



2024 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD: KARSTEN HEUER AND LEANNE ALLISON



Karsten Heuer and Leanne Allison have committed decades of their lives to the conservation and documentation of both wildlife and the landscape of the Canadian Rockies. What began as curiosity stemming from a mutual love for the outdoors, eventually matured into action and ultimately education and advocacy. Together their work has created not only awareness but measurable success, especially for projects like the reintroduction of bison to their natural habitat throughout Western Canada.

In 1998, Karsten walked 3,400km, the length of the Rockies, from Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming to Watson Lake, Yukon. It was a trip of personal growth but also attracted media attention to the then newly established Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), a

forward-thinking organization that believes preserving large tracts of interconnected land is the key to thriving ecosystems. During the 188 days of hiking, Karsten had plenty of time to think about how humans impact landscapes and he understood that they have a large role to play in speaking up for the animals that cannot.

Karsten worked as both warden and biologist for Parks Canada and eventually as the Executive Director for Y2Y. In all his roles, he has championed the vision of animal movement through wildlife corridors and has confronted developers who would threaten those wild spaces by leading a local group called Bow Valley Engage. His most recent ambitious project saw the successful return of wild bison to Banff National Park, perhaps the most celebrated event in the Park's recent history and a testament to his determination. His best-selling books have won multiple international awards and are widely read and celebrated to this day.

Leanne is an award-winning filmmaker and storyteller whose adventures have inspired audiences worldwide through films like *Finding Farley*, *Being Caribou*, and *Losing Blue* as well as her innovative, interactive media project *Bear 71*. *Being Caribou* is the story of Leanne and Karsten's journey to follow the porcupine caribou herd across Alaska and the Yukon for more than 1,500km. Their expedition brought attention to the threat of resource extraction in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Finding Farley is the remarkable 5,000km cross-Canada journey that Leanne and Karsten undertook with their dog and 2-year-old son Zev. It was a love letter to Farley Mowat, one of Canada's most celebrated wildlife authors. They would paddle, hop a train, and sail for 5 months from Canmore, AB to Cape Breton, NB. *Finding Farley* won both the People's Choice and Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Film & Book Festival in 2010. Leanne's latest film, *Iniskim - Return of the Buffalo* celebrates the reintroduction of bison in Banff National Park and the ambitious, Indigenous-led Buffalo Treaty which commits to bringing buffalo back throughout North America.

Karsten and Leanne's national legacy is felt by all who have met them, read their books or watched their films. Their impact on the conservation of Western Canadian ecosystems is undeniable and their work has crossed borders, and its impact will be felt by many generations to come.