneehill County landowner, I urge you to consider the following important arguments when deciding on this proposal:

1. Overall prairie wildlife numbers in that part of Kneehill County and adjacent areas are apparently down to less than half the numbers they were about 40 years ago.
2. Insect eating birds, like swallows, meadowlarks, flycatchers, etc. (a very important part of our ecosystem) have been reduced to about 20% of their former numbers, according to a very recent estimate.
3. Some species like sharp-tailed grouse (a prominent game bird that attracted many hunters to this county up to 25 years ago) have decreased to less than 1% of their numbers of 40 years ago, and are actually extinct in much of the county.

And what caused this major loss of our wildlife? Habitat destruction, mainly. Steadily removing things like those little depressions with their little groves of willow and poplar and buckbrush and wild rose that interfered with straight-row operation of swather and combine etc.; and draining and filling in sloughs, and removing their shoreline vegetation, to gain an extra acre of farmland and produce more straight-row farming capability.

For many years, when there was much more mixed farming than at present, areas with native grass and hilly terrain or many coulees, sloughs, tree groves, etc. were left in their natural state and used for grazing for the cattle and horses most farms had. These areas preserved and maintained the natural food varieties, travel corridors, "dance grounds", nesting sites, shelter, etc. that made the environment acceptable for most wild species, among the many cultivated grain and hay fields. But with the development of newer varieties of grain, and much more powerful farming equipment, most areas of natural habitat, necessary for most wildlife, were steadily turned into more grain fields, leaving almost no natural habitat in some areas.

Thus, in many parts of Kneehill and adjacent counties, we are left with less than 10% of the natural (and essential for wildlife) prairie habitat remaining. And in this southwest corner of the county, undamaged parts of the Rosebud River Valley, with its many side coulees, seasonal tributary streams, etc., are nearly all that is left holding the remaining ecosystem together. This is why this valley is considered to be extremely important, with warnings not to allow “development” (or even heavy grazing) within this essential wildlife corridor.

According to plans, the proposed Motorsports Resort will definitely do significant physical damage to parts of this very important ecosystem and wildlife travel corridor, in its proposed location, and with its many facilities and housing for up to 1400 people with numerous roads and many other facilities very near other parts of the ecosystem which they claim won’t be physically damaged. And all the planned human activity, the necessary fencing, and resulting noise, smells, etc., will definitely make even the “undamaged” part of the local ecosystem unusable by many species presently dependent on it for their survival in the region.

Because of the ecological importance of the Rosebud River Valley to the county, the province, the country – and even the world, by supporting an ecosystem that includes several rare and endangered species – we cannot allow the Badlands Motorsport Resort proposal to proceed in this location. Such a resort can probably be built in many other places without doing significant ecological damage; but the Rosebud River ecosystem cannot be rebuilt or replaced if badly damaged, so it is the wrong place for such a development.

Economic and ecological systems have some similarities. Damage to one small part of a bridge on an important transportation corridor can cause that bridge to collapse, to the detriment of everyone and everything dependent on the economy of that travel corridor and the area around it. Similarly, damage to any part of the Rosebud River ecosystem, including its wildlife travel corridor, could have detrimental effects on everyone and everything dependent on this ecosystem, living near the Rosebud Valley, and beyond.

Because the Motorsport Resort proposed for part of that ecosystem will have some or many detrimental effects on that ecosystem, I and many other residents and scientists conclude that it should definitely not be built in its proposed location. And because this part of the Rosebud Valley ecosystem enables and maintains the survival of several endangered species and other species “at risk”, all of which are very important parts of local, provincial, national, and world ecosystems, is it not our duty to do what we can to protect and restore these irreplaceable world resources, and the habitat necessary for their survival?

In view of the damage that the Motorsport Resort can and will do to wildlife, very important habitat, and the lives and culture of many residents of Kneehill County and beyond, what could be the reasons or excuses for not telling the resort proponents that they have to build their resort in some other location, where it will not have significant harmful effects?

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