

# Ring road drives light pollution debate

## Foothills: Cross Conservation to host information night March 18

By Krista Conrad  
Staff Reporter

An evening of stargazing will be held to bring attention to the importance of maintaining dark skies at night.

The Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area is hosting a Star Night on March 18 from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m., featuring guests from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory.

There will be talks about what is currently in the night sky and the impacts of light pollution on the observatory and conservation area.

Cross Conservation educational interpreter Laura Griffin said there is concern with the lights being put on Highway 22 as part of the ring road development. The star night will highlight those concerns and raise awareness of light issues, she said.

"We're hoping to attract our neighbours and raise awareness that we're living in the Foothills where

there's a dark-sky bylaw, and what they can do personally to prevent light pollution," said Griffin.

Participants can hear the talks and take a look through telescopes that will be set up on-site, she said. If the evening is cloudy, some astronomy videos will be played indoors. Though Cross Conservation has hosted star nights before, this is the first time it's carried a pointed message, she said. It's important to educate people on light pollution, said Griffin.

"We feel that it's one of the easier forms of pollution out there to eliminate," she said. "This is happening now, and this is something that we'd like to try to get addressed before it's too late."

Marshall Abbott, Cross Conservation Area director, said light pollution from the ring road expansion will definitely have an adverse impact on the Rothney observatory.

"The whole facility is now at risk of being neutralized because of the light



BRENT CALVER/OWW

Marshall Abbott at the Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area on March 12. A night of stargazing is planned for March 18 to raise awareness of the effects of light pollution that will come from the new Calgary ring road expansion.

pollution that is going to arise from the ring road construction," said Abbott. "The lights that Alberta Transportation is going to utilize would contaminate the night sky to a large degree and render the existing facility relatively useless for research."

He said meetings with Alberta Transportation haven't resulted in any change in plans. The lights have already been purchased and everything

seems to be going ahead as planned regardless of the potential affect on the observatory and conservancy, he said.

Not only would light pollution impact operations at Rothney, it would also affect wildlife of all kinds in the Cross Conservation Area as well, which received the first nocturnal reserve designation granted in Canada.

With a sizeable elk herd, a healthy cougar popula-

tion, bears, white tail and mule deer, white fox, lynx and bobcats all making the area home, having bright lights emanating from the new highway could be a problem, he said.

"The conservancy has an incredible biodiversity, and that's being threatened by the lights going along Highway 22," said Abbott. "We certainly don't want to suggest we want to compromise safety along that major transportation route, but I

believe there's a compromise that can be made with Alberta Transportation to temper their wanting to make Highway 22 look like a night launch at the space shuttle."

He said he hopes the Province can be convinced to modify the lighting plans.

MD of Foothills Coun. Suzanne Oel said the glow is a concern, regardless of Alberta Transportation's claims that the light won't have the same impact as previous lighting systems would have.

"They believe it will perform better, but Rothney is concerned with glow and they wanted to do a pilot project and they're trying to figure out how to fit that in," said Oel. "Like in home fixtures you can dial down the intensity, there are some experiments where they can actually do that."

She said she hopes Rothney observatory and the Cross Conservation Area will be taken into consideration as the government moves forward with ring road construction.



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