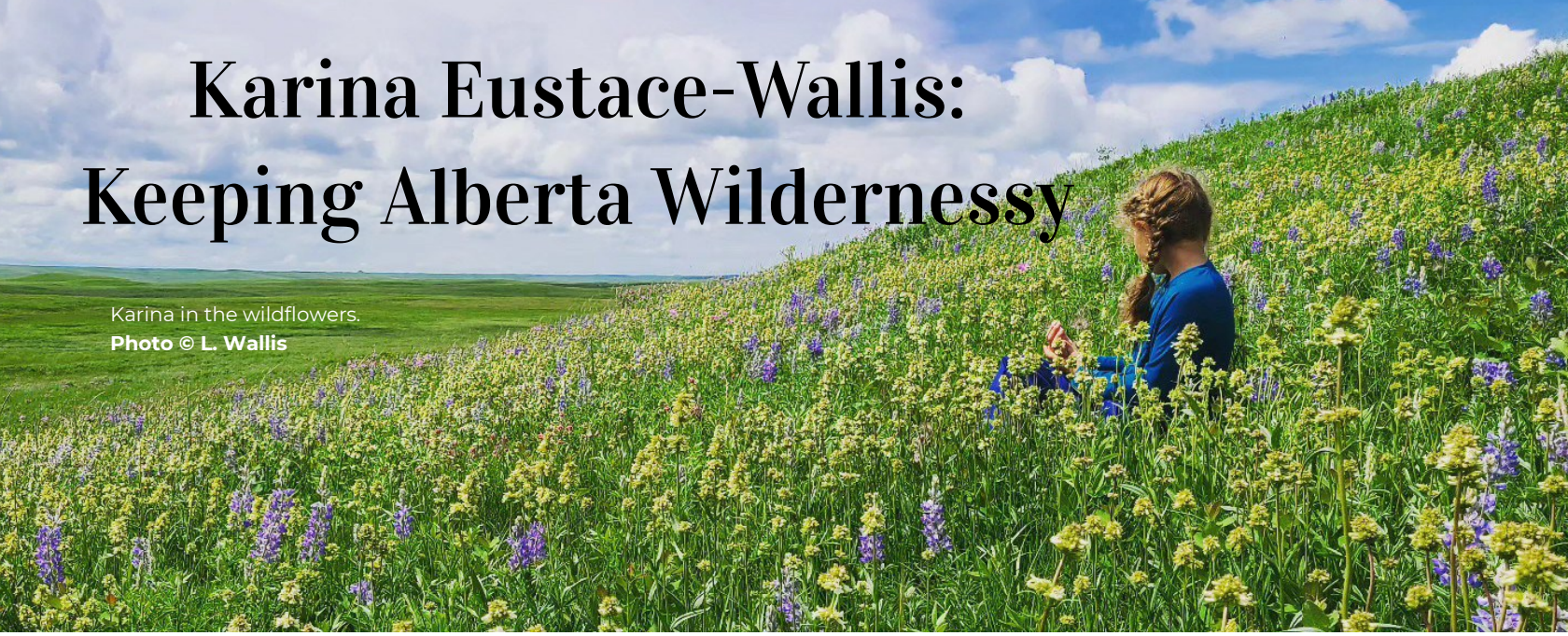
Karina Eustace-Wallis: Keeping Alberta Wildernessy



Karina in the wildflowers.
Photo © L. Wallis

This year's Great Gray Owl Award recipient embraces the fighting spirit of generations before.

By Cliff Wallis, AWA Board of Directors

Karina's engagement with nature began with camping on the side of a Guatemalan volcano at just 5 months old. She has been on nature trips to Sri Lanka, Argentina, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Arizona, Montana, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia with the odd playground, midway ride, surf trip, and other fun stuff along the way.

We have rambled across the Parkland near Wainwright, hiked the grasslands and badlands along the Milk and South Saskatchewan Rivers, and ascended to new heights in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, as well as marveled at "critters" and flower blooms in the deserts and mountains of southeastern Arizona.

I am sure Karina does 50 percent more distance than the rest of us, wandering back and forth, going to the front of the group, then the back, and finding all sorts of cool things to look at. She is a great field companion and a champion for the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). More recently, she has taken up raising funds for the AWA.



Karina climbing.
Photo © L. Wallis

In 2023, at eight years old, she summited eight peaks — we hiked up one together, but for others she used technical gear to work up sheer rock faces. Her goal was to raise $8,000, and she dramatically surpassed that with $10,346 raised. Last year, she completed 9,000 metres of elevation gain, climbing up up up, and the funds also went up up up, helping her exceed her goal of raising $9,000. This year, she swam in 60 bodies of water for the "What's Your 60" challenge to raise funds for AWA. In all, she has raised well over $20,000 for wilderness conservation.

Undeterred by wasp stings, rain, snow, snakes, mosquito bites, and cacti, Karina is fascinated by the smallest of creatures and is a good "finder," so we often come over to ponder a rock, fossil, or some colourful "bug" that she has discovered.

She still has time to be a kid and do her own exploring, even as she runs circles around the grown-ups. She is quite the chatterbox, and there is no trouble striking up a conversation with her, whether it be about Taylor Swift, a Turkey Vulture overhead, or what she likes about Grandma's cooking.

We are inspired by Karina's efforts to help the AWA keep Alberta's wilderness wildernessy — thanks a bunch!



Karina receiving the Great Gray Owl Award from her grandfather Cliff and mom Lindsey.
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