In Memoriam: David (Dave) Sheppard

1936-2025

Founder of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition



Dave Sheppard.
Photo Submitted

Dave Sheppard was born in Lacombe, AB, on November 26, 1936. His early attraction to life in the natural world led him to pursue a BSc in Conservation Biology, an MSc in Wildlife Ecology (mule deer) and a Ph.D. in Animal Ecology (chipmunk behaviour). He was an award-winning scholar.

Dave and his wife Jean met at the University of Saskatchewan during his Ph.D. studies and her Master's in Science studies. They married in 1965, and 59 years together tell us they made a strong team.

In 1966, Dave joined the academic world at the University of Regina. But, this confinement was not the world for him. He had the courage to resign after eleven years and pursue a more challenging path.

In 1977, they, with their young daughter Kathleen, made the bold move into a new world at Screwdriver Creek west of Beaver Mines in the foothills. But first, a house would have to be built. Without any construction background, they procured logs from a local mill and learned to build a log house, including its electrical, plumbing and brick chimney construction requirements. Oh, this was different from academia! It was a challenge in summer and winter snowstorms. This was roughing it, physical work and pioneering. It took 18 months before they could move in.

Dave continued with the never-ending improvements of the home, created a market garden plot, and produced hundreds of tons of firewood to keep the family warm over the 37 years they lived in the foothills. They enjoyed the natural world around them and did many hikes in the area.

Dave's advocacy for the Castle began in the early 1980s, leading the Alberta Wilderness Association's criticism of plans for salvage logging intended to control the mountain pine beetle. Over the next decade, Dave became a vocal opponent of oil and gas development in the Eastern Slopes. In 1990, he founded the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition and gathered like-minded Albertans together for the ambitious task of protecting the Castle watershed. (For the early history of the CCWC, see the CCWC website).

Dave was a gentle and stubborn leader. In 1996, he was awarded a Parks Canada Award for his efforts. In 2015, the efforts by the CCWC were acknowledged and rewarded by the Alberta Government, and the Castle was legislated as a provincial park.

Friends James Tweedie and Judy Huntley reflect on the Sheppards' impact: "Dave, Jean, and Kathleen at Screwdriver Creek lived a life of awareness of our place on this earth and our need to cherish it. Our lives might have followed some different path had we not shared those aspirations for a 'Good Life' that Dave, Jean and Kathleen represented."

Without Dave Sheppard, there would be no Castle Provincial Park or Castle Wildlands Park.

Canadians thank you, Dave, Jean, and Kathleen.

Dave died on May 3, 2025, without regrets.

-Klaus Jericho