

Issues

At 18 million acres, the Crown of the Continent is internationally acclaimed as one of the largest remaining intact ecosystems in North America - a truly magical landscape. But the region is also criss-crossed by a jigsaw puzzle of political, jurisdictional, and cultural dividing lines. An international border divides the United States and Canada. Twenty-one federal, First Nation, provincial, and state agencies manage 83 percent of lands and resources within the region. County, municipal, and non-governmental officials and private landowners and citizens also weigh in on decisions affecting life in the Crown.

Changes are coming to this landscape, bringing many challenges - threats to wildlife and critical habitat; uneven distribution of water, land, and energy resources; and social turbulence as economies diversify from a base of natural resource use to knowledge-industry and amenity-oriented growth. Listening to people around the Crown, we've heard concerns about changes at the local and sub-regional level that, in aggregate, put the larger Crown ecosystem and social fabric at risk. In broad terms, people are concerned about changes affecting their quality of life, such as:

- Residential and commercial sprawl.
- Threats to the rural lifestyle.
- Energy and resource exploration and development.
- Fragmentation of wildlife habitat and migration routes.
- Genetic isolation of endangered species populations.
- Declining water quality.
- Drought and declining water supply.
- Wildfire management.
- Economic stagnation.
- Noxious weeds.
- A warming climate.

These issues transcend jurisdictional lines on a map. People, rivers, mountain ranges, wildlife, oil reserves, wildfires, weeds, and economies don't stop at the borders between countries, counties, or provinces. Though problems cross borders freely, attempts to address them are often stymied by jurisdictional and cultural barriers. These lines delineate ownership and management authority, and also serve as dividers between disparate cultures, attitudes, goals, and values. The cumulative effects of such transboundary issues threaten to fragment the natural landscape and tug local communities in unsustainable directions.

To be effective, our responses to these challenges need to span the region. We need to take advantage of working as partners to avoid fragmented decision-making and "death by a thousand decisions." People who care about the Crown of the Continent have a tremendous opportunity. There is a growing capacity for regional networking, planning, and policy responses to the challenges facing the Crown as a whole. With an ecosystem and economy at stake, regional networking and partnerships are emerging as essential and fundamental ways to sustain this treasured part of the world.