

## O KANANASKIS: WE STAND ON GUARD FOR THEE

### Protecting the natural beauty of the summit venue

**B**ringing world leaders to a wilderness area such as southwestern Alberta's Kananaskis Country requires sensitivity to environmental concerns. That's why, from the very beginning, Canadian G8 summit planners took the unprecedented step of establishing an Environmental Affairs directorate. The directorate is providing summit planners with environmental guidance. During this year's summit, the wildlands are going to be safeguarded as much as the leaders themselves.

Why go to such a remote area for a G8 summit? For this meeting, in Canada for the first time in seven years and in western Canada for the first time, the Prime Minister envisioned a small, retreat-style setting that would allow the leaders to spend as much time as

possible in productive and frank discussions.

That vision led organizers to Kananaskis Village—a small pedestrian-oriented wilderness resort area. Albertans have a deep love for Kananaskis Country. The spectacular 4,000 square-kilometre

region has an incredible abundance and diversity of animal and plant species.

The government committed itself to taking extraordinary care to avoid adverse environmental effects. That commitment began with the appointment of Bruce Leeson as the first-ever G8 Director of Environmental Affairs. Dr. Leeson's directorate has been given authority equal to that of all the other summit planning directorates to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into all areas of decision making. "In all G8 plans and decisions," explains Dr. Leeson, "protecting the special

natural values of Kananaskis Country will be a priority."

Identifying those natural values—what Bruce Leeson describes as "special species, spaces and times"—was the first task of the directorate. "A major component of our enviro-safe program is compiling information that informs us about places we shouldn't go, and times we shouldn't go, as well as about sensitive species we must avoid. We're concentrating on animals that have a stressful reaction to people, such as grizzlies, cougars, and cow moose and cow elk with calves."

Dr. Leeson, who has 30 years of experience as an ecological integrity specialist with Parks Canada and intimate knowledge of the Kananaskis area, is providing environmental guidance to all the other planning directorates about each identified species and space.

The location of the secure-zone perimeter, for example, and all other security plans are being established taking into account the sensitive species, spaces and times identified by Bruce Leeson and his team.

The effort doesn't stop there. Training is being provided to security forces so that they can undertake their duties with the least impact on the environment and avoid hazards inherent in the wildlands.

Certain "spaces" will simply be made off-limits to personnel. These include areas containing special flora, as well as the habitats of specific creatures, such as the small shallow ponds that are home to the long-toed salamander, and the river shorelines where harlequin ducks will be nesting at the end of June. In the case of the ducks, constant disturbance by people could lead to nesting



Elk is among the many animal species found in Kananaskis Country.