

April 2007 • Vol. 15, No. 2

AWA



# A WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



*Clark's nutcracker (C. Wallis)*

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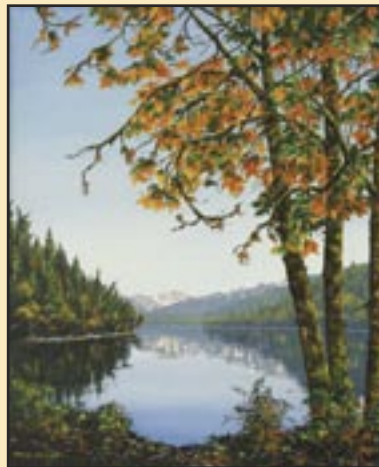
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**Printing by:**  
Colour printing and process is sponsored by Topline Printing



**Graphic Design:**  
Ball Creative

*Wild Lands Advocate* is published bimonthly, 6 times a year, by Alberta Wilderness Association. The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication are not necessarily those of AWA. The editors reserve the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles and letters submitted.

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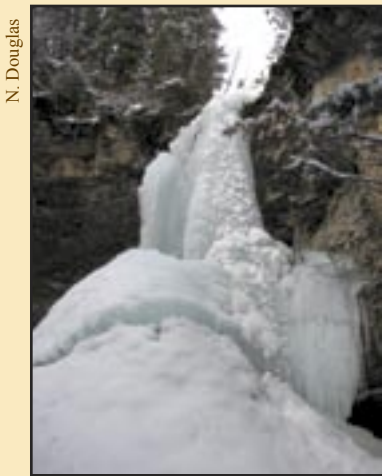
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# EXPLORING WILD ALBERTA



S. Bray

*Autumn reflections in a Kananaskis beaver pond*



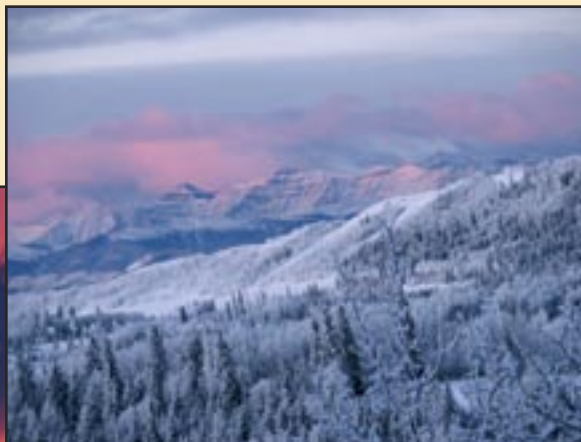
N. Douglas

*Troll Falls, Kananaskis*



N. Douglas

*A northern flying squirrel makes a nocturnal visit to a Millarville feeder.*



J. Douglas

*Sunrise over the foothills*



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## STEWARDS UNITE PASSION AND VIGILANCE IN CARE AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL AREAS, PART 3: THE NEW ORDER

By Shirley Bray

*Being a steward is a great excuse to do what I like most, spend time in the jackpines. The jackpines in many places remind me of a cathedral, with the lovely mature jackpine trees and soft moss and open space beneath them. My spirit is always uplifted by a visit to this special place. I feel great satisfaction that others love this special place and want to spend their time here. My family loves the area, both for recreation and just for walking and rejuvenating the human spirit. We all spend much time in the "Pines," and as one young grandson said while taking a deep breath, "Grandma, I smell wildlife!"*

— **Louisa Rich**, volunteer steward for Jackpines Natural Area (*The Steward*, Fall 1997)

The story of Wagner Natural Area shows how necessary volunteer stewards have been in protecting areas that are well known to be ecologically valuable. Wagner Bog, as it was originally known, is actually a rich calcareous peatland and a prime example of a rich spring fen. It lies between Edmonton and Spruce Grove along the south edge of Highway 16. However, the groundwater recharge area runs all the way south of Highway 16A.

In 1971 the Alberta Wildlife Foundation spearheaded a fundraising drive to purchase a half section from William Wagner, who wished to preserve this special place "as is, long into the future when it would become ever more appreciated." Alberta Environment contributed 60 percent, and others, such as the Nature Conservancy, provided the rest.

The area was transferred to the Natural Areas (NA) Program in 1975. In 1982 Alberta Transportation wanted to build a north-south access road along its eastern edge to connect the two highways. However, this would have separated the NA from its major water source.

The campaign to save the NA resulted in the shelving of the plan and the formation of the Wagner NA Society (WNAS), a more effective watchdog of the area than the government. In 1984 the Nature Conservancy contributed a large portion of money to purchase 14 ha to the east of the NA, which contained the majority of springs essential to maintain the eastern portion of the peatland.

However, plans for a connector

road and interchange through that very portion resurfaced in 1988. A County of Parkland councillor said he recognized the value of the NA, but he seemed to think the road was equally, if not more, important. Alberta Environment wanted proof of broad public support for an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the project before they would commit to one.

WNAS swung into action again and the road was eventually built further east – not a location Society members liked, but one they could live with. It was the first time, said WNAS, that Alberta Transportation had conducted an EIA for a road project, and the first time the Department had realigned a road because of environmental concerns. WNAS

was optimistic that this might signal "the beginning of a new era when governments do listen to the public and are willing to seriously give some consideration to the environment before proceeding with development." Society members, wrote president Derek Johnson in May 1993, hoped "to get back to doing some of the things we'd like to do rather than the things we have to do."

However, in 1996 the call went out again to defeat plans by Alberta Transportation and Utilities to build a frontage road (or as WNAS called it, an [af]frontage road) along the northern perimeter of the NA. The Department even had terms of reference for an EIA ready. It appeared the road would cater to future development, and



*In June 2006, the Wagner Natural Area Society and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, seen here on a tour of the marl ponds, celebrated the addition of land to the Natural Area.*

D. Johnson

WNAS saw that the industrialization and urbanization of farmland creeping closer to the NA would only threaten the area's integrity further.

Another vigorous campaign and letters to the premier resulted in the cancellation of the road plans. WNAS subsequently obtained an annual lease for the road allowance from the County, which refused to give up ownership. That same year, WNAS learned of an interest to conduct seismic activity in the NA, so they put out a notice that they would deny access to anyone and would vigorously contest any activity on adjacent properties that might threaten the NA. In later years, further land acquisitions – particularly in the south – with donations from government, the Nature Conservancy, and individuals, provided even more security for the WNA.

In 1988, the WNAS closed a large central portion of the NA to public access, believing that a protected core area was necessary to preserve the area's biodiversity. "Although some claim that those plants and animals of the Wagner NA have a right to exist only insofar as they are useful to people," said then-president Alice Hendry, WNAS believed "that these biological species exist in their own right – they have an inherent right to share the NA."

They were backed up by NA Division Manager Peter Lee, who said, "Without appropriate management... those distinctive values that the designation seeks to protect could easily be lost to gradual and unnoticed attrition, especially by random public use."

In 1997 WNAS tallied up five and a half years of free labour spent on the NA. They have received several national and provincial awards over the years. Their recreation lease was recently renewed for another 21 years.

### **The Blessing of Big Lake**

Near Wagner lies provincially significant Big Lake, a shallow prairie slough on the west edge of St. Albert and part of the Sturgeon River. Two shallow basins are surrounded by wetlands, making this one of the top 10 migratory bird staging areas in Alberta. The area has had the support of many citizens over the years, including the



L. Fitch

*Advancing urbanization is a concern for Big Lake, a globally significant Important Bird Area (IBA). The lake is actually a widening of the Sturgeon River, its main water source, and spreads out onto low-lying areas to the north and west in wet years.*

Big Lake Environmental Support Society (BLESS), which began in 1991. With Board members from each of the four municipalities bordering the area, BLESS has monitored water levels; done a bird checklist and brochures; and built a public shelter, a large viewing platform, and a trail.

Since 1969, at least 30 studies on the area have pointed out the need for its protection. Since the 1970s, there has been a proposal for a road on the east side of the area to ease traffic congestion in ever-expanding St. Albert. When the city council voted to go ahead with the West Boundary Road in 1996, well-known local artist Elke Blodgett organized a petition against it. Faced with 11,000 signatures representing more than 50 percent of eligible voters, the city chose to seek alternatives.

BLESS supported the petition and also nominated Big Lake under Special Places 2000. Although the city wanted a buffer zone around the lake, most of the surrounding land is privately owned and would have to be purchased. The local committee agreed to recommend that the government purchase land as it became available. In May 1999, the government designated the Big Lake Conservation Natural Area (BLNA). However, BLESS president Bob Lane wrote that the designation would be unlikely to have "any impact on land

use activities that affect the wetlands, unless adjacent municipalities and landowners unite to that end."

Big Lake was designated a globally significant Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International in 2000, joining Beaverhill Lake, which was the only other IBA in Alberta at the time. However, when a new city council was voted in, the road proposal was resurrected. Many articles and letters appeared in the local newspapers for and against the road. Consultants hired by the city recommended that the road be located further east of the lake (480-620 m) than originally proposed (100 m), but the two-lane road was slated to become four (and maybe six) lanes and would be a dangerous goods route.

In 2002 Alberta Community Development, which included the Parks and Protected Areas Division, appointed BLESS as the official volunteer steward of Big Lake and spearheaded a management planning process for the area, in addition to several studies initiated at that time. BLESS called on the provincial government for a moratorium on the road until the studies were done. At a preliminary meeting between consultants and "stakeholders" for phase one of the management plan, a St. Albert road engineer expressed concerns about the potential influence



of the new steward group. A Parks staff member reportedly dismissed the engineer's concerns, saying, don't worry about the stewards – they don't count for anything.

Road opponents considered the public hearing a farce, as citizens against the road were given little or no time to make their presentations, felt their concerns were ignored, and were heckled by the audience, while proponents of the road were allowed to speak beyond their allotted time. Even a letter by Dr. David Schindler was dismissed by the St. Albert mayor, who claimed that the road would actually improve Big Lake. The road was approved with the assurance of mitigation plans for any environmental damage.

In a letter to the *St. Albert Gazette* (Aug. 28/02), Wilf Borgstede wrote, "We have all been conditioned into believing that there is a strong correlation between economic development and quality of life, so we have become blind to the treasure of preservation.... As a result, the west river crossing is seen as progress packaged in the form of a more convenient and efficient roadway system over a mere slough."

BLESS and the Anti-Bypass Coalition (ABC) criticized the 2003 EIA for containing missing or misleading information, ignoring science, and downplaying the impact of its own findings. Although the road would be outside the boundaries of the NA, BLESS showed that based on aerial photos of past flooding, it would go through the lake bed. Citizens demanded more public consultation and one St. Albert alderman implied that ABC and BLESS activists were not members of the public.

In 2005, with the help of BLESS, Community Development – led by Minister Gary Mar – expanded the BLNA and renamed it the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park in memory of the late lieutenant governor. A government news release (April 22/05) quoted Hole as having said, "If we hope to preserve our way of life, we need to rediscover our respect for the land, the water and the natural world." Ironically, to many people "preserving our way of life" meant building the road.

### Stewards Rescue Natural Areas

When Environment Minister Ty Lund trotted out his proposed *Natural Heritage Act (NHA, Bill 15)* in 1998, it was greeted with strong public criticism because it allowed industrial activities in protected areas (PAs) under the law. The minister would have discretionary power to approve such things as oil and gas and timber dispositions and mineral leases through regulation, even if they violated the Act. Existing industrial activities would be honoured and could be renewed. With 90 percent of Alberta's public land auctioned off to business interests and another 8 percent in national parks, there was little land left that was not yet subject to industrial activity. Motorized recreation was also a concern.

K. Hauch



*ATV damage at Bruderheim Natural Area has been a concern for many years.*

Lund gave assurances that areas would be protected because site management plans would determine what would be allowed in any particular protected area; however, everyone knew the plans could be changed at a moment's notice, or ignored, as in the case of the Rumsey NA – or they could use language like "vegetation management" to mean logging. Lee noted that there are no ecological and protection performance measures in PA legislation or policies,

or in site management plans, and no audit of management performance (*Actions for Ecological Prosperity*, June 2000). Conservationists predicted that the *NHA* would mean endless conflict.

A majority of Albertans who responded to the government's request for feedback in early 1999 said that honouring existing resource commitments in protected sites is incompatible with the purpose of PAs. The government's response was that the existing policy would be maintained but companies could relinquish their tenure interest voluntarily. They refused to consider the option of compensation.

"This is a sad time for any Albertan who has a love of our great outdoors and its wild inhabitants," said well-known conservationist Edgar T. Jones, who had a Natural Area named after him in 1992.

The *NHA* did promise to do some good things, such as roll three acts – the *Provincial Parks Act*, the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act*, and the *Willmore Wilderness Act* – into one piece of legislation. It also proposed a new PA category of Heritage Rangeland (HR) to protect sensitive native grasslands, many of which incorporate grazing leases.

But the *NHA* would remove the Wilderness Areas category and change NAs to Provincial Parks (sites with provincially significant ecological values) or Recreation Areas (sites dedicated to outdoor recreation) categories, or drop them altogether. A new Natural Recreation Areas subcategory, which would include natural or near-natural landscapes of regional or local significance, supposedly gave higher protection than the NA category. But stewards and

### Wilderness Stewardship

Exercising humility and restraint in our interactions with Wilderness is what differentiates "stewardship" from "management." Stewardship entails carefully protecting and guarding certain values, qualities, and experiences, both tangible and intangible, that exist in Wilderness. In contrast, a management paradigm is generally more premised on selecting human-centered goals and objectives for a landscape, and then actively shaping and manipulating the landscape and its wildlife to achieve those pre-determined goals. Good wilderness stewardship requires respecting the value of self-willed land, where natural processes prevail and humans do not dominate and control.

(from: *Wilderness Watcher*, May 2005)

others felt it represented a downgrading for NAs and could lead the public to think these areas were open to inappropriate types of recreation.

The stewards became part of a larger Parks volunteer program in 1997, overseen by the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC), which had some Parks staff and regional representatives. Of the 220 participants at the first joint conference in 1998 at Pigeon Lake, a large majority were campground hosts. It soon became clear to the PA stewards who attended that the focus was going to be on facilities, campgrounds, and camper management, not conservation. All the “welcomes” and “you’re great people” speeches were about hosts, recalls long-time steward and multiple award recipient Dorothy Dickson.

Dickson says government spin in information sessions on Special Places and the *NHA* made them sound great, but problems were only discussed when brought up by knowledgeable stewards. At the one “site problems” session, where stewards could talk about issues, recalls Dickson, the Agriculture Department representative tried to be helpful but obviously could not make promises or decisions, while Forestry treated it all as a joke. “The whole thing was a disappointment,” she says. “Even the food ran out!”

Patsy Cotterill of WNAS thought the sessions were of value but not reassuring. “We felt angry enough by the end to avow political action,” she wrote (WNAS Newsletter, Dec./98). Regardless of the good things they heard, they also heard that public money was getting ever tighter, which meant some PAs might be dropped if they were too expensive to maintain. Already, to save money, the government had required local municipalities, non-profit groups, or individuals to do the work needed to keep some parks, recreation areas, and roadside rest stops open.

Reflecting on that year’s appreciation ceremony and the parade of gifts and speeches lauding volunteers, Cotterill commented that since “it’s evident that government is relying more and more on volunteer help as a means of saving money, we have to wonder: are we being rewarded or are we really being bought? Are we partners in environmental protection,

or puppets? Stewards or stooges?” The stewards were aware that other departments did not like amateurs (or even paid professionals) in these sites telling them what to do.

After this conference, the stewards started talking more seriously about forming their own association to address some of the issues Parks staff no longer seemed free to discuss. The stewards felt this was partly because the current staff had not “grown up” with the program and were part of a bureaucracy more interested in running volunteer programs than trying to improve the conservation of PAs.



*Gladys Pennock, pictured here with Conservation Officer Gary Martin in Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park, received the outstanding individual steward award in 2003 for her stewardship of the Park. She was 77 at the time. By 2003 she had led 211 hikes since she started recording them in 1996. In 2006 she received the Parks Lifetime Volunteerism Achievement Award. Gladys was born and raised, and has lived her entire life all within a few miles of the Park just northeast of Trochu. She researched, wrote, and funded two booklets entitled “Hiking Trails of the Dry Island: In Dry Island Provincial Park” and “Wildflowers of the Dry Island.”*

Sandra Myers, the Volunteer Stewards Coordinator, was the only original staff member left. The potential loss of NAs was another serious concern that galvanized the stewards into forming the Stewards of Alberta’s Protected Areas Association (SAPAA).

The stewards recognized that NAs are “a really awkward bunch of places” that don’t fit one definition, says Alison Dinwoodie, steward for Whitehorse Wildland Park and one of the key initiators of SAPAA. NAs range from very small pocket quarter sections or less to relatively large parks. The stewards agreed with NA reclassification and with developing one piece of legislation that would determine what was permitted in PAs, but they wanted input into decisions.

“It’s very difficult to define conditions where one size fits all,” says Dinwoodie. “It’s only because we were there as stewards that I think a lot of those natural areas still are there.” If it weren’t for the stewards sending in their reports detailing what was happening, she says, nobody would know about those NAs; she thinks they would just quietly disappear or be sold off.

Of particular concern were reserved NAs with a protective notation (PNT) on them (see part 1). PNTs used to be red flags when industrial or motorized activities were proposed, and permission had to be obtained to use the area. Permission was sometimes refused or alternatives were suggested. Dinwoodie feels the PNT is now a fairly toothless designation: these areas are not treated as special but developed as usual. With increasing development over the years, both PNTs and NAs have been under much more pressure.

By March 1999 Lund was prepared to make amendments, including not allowing any downgrade in protective category for an area, but critics charged that the changes would not be enough. Instead, ENGOs proposed a 15/15 solution – withdraw Bill 15 and set aside an additional 15 percent of Alberta – and specific sites were proposed. The government chose to put the bill on hold until the fall. At the May volunteers’ conference, downgraded to a “Volunteer Recognition Weekend,” an inaugural organizational meeting for SAPAA was

held and all stewards were invited to attend.

A cabinet shuffle in May put Gary Mar in charge of the environment portfolio. He quickly set up an MLA Review Committee to obtain yet more public feedback on the bill, review the legislation, and bring out an amended version. Mar agreed to leave the Wilderness Areas category alone. In September 1999 the government asked the public to fill out a workbook with comments on a revised draft of the *NHA*, which suggested phasing out industrial development in PAs. ENGOs boycotted a multi-stakeholder meeting with government and industry to discuss the *NHA* because it was still clear that industrial development was not prohibited in PAs. SAPAA encouraged members to fill out workbooks but also agreed to follow the ENGO lead and boycott stakeholder meetings.

One of the first actions of SAPAA was to meet with Mar. They wanted support for the Volunteer Stewards Program (VSP), and they wanted to be consulted regarding any changes in status of NAs in the *NHA*. They gave Mar a table showing where they thought NAs would fit into the classification with regard to activities. According to Dinwoodie, Mar was quite impressed and told the stewards that the table was much better than any that his department staff had given him.

Mar assured the stewards that NAs would not be downgraded and the VSP would continue. He was interested in SAPAA's suggestion that NAs listed as "recreational" should be for non-motorized, nature-based recreation and that some should be upgraded to Ecological Reserves and others put in a new category called Conservation Areas. "We felt we had made a bit of a mark there to at least bring the Volunteer Stewards Program to his attention and also the importance of Natural Areas," says Dinwoodie. "I think that was a fairly significant achievement for a fairly new and little organization."

But by mid-April 2000, the bill was killed by an unresolved disagreement between Mar and Resource Development Minister Steve West. Mar's new version of the bill proposed a gradual phase-out of

existing industrial development and a prohibition on new applications being approved, a tightening of controls on OHV activity, and a provision for compensation of companies when their operations were phased out, such as land swaps and royalty credits. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers was supportive; West never revealed what he specifically disagreed with.

The MLA Review Committee's report in early April agreed with phasing out industrial activities in PAs and proposed a "no surface access" restriction for new activities. Most importantly, thanks to the efforts of SAPAA and the support of Mar, the recommendations included retaining and redefining the NA class: "The redefined class should include natural areas of local or regional significance established for local conservation and educational purposes. This would include those areas that would have been placed in the 'natural recreation area' category."

The report also recommended foot access only, with horse use and other recreational activities being considered exceptions and determined by site. It recommended prohibiting OHVs and industrial development in NAs because of their small size. Areas already heavily developed or without significant ecological value could be removed from the system. Areas with high historic levels of OHV use could be classed as Recreation Areas or removed from protected status.

There were hints that a new *Parks and Protected Areas Act* might be brought forward after the next election, but Mar made it clear that certain things needed to be resolved first. Dinwoodie cautioned that resources for enforcement of legislation and proper management of NAs was crucial.

### **Communications with Stewards Dulled**

When Lee left Parks in late 1997, Cameron Hantiuk took over as manager of volunteer services. *The Steward* newsletter ceased publication at the end of 1997. Parks started a new newsletter, *Partners in Preservation*, in the spring of 1999 aimed at all their volunteers. The features were largely about individual volunteers and good news

stories on specific sites. Information on development permits, activities of other groups, conservation challenges, ecology, and natural history was mostly dropped. When the largely discredited Special Places program concluded in July 2001, a very laudatory article about its achievements appeared in the newsletter. However, it occasionally gave news of SAPAA.

Dickson speculates that the lack of relevant articles for stewards reflected the very different needs and interests of the different types of volunteers. The Protected Areas Volunteer Stewards were the only volunteers continually dealing with such problems as political policy, inappropriate uses, and vandalism, she says. At the same time they needed to increase their natural history knowledge and keep inventory listings of their sites, and deal with land management issues such as weed control and wetland management. They also had to deal with many different departments and agencies, including municipalities and counties, particularly regarding such things as fences, herbicides, and slough draining.



*The two versions of the Natural Resources volunteer logo and the current Parks and Protected Areas volunteer logo.*

The PA stewards were now only another group of volunteers, which also included Fish and Wildlife monitors, park assistant interpreters, campground hosts, and water monitors.

The stewards' logo was replaced by the Alberta Natural Resources Service one for volunteers, who were subsequently referred to as Natural Resources Service volunteers. This logo was updated in the Fall 2000 newsletter, and then changed to a Parks



and Protected Areas Volunteer logo in the Fall 2001 newsletter.

Parks issued a new paper on the Steward Program, endeavouring to clarify the responsibilities of those involved. It had less emphasis on conservation support, and commitments to helping volunteers with problems were rather weak. The stewards experienced increasing frustration and feelings of alienation. "If it had not been for the efforts of Sandra Myers, many stewards might have left the program at this point," says Dickson.

However, a much appreciated article by Public Lands Specialist Keith Stretch in the Fall 2000 newsletter lauded stewards for assisting staff (doing much of the work they did not have time for), providing valuable information, making improvements, and dealing with the public: "Volunteer stewards are valued partners in natural area management; we couldn't do it without them!"

SAPAA became increasingly important in helping stewards get more action on immediate on-site problems and making contact with and getting help from the staff of the various departments and bureaucracies with which they had to deal. At their fall 2000 meeting in Red Deer, SAPAA decided on bylaws and policies and proposed to apply for status as a non-profit organization. Board members were elected and Dinwoodie became president. SAPAA became a registered society in 2001.

### Changing of the Guard

During the 1990s, Parks became submerged within the large Environment Department and lost a lot of its clout. In 2001 a new department, Community Development, took over the Parks and Protected Areas Division, with Gene Zwodzdesky as the new minister and John Kristensen the Assistant Deputy Minister. The new Sustainable Resource Development Department took over Public Lands, Forestry, and Wildlife. June Markwart took over Hantiuk's position, which in 2001 became manager of the Visitor Services Branch for Parks. Myers remained as the Volunteer Stewards Coordinator. In 2001, there were 304 stewards (239 individuals and 65 groups).



*John Woitenko (left) accepted the 2001 Steward Service Excellence Award on behalf of the Riverlot 56 Natural Area Society. Fred Moffatt, Executive Director of Field Operations for Parks and Protected Areas Division, presented the award at the April 2003 Volunteer Program Awards Banquet, held in conjunction with the 2003 Volunteer Conference at William A. Switzer Provincial Park.*

Stewards thought having a distinct identity in a smaller department might bring Parks more attention but were worried about the separation between the administration and on-the-ground management of sites, which made things even more confusing than before. Communication between departments was poor. Often stewards' reports were the only way Parks staff knew what was going on in PAs. This was quite a difference from the old days, when newsletters regularly listed activities in various sites.

A survey in the Spring 2002 newsletter showed that stewards were least satisfied with their field staff support. Parks promised to improve communications by setting up more onsite and orientation meetings between field staff, Parks administrative staff, and stewards. But the reality was that there were simply not enough field staff, they were difficult to get hold of, and NAs were not their priority.

SAPAA met with Zwodzdesky, who was positive about the program, and told him the stewards needed support. They were very prepared to put in the work needed in their areas, but not many were interested in raising the funds to do it. The stewards also wanted more support in actually protecting the areas. Having

enforceable regulations was important, and OHVs were the biggest problem. But the future of NAs and PNTs was still an issue. NAs established by Order-in-Council (OC) required another OC to remove them, but these decisions were not debated in the legislature or in public.

Parks told stewards it now had a small budget for items such as signs, fenceposts, and wire, but stewards still had to work with land managers from Public Lands or Forestry (and in some cases local authorities and landowners) to use them. Information about imminent industrial development in NAs came from the Resource Development Department. Parks was trying to get a process for notification of stewards, but applications for land use often had a turn-around time of only a few days. Neither the stewards nor the management plans they drew up had legal standing, so there was no obligation for anyone to inform them. Stewards with a recreational Licence of Occupation, a lease, or a disposition did have to be informed, but did not have any right to stop a development.

Kristensen addressed stewards at SAPAA's October 2001 AGM in Red Deer. A long-time supporter of the stewards program, he urged stewards to get to know their site supervisors and to call on Myers if they had

problems. He said that site reports were very important to help the division understand the extent of problems such as inappropriate OHV use. A new Act was still in the works and, as a result of SAPAA's representations to Gary Mar, a Natural Areas class would be retained. By 2004 it was clear that only changes to existing acts would be made, and Natural Areas would still not have management plans or legally enforceable regulations.

In 2003 Ted Switzer was appointed Interpretive Services Coordinator and asked to review all programs to see if some should be reduced or eliminated. He found wide support for the VSP and said he was looking forward to working collaboratively with SAPAA. A core group was formed of field and Parks staff and volunteer stewards, including Jean Funk (Sherwood Park NA) and John Woitenko (Riverlot 56), second president of SAPAA. The first recommendation was to use the original stewards' logo for steward business (the change in logo had been a sore point). They developed a new vision, mission, goals, and objectives, and a revised draft of the 2001 volunteer steward policy paper, and they updated staff administrative procedures, including criteria for selecting stewards.

### The New Order

In the Spring 2002 newsletter, Markwart reported on a new recruitment brochure for the VSP, the initiation of mandatory orientation sessions for new stewards, and the preparation of a new Stewards Handbook. Stewards were not involved in writing the handbook, but in 2003 as it neared completion, it was circulated to four stewards, including SAPAA Board members. They brought copies to the fall SAPAA AGM and encouraged members to send in their comments. That resulted in a major revision and a meeting between Parks staff and the SAPAA Board to discuss concerns.

The draft – a 30-page, difficult-to-use manual – was not very well received, says Dickson. The stewards had particular concerns about the lack of clearly stated conservation goals, the lack of understanding that respect and trust needed to be a two-way



*Bertha Ford accepted the 2001 Steward Service Excellence Award on behalf of the Red Deer River Naturalist Society. Kyle Clifford, West Central Area Manager for Parks and Protected Areas Division, presented the award at the May 2001 Volunteer Program Awards Banquet held in conjunction with the Volunteer Conference at Wabamun Lake Provincial Park.*

partnership, and a condescending tone towards volunteers.

What angered stewards the most were statements about stewards being representatives for Parks – stewards were told that they were to create a positive image of the Division, that it was inappropriate for them to express opinions contrary to government policies, and that they should get permission before speaking to the media. Dickson felt the draft handbook could lead to the loss of the VSP. The stewards made it clear they had a different way of working. They were so concerned, they sent their comments not only to Parks staff but to Kristensen. While Parks staff never liked stewards going above their heads, there were times when the stewards felt it was necessary to get action.

The New Order staff had a very different attitude towards the stewards that was a radical departure from the management of Lee. They were bureaucrats, more interested in image and numbers than conservation. They

saw enjoyment, not conservation, as the aim of the VSP. Markwart expressed enthusiasm for working with volunteers: "I'm always awed by their talent and their expertise. You really become friends with these people." But it took a couple more years before frosty relations with the stewards thawed out.

The 2004 annual conference was held at the Rocky Mountain YMCA at Yamnuska, the same venue as the big 1993 conference. Sadly, only about 30 stewards attended compared to the 165 in 1993, and there were fewer than 70 registrants altogether. However, Dickson says it was one of the best of the recent conferences. One session was on a new vision for the VSP. There was frank discussion of concerns and issues, including the handbook, communication and inter-departmental roles and responsibilities, and the need to get back to their major mission of conservation.

When the final handbook was released in 2005, the sections on



public advocacy and the media had been changed to state that stewards were volunteers and not official spokespeople for the department. Stewards were asked to identify themselves as volunteers and to say that their opinions were their own and not those of the government.

### Advocacy Triumphs over Adversity

Should stewards be advocates? “Absolutely!” says Lee. “The main function of the steward should be that of an advocate for their site. Stewards are, or should be, absolutely critical for the long-term security and conservation of natural areas. Without them, non-conservation interests would predominate on these sites.” Lee had plenty of experience with WNAS, which came into existence as an advocacy group, and he was a strong advocate himself. But the New Order staff balked at the word.

One of the major aims of SAPAA was to advocate for the protection of NAs. At the May 1999 conference when the aims of SAPAA were discussed, the use of the word “advocate” made some of the staff members uncomfortable. Stewards pointed out that advocacy had once been the aim of everyone working in the program. If staff were no longer comfortable in continuing with that role (or, perhaps, not allowed to without jeopardizing their jobs), it was important for stewards to be free to speak out, particularly with the provisions of the *NHA*.

Some stewards felt it was impossible to join an “advocacy group,” including those in government and industry. As one put it, “In my work ‘advocacy’ is a dirty word and I would lose all respect and credibility.” SAPAA expressed sympathy for their position and harboured no ill will toward those who did not join.

At the June 2003 meeting with Parks, the staff said that while they wanted to work more closely with SAPAA, they were uncomfortable with advocacy as one of the association’s purposes. They wanted SAPAA to remove the word “advocacy.” They were also concerned about SAPAA working with other groups and about stewards having direct contact with the Minister. They assured SAPAA

that improvements were happening to address the association’s concerns.

SAPAA discussed the issue of advocacy and the attitude of staff at their next AGM. “Why,” wondered Dinwoodie, “is the advocacy by many groups such as OHVers for their own interests accepted, when advocacy for environmental protection is not?”



*From 1997 to 2004, the Steward Service Excellence Award was a framed print entitled “Sacred and Sacrificed,” depicting wild buffalo on the plains of Alberta. The print was permanently retired in 2005. In recognition of Alberta’s Centennial, a new Steward Service Excellence Award was introduced, entitled “Taking Off.” It depicts a young great blue heron beginning its fall migration journey.*

Most stewardship organizations include advocacy in their mandate, and SAPAA was not a lobby group with vested or financial interest in protecting NAs. SAPAA unanimously voted not to change the wording of its objectives as requested by Parks staff. Some executive members had a further meeting with Parks staff in December 2003 and stressed that what SAPAA was advocating for was the preservation and protection of PAs; they were being supportive of the Division and its mandate.

Dinwoodie says they tried to explain that they were engaging in positive advocacy. They were not out to “get” the government or working against it, but trying to get it to do something. But they said they would defend the program against harmful bureaucratic manoeuvres. “We had spoken out for years, and that had been part of our role,” says Dickson. “New people were so scared we were going to criticize the government, and sometimes we were. They had to accept our refusal.”

Woitenko says the stewards weren’t sure where the government stood on preserving NAs and why advocacy made them get their backs up. “They thought we were going to march and storm the bastille, but that’s not what we’re about at all.” He says it took them more than four years to convince staff that the stewards were an important resource and were there to work with them. “What we want to do is make sure our natural areas are indeed protected in perpetuity. Why shouldn’t we be advocates?”

That effort appeared to show in Markwart’s response to stewards as advocates. She thinks it’s natural that some stewards become advocates, although it is not a program requirement. “Stewards can be ambassadors in their community and very effective in raising public awareness and support for those sites,” she acknowledges.

Kristensen agrees. “I think advocates are a positive thing,” he says. “It means that you want to see the area maintained or see it improved from a habitat perspective, or you want to see more people use it in a positive way so that more people become as educated about the area as you do.” His preference is to work together with stewards on issues, although he accepts that people in a free society can do other things. “There are going to be differing opinions about particular areas and the things we should be letting happen there. But certainly if we can work together, it does make for a much more productive way of keeping these areas as natural as possible.”

At SAPAA’s 2005 AGM, which I attended, Kristensen had some advice for the stewards – don’t embarrass the government. The government apparently did not want to work with anyone or any group that embarrassed them. I said I thought the government embarrassed itself and we just pointed it out. These thoughts are not new. In *The Covenant*, a sweeping historic novel of South Africa, author James Michener describes apartheid’s Terrorism Act of 1967, which forbade any act or attempted act that in any way embarrassed the state and was punishable by imprisonment or death. One of his characters, on trial, for (among other things) embarrassing

## Local Stewardship: Training Ground for an Environmental Vanguard

Many individuals and groups are politicized by their involvement in stewardship activities and, as a result, become part of an active, effective environmental constituency. Even if their initial interests lie mainly in outdoor recreation, nature study, or simple enjoyment of an attractive place, any threat of harm to a valued species, locale or activity can trigger a pattern that commonly politicizes those involved.

People often seek help from government sources, feel they have not received the support they wanted, put their stewardship group on an action alert and begin to address the problem politically by doing research, lobbying, preparing briefs, dealing with the media and gradually acquiring the skills to become an effective voice in the decision-making arena.

This kind of experience has turned many “mild-mannered” nature, sports, and cottager groups into sophisticated participants in the rough-and-tumble of local or higher-level politics.

(from an article of the same title by Sally Lerner in *Alternatives*, March/April 1994)

the government, says: “In the eyes of the civilized world, this government embarrasses itself.”

Dinwoodie says Parks is now trying to define the role of stewards more clearly, whereas before it was left up to the individual. “Depending how persistent they [the stewards] were, things got done or they didn’t get done.” She says if stewards report inappropriate things going on in their areas and neither the land manager nor Parks does anything because of staff shortages or lack of power, conscientious stewards feel they must do something, such as get more local support or attend public hearings. Dinwoodie was an intervenor in the original Cheviot mine hearings in the mid-1990s, as a member of the Alpine Club of Canada and as steward for the Cardinal Divide NA.

“You are representing, in a way, the public,” she says. “People try to label us as special interest groups, but we’re not because we’re not making anything off it. It’s purely voluntary and we’re not doing it for ourselves, we’re doing it as stewards of these public lands.” With cutbacks in Parks over the years, the stewards are filling in the void of education, monitoring, talking to the public, and attending public meetings on behalf of the general public, whose voice may not otherwise be represented. “We are stewards for the public,” she says. “We are a public voice. That was really the original intention of the stewards program – they were to be a voice for the public, an interface between the public and the government.”

Part of the steward’s job, she says, is maintaining communication with the government – but it needs to be both ways. One of the areas in which she feels stewards are essential is in the drawing up of management plans. In the old days, Lee encouraged stewards to do management planning, and knowledgeable staff were available. These days, stewards tend to be consulted after the fact. At a meeting for management planning for Whitehorse Wildland Park, Dinwoodie pointed out that they had the wrong maps and boundaries, that statements had been taken out of other management plans and were unsuitable for the area, and that a brochure stated incorrectly that one could drive right up to the continental divide.

Dinwoodie would also like to see better training for stewards so their reports are not just anecdotal but can be used for serious monitoring and management. “They could be making much more use of the stewards, but I don’t know how much they’re really pushing this and certainly it’s not really in the manual.” She would like to get more information back from the reports they send in, not just tidbits in the newsletter. Current SAPAA President Peter Kershaw, a geomorphologist at the University of Alberta and a long-time steward of Hastings Lake Islands NA, agrees. He doesn’t send in reports because he doesn’t know what is being done with them.

Dinwoodie always recommends that people talk to their land managers

and fill out their reports. Some stewards are reluctant to publicize their areas for fear of attracting too many people and subsequent damage. But Dinwoodie says getting better awareness of one’s site can actually confer greater protection because staff will be more aware of it and what the problems are. However, she also says the new report forms are too complicated and unclear.

## Stewards Today

Dickson feels that staff attitudes are changing for the better, and she attributes that to the influence of Kristensen. But problems remain. Kershaw notes that many areas have no stewards to watch over things, and the government doesn’t watch either. Often people feel they can do as they please. Issues ranging from cattle grazing, cutting trees and trails, and access routes for OHVs, to tree stands for deer hunting are increasing and escalating. Rules on the NA boundary signs about what is permissible are still in the form of unenforceable “requests.”

Kershaw says people tell SAPAA they would like to get involved and make reports about what is happening in particular areas, but the government won’t appoint stewards to areas where there may be potential for conflict. It shows the government is not really interested in preservation or maintenance, he says, and fancy conferences don’t substitute for on-the-ground protection.

He points to the case of Helen Trefry, a Canadian Wildlife Service employee whom he encouraged to take stewardship of the Parkland NA near her home. Fish and Wildlife and Doug Bowes, manager of Policy and Land Use Planning for Parks, told her they were not taking stewards because they were worried about confrontations between stewards and OHVs.

Trefry was especially concerned about wetlands in the area. The gas company on site admitted that access was a problem on cutlines, but no one seemed interested in doing anything. Trefry tried to close the path, but logs were removed. Trefry had approached a person riding a quad who was cutting trees. He said he was from Ducks Unlimited and was clearing the trail, which was actually an access route for a gas company, to check duck nesting



boxes. Yet Trefry had voluntarily checked those same boxes by hiking in.

A sign saying “Foot Access Only” had fallen down. When she tried to get new signs, she was told the government did not make them anymore because they were not legally enforceable, yet she was also told that in the past, people respected them. People in the area don’t know it’s protected, she says, but they do know it’s not private land. She is pondering putting up her own sign – after all, who would do anything about it?

At a meeting, Trefry asked Bowes if she could just send in reports and not talk to anyone. He told her that he already knew what was happening out there, so what good would reports do? That response did not sit well with stewards at the meeting. Bowes told them that without legislation, the department’s hands were tied. They were also extra busy with all the increased oil and gas activity in NAs. He said that more public support was needed and that people should contact politicians about better laws. Trefry argues that while they say they want more public support, they don’t want stewards who can garner it.

Bowes and Markwart both talk about providing “meaningful opportunities” to stewards, but they clearly don’t intend for stewards to define “meaningful.” The key message from our end, he says, is “we still try and match up volunteers with

appropriate volunteer opportunities but we want those to be safe and meaningful opportunities and don’t want to place people in a confrontational situation where we can avoid that for now.” That attitude indicates a significant level of distrust in stewards’ abilities and intelligence, and it contradicts Kristensen’s value of working together.

Kershaw says the priorities of stewards and government are different: stewards want to maintain ecological integrity and government is interested in generating tourism dollars. Conservationists are concerned that Parks’ new strategy only values PAs for human use and not for their own sake. “It seems to me everything has to have a dollar value as far as this current government is concerned,” says Kershaw. “From my point of view, these areas have value in and of themselves.” NAs will never compete with the oil and gas sector and should never be justified in economic terms, he believes.

Kristensen says it’s important to talk about the dollar value of PAs in order to get the attention and support of people who don’t intuitively think of natural values. There’s a “tug of war” going on between different departments and different user perspectives, he says. “We need to get ourselves on the same playing field as others who talk about the dollar value of their development or whatever. We need to show that

hiking, bird-watching, all the different benefits have economic value.” He told stewards the three P’s of government are People, Prosperity and Preservation.

Anything with preservation value in and of itself is devalued, Kershaw argues. And that includes the stewards, who, he says, are unpaid and undervalued. “Stewards spend considerable time and effort monitoring sites and know them well; their opinion should be valued.” The government, he notes, is interested in having stewards so it can justify lobbying for more funding. “In a sense, the stewards may be making the situation worse because they are doing their work for free, so the government doesn’t have to do it,” he points out. “But when there is a problem, the government doesn’t want to do anything about it.”

Kristensen acknowledges it’s a challenge to respond to stewards’ concerns. The Division gets a lot of complaints about OHVs, random camping, and vegetation destruction, but lack of legislative teeth prevents regulations from being developed to control negative activities. Parks staff say they are working behind the scenes to improve things, such as getting better legislation. Some NAs – like Big Lake – are being moved to higher categories of protection.

With Parks listed in the name of the new department (Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture) Kristensen is optimistic that PAs will get more attention. But things move slowly and for now, stewards still lack the necessary backup in manpower and regulations to prevent abuses in NAs. They can put up signs asking people not to do certain things that may be legal but damaging, but signs can be ignored or torn down.

Looking at the future, Woitenko says, “What I would like to see is SAPAA dissolved. And the reason it’s going to be dissolved is because government is going to recognize how valuable the stewards program is, how valuable the stewards are, and they’re going to communicate with stewards and they’re going to give the stewards the recognition they deserve. That’s my goal.”

### **If It’s Priceless, Does It Count?**

In the public arena, our sense of place and our relationship with beloved landscapes – which we consider priceless – are handicapped when that “pricelessness” must compete with development, which always brings a good price indeed. The saying “There’s comfort in numbers” takes on a new meaning for bureaucrats evaluating the environmental effects of proposed development... But where is the accounting for the heart of the land, its character, its majesty? The beauty of the natural world and our ability to find solitude and meaning in nature are values that defy a price tag or quantification...

Our sense of place – the sum of our relationships with our lands – cannot be dismissed as maudlin sentimentality. Our desire to leave a legacy of intact, thriving, beautiful ecosystems is part of what it means to be human. If asked to describe people or places that are most important to us, no one starts reeling off rote statistics. We speak from the heart, describing character, experiences, memories, and spirit. When we speak of lands, especially those we collectively own, why should we be silent on that which is most meaningful?

(from an article of the same title by Gloria Flora, a former supervisor of a Nevada National Forest and founder of the nonprofit Sustainable Obtainable Solutions, *Orion*, July/August 2006)

## New Blood

One of the main concerns of stewards is getting in new blood. “Very few stewards are new at the game,” notes Kershaw. Dinwoodie says old-time members have gone through a lot, including much frustration. Keeping the program going in the future will be one of the challenges, she says. Kristensen thinks that retiring baby boomers with a passion for the outdoors will be a goldmine for active and knowledgeable volunteers.

In 2004 parks reported 278 individual, 58 group, and 7 roving stewards. However, non-active stewards are not removed from the list. Many people are reluctant to commit for the two-year required time period. Dinwoodie stresses how important it is to monitor changes over a longer period, a minimum of five years. She says new stewards don’t see the changes that have happened and may accept a degraded landscape as natural.

There are also concerns about liability. Staff are concerned that if they build trails, they have to be maintained or someone could sue. Government has a blanket insurance for individuals, but societies must carry their own. WNAS, for example, has to raise enough money to cover insurance costs, and their insurance tripled because they built a shelter.

In *Nature Conservation in an Era of Indifference*, Don Gayton says, “A pre-condition for successful nature conservation projects is the presence of committed individuals, largely from the volunteer sector” (*BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management*, 2004). He points out that the problem of conserving nature is social, not scientific, governmental, or economic. “Governments are not committed to nature conservation because we aren’t,” he proposes.

It is up to citizens to make nature more central to their daily lives, he writes. Then government will follow. What is needed is ways to allow prolonged, intimate, and interactive contact with nature for young people, far beyond what schools and parks offer. “We need to elevate and enhance the public profile of the conservationist. We need to create and maintain wild and semi-wild spaces in urban areas. And finally, we must begin to think

Courtesy S. Myers



*Alice Hendry (right) of the Wagner Natural Area Society presented Volunteer Steward Coordinator Sandra Myers with an award in 1998 in recognition of her work over the years for the Volunteer Steward Program. The gift was a framed photograph of lady's slipper orchids taken by Leota Cummins in the Wagner Natural Area.*

bioregionally, and enhance the social value of attachment to place.”

In the summer of 2005, Sandra Myers resigned from her position after 18 years as Volunteer Steward Coordinator to become a senior program/policy manager with Parks. She was instrumental in helping build the stewards program into one of the most successful volunteer programs in western Canada. She was always a favourite with stewards who credited her with keeping the program afloat in the New Order.

“You have always been the one person all volunteer stewards have known they could count on and trust,” said Alice Hendry in her presentation of a Wagner award to Myers in 1998. She praised Myers for her dedication and drive to keep the program going. “The Volunteer Steward Program is truly YOUR program, Sandy. Without you the Volunteer Stewards would not exist.”

In a farewell letter to the stewards, Myers reminisced on the program. At the beginning, she wrote, “the sky was the limit.” She left the stewards with her hope that they remain involved and her belief that the sky is still the limit today.

## Ministers Responsible for Protected Areas

**EP** – Environmental Protection,  
**CD** – Community Development,  
**SRD** – Sustainable Resource Development  
**TPRC** – Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture

Dec. 1992 – Oct. 1994:  
Brian Evans, EP

Oct. 1994 – May 1999:  
Ty Lund, EP

May 1999 – Fall 2000:  
Gary Mar, EP

Fall 2000 – Mar. 2001:  
Halvar Johnson, EP

Mar. 2001 – Nov. 2004:  
Gene Zwozdesky, CD;  
Mike Cardinal, SRD

Nov. 2004 – Apr. 2006:  
Gary Mar, CD;  
Dave Coutts, SRD

April 2006 – Dec. 2006:  
Dennis Ducharme, CD

Dec. 2006 – present:  
Hector Goudreau, TPRC;  
Ted Morton, SRD

*Many thanks to Dorothy Dickson for suggesting this story and providing an extensive history on the volunteer stewards, to Alison Dinwoodie for her many insights, to those who granted interviews and provided photos, and to all the stewards for their inspiration and testimony.*

**Clarification for Part Two:** In 1997 the Recreation and Protected Areas Management Committee (RPAMC) asked the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) to conduct a focus group to identify volunteer issues and to develop a list of participants for a focus group that included staff and specific representatives from some of the key volunteer groups. Forty-eight people were invited and 30 people showed up. The VCC selected a team of Peter Lee, Marilyn Cooke, Doug Pilkington, and Dorothy Dickson to deliver a presentation to RPAMC on the findings.





## HAY-ZAMA LAKES – INTEGRATED LAND MANAGEMENT AT ITS BEST

By Joyce Hildebrand, AWA Conservation Specialist

*“Economic activity, environmental management, and cultural sensitivities can co-exist if, and only if the neighbours arrive at mutually beneficial agreements through consultation and participation.” – Hay-Zama Committee Vision, 1994*

The champagne is on ice for the festivities in 2017 when the last well will be shut down in Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park, 18 years after the park’s official designation in 1999. The collaborative, lengthy process of phasing out oil and gas production in these internationally significant wetlands could well serve as a template for future protection of Alberta’s wild spaces.

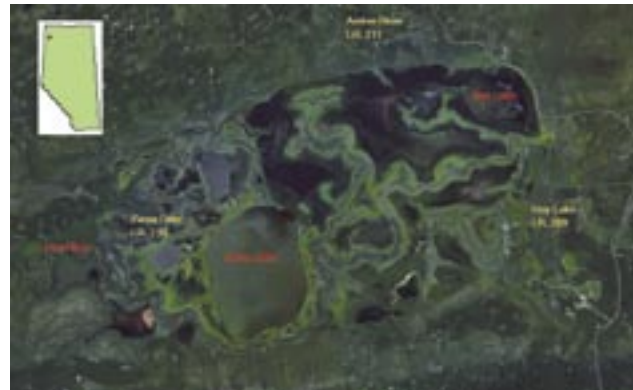
It’s a timely antidote to the onslaught of bad news about climate change, water shortages, and frenzied development in a runaway economy. And all it took was time, patience, persistence, constant communication, trust, and general good will. Or as Pat Cabezas – one of the three co-chairs of the committee guiding the Hay-Zama process – likes to say, “Just follow the formula SC=ICT<sup>2</sup>: Successful Change = Information, Communication, Transparency, and Trust. It’s all there in the Hay-Zama Committee.”

### Hay-Zama: Home of Dene Thá

The 486-km<sup>2</sup> Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park in the northwest corner of Alberta comprises marshes, open water, willow swamps, woodlands, and wet meadows. Located 120 km northwest of High Level, the park is situated on three major waterfowl migration flyways, providing habitat for hundreds of thousands of nesting and migrating birds. As the earth heats up and wildlife habitat continues to shrink, protecting existing wetlands like Hay-Zama on which birds and other species are dependent becomes ever more urgent.

This area contains one of Alberta’s few bison herds in which there is no evidence of disease (although the herd has not yet been tested). It is also part of the fishing, trapping, and hunting territory of the Dene Thá First Nation.

NASA World Wind



*Hay-Zama Wildland Park, designated in 1999.*

“Hay-Zama is our traditional territory,” says Chief James Ahnassay. “Back in the 1940s when the reserve lands were surveyed, our leadership chose the land surrounding Hay Lake, Zama, and Amber so our people could continue living off the land as we had for eons.”

Had the ecological and cultural importance of this area been acknowledged before the expansion of oil and gas development into this remote corner of the province, the energy industry would probably not have been allowed to set foot here. “This should never have happened,” says Chief Ahnassay. “Our elders did not like the oil companies coming in; they were very much against it because of the potential for environmental disaster. Although nothing major has ever happened, there is always that potential.”

The Hay-Zama area is home to about 180 wild horses, descendants of the animals that arrived with European traders and were used by aboriginals before settlements were established. These horses are sometimes seen licking minerals from the mounds built up to contain the drilling areas and have been found dying in the vicinity of the wellsites. Elders suspect that there is a link between their mortality and the oil and gas activities. The entire herd

is being tested by Dr. Rex Coupland for swamp fever this month, and the results will be available in early summer.

By the time the area received global attention in 1982 through its designation as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, oil and gas activity was already two decades old in the area and wells dotted the

lakes and marshes. In 1970, when conservationists called for a shutdown of the Rainbow-Zama Lake oilfield, their concerns about the risk of serious environmental impact from a spill or blowout were dismissed by the Alberta Health Minister, who contended that Alberta’s record in pollution control and conservation was the best in North America.

### Move ‘Em Out

In 1985 the Alberta government finally acknowledged the cultural, environmental, and economic concerns related to oil and gas activities in the complex and created the Hay-Zama Committee (HZC) to address them. After several years of inactivity, the Committee was revived at the request of the energy industry in 1994 and has been actively working toward the accelerated depletion of oil and gas reserves in the Wildland Park ever since. Its membership represents a diversity of sectors, including the oil and gas industry, three levels of government, environmental non-governmental organizations (AWA), and First Nations.

Using consensus decision-making, the HZC has patiently traveled the sometimes bumpy road toward its destination – a truly protected wetland

complex free of industrial activity. The landmarks along the way have included the government's Interim Directive (ID) 96-1, as well as three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with different oil and gas companies.

ID 96-1, released in 1996, was spawned by the activities of the HZC and earned the Committee an Emerald Award. Based on a wetland delineation commissioned by the HZC, the Directive used biological and hydrological criteria to adjust the boundaries of the park, which were originally established more arbitrarily using township/range coordinates. As a result of this change, the Committee was able to define more clearly the areas most sensitive to impacts from oil and gas development (referred to as Area 1 and encompassing almost the entire park).

At least as important as the new boundary delineation was the recognition in ID 96-1 that the risk of serious environmental impact was high enough "to encourage the rapid and safe depletion of any reserves being drained by wells within Area 1... and the timely abandonment of any associated well bores, while still providing companies with a reasonable opportunity to develop their mineral leases." The Directive further recommended that "all future mineral leases sold within Area 1 will stipulate that no surface access will be allowed... For all future mineral leases sold within Area 2, a 100 metre buffer from Area 1, due to the proximity to open water, must be observed for any new surface activity."

In addition, ID 96-1 included a number of special requirements for seismic, drilling, production, and servicing operations, recognizing the special sensitivity of the Hay-Zama Complex and the need to proceed with caution.

And then the HZC hit a major pothole – Alberta Energy hedged and waffled, refusing to sign off on the Interim Directive. As a last resort, the Committee issued a news release praising the government for its wonderful cooperation in moving the process forward through ID 96-1. Alberta Energy had two choices: refuse to sign the Directive and risk public embarrassment and opprobrium or

AWA Files



*Located in the far northwest of Alberta, Hay-Zama is one of 1,069 wetlands around the world designated as an internationally significant area under the Ramsar Wetlands Convention.*

begrudgingly give in. They chose the latter, and the HZC bus was back on the road.

In 1999, a few months after the official designation of the park, the first MOU was signed by Ventus Energy agreeing to the cessation of oil and gas production by specific dates in the most high-risk portions of the complex. This was followed by two more MOUs with Crispin (2002) and Devlan (2003), as well as two Addenda to the original MOU (2000, 2003). These agreements were precedent-setting: time limits on oil and gas extraction had never been set in Alberta before – the government hadn't allowed it.

Significantly, all of the MOUs (and ID 96-1) are included in the Management Plan, signed off by Cabinet in 2001. "If they weren't," notes Cliff Wallis, AWA's representative on the HZC, "they'd be a lot easier to ignore." The MOUs significantly reduce the period of time oil and gas operations are conducted in the Complex, phasing out operations step by step until the final withdrawal in 2017.

### **Keys to Success**

As multi-stakeholder groups sprout up in Alberta like spring crocuses (or Canada thistle, depending on your perspective), doubts about their effectiveness abound. Many a well-worn conservationist in this province has spent months or years participating in at least one such group, only to have the resulting recommendations

gather dust, never to be implemented. Is the government just using us to do their dirty work (usually for nothing) or distracting us from more important – and more controversial – tasks?

The Hay-Zama process shows that multi-stakeholder groups can work to benefit wilderness, as well as the people and wildlife dependent on the land. What are the necessary ingredients?

"The beauty of this exercise," says HZC co-chair Pat Cabezas, echoing the vision of the Committee, "is that the purpose of the HZC is to manage the production of hydrocarbon extraction in a way in which economic activity, environmental management, and cultural sensitivities can co-exist." We hear words like this often in Alberta – the infamous "balancing" of industry with environment and culture, with the latter two being jostled off the balance beam; cynicism is often a justifiable reaction. But in Hay-Zama, somehow it has worked. Maybe it helped that the issue was well defined: high-risk economic activities were going on in an extremely sensitive area and the task was to manage it all. Then again, where in Alberta is the scenario any different? How does such a disparate group move forward?

"We all had to agree that the main thing is the ecosystem, that it's not all about money," says Wallis. "You also have to work with the local community, find common values and work to protect them." After agreeing on the goal, it's important to segment the task and establish the risks of

taking each step: “You start with the highest risk because it clarifies the issue; if you don’t get agreement there, you won’t get it anywhere.” And to get somewhere, he says, you need creativity, which comes in considering multiple pathways. “If you see only one pathway,” he says, “you risk losing it all.”

Why would oil and gas operators agree to change their operations in a way that would inconvenience them and affect their profits, which is presumably their *raison d’être*? Initially, Cabezas approached the energy companies and asked them what they needed in order to maximize their productivity while limiting their time in the complex. “I said, why don’t we work backwards – how much oil do we have, what do you need to get it out within the existing commitments?”

Even entering into those negotiations, however, required some motivation on the part of industry. In part, says Wallis, they complied because of what might follow: a hearing process that would cost

Zurfluh of Parks and Protected Areas – facilitate the process, modeling the collaborative nature of the endeavour and ensuring that everyone’s interests are represented.

Everyone involved has to be willing and able “to go from the me-me into the we-we,” as Cabezas says. “If we just defend our own interests without thinking of the collective outcome, it won’t work.” In this process, nobody wins absolutely; everyone compromises something. Wallis agrees: “If people come totally committed to their dogma, you won’t get anywhere.” Even Alberta Energy, he adds with amazement, is singing from the same songsheet!

The longevity of the core members of the group has also greased the wheels of the HZC vehicle – they have been together since 1994, when the Committee was reconvened. As industry players change with every merger and buyout, this level of continuity and experience with the process keeps the group and its vision strong and focused. The curves in the

extend their deadline for getting out of a medium-risk area. “But they came with nothing for the land. That’s not how we work,” says Wallis. “There must at least be tradeoffs.”

More recently, a newcomer to the process, Sound Energy Trust, also pushed to extend their deadline for abandoning wells. Although Sound has fully complied with the MOUs to this point, they are now balking. The situation is not yet totally resolved, but the government of Alberta continues to support the original agreement and is considering their request for compensation.

For now, the situation has been defused and the Committee acknowledges that Sound has generally been a positive presence in the area, but as Wallis emphasizes, “if you don’t keep talking, things start to go sideways.” One of those off-kilter moments occurred when Sound offered the HZC a financial incentive – a certain percentage of the revenue to be used for HZC activities – in exchange for extending the life of the wells. But the Committee presented a united front, refusing to be bought out.

### It’s All about the Neighbourhood

A few years ago a bunch of neighbours in Calgary got together and started a process to declare their little neighbourhood park pesticide-free. It took a while to convince the City that this was a good thing, but the neighbours finally had a picnic to celebrate their success. Once you start talking over the fence, animosities soften, friendships begin, and good things happen.

It’s a little more difficult when neighbours are separated by miles of wilderness, but Cabezas has seen the intense antagonism between some of the neighbours in the Hay-Zama region transformed into reasonable negotiation through the HZC process. “The whole idea is the neighbourhood,” he says. “Everybody in the area has the right to participate in the decision-making process. And since we are an advisory committee to the government, the advice has to come from the neighbourhood.”

Occasionally, though, even well-intentioned neighbours can get a little devious. On January 31,



*Several small oil spills have occurred in Hay-Zama in the last few years, but the companies involved have contained the spills with booms and mitigated the damage. With oil and gas activity phasing out of the area, the risk of a major spill will gradually diminish until 2017, when industry will no longer be active in the Wildland Park.*

them more in the end, in terms of both financial cost and public image. There is also the simple appeal of doing things in a better way, but when the price of oil skyrocketed and negotiations bogged down, it became evident that profit bullies environmental and cultural agendas.

Another key is having the right people around the table. The three co-chairs of the Committee – Pat Cabezas representing oil and gas, Chief James Ahnassay of the Dene Thá, and Ken

road that come with energy company changes, though, certainly present challenges. “The longer everyone is in the same process,” says Wallis, “the more buy-in there is. But you have to keep at it, keep refocusing people. There is no resting on laurels.”

Each MOU contains a clause that holds a new company accountable to the same commitments as the original signatory, but vigilance is always necessary. At a recent meeting, Pengrowth Energy Trust wanted to



## China and Canada Cooperate to Twin Ramsar Wetlands

Cliff Wallis, AWA's representative on the Hay-Zama Committee, has had some creative ideas over the years, but this may top them all – twinning a remote wetland in boreal Alberta and a nature reserve on the arid steppes of Inner Mongolia, China. These areas may not be at the top of your list of comparable landscapes. But while bison don't roam free in China, Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park and the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve have much in common.

About 15 times larger than Hay-Zama, the Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia is a huge wetland complex of lakes, rivers, marshes, shrubs and reedbeds. Like Hay-Zama, it is used as a staging area for birds on a major migratory route and is an important site for 284 bird species. The area is also critical for flood storage, sediment retention, groundwater recharge, maintaining regional climate, and increasing air humidity in the surrounding steppes. Tourism offers birdwatching, boating, and traditional Mongolian foods, customs, and cultures, and the area is becoming a centre for environmental education and research.

The Reserve shares another commonality with Hay-Zama: potential threats to its ecological integrity. With more than two million



*Cliff Wallis (front, second from right) with scientists and protected area staff in Inner Mongolia.*

domestic animals grazing in the surrounding grasslands and some 10,000 tons of fish caught per year, overfishing and overgrazing are very real possibilities, as is damage from incipient oil and gas development.

Both Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park and China's Dalai Lake Reserve are Ramsar sites. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an international treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation of wetlands. The Ramsar designation obliges "wise use" of a site and brings increased publicity and international prestige for the designated wetland.

The seeds for the twinning process were planted when Wallis did some consulting work in Inner Mongolia. "It started with

friendship," he says. "There was a resonance with certain people who were passionate, innovative, genuine." Both areas were developing Management Plans at the same time, and both are home for minority peoples. Wallis began the twinning process in 2004, and for several years, the paperwork wound its ponderous way through the bowels of government. The Memorandum of Understanding awaits some fine-tuning at the Chinese end, but it will be signed in time for the festivities this fall celebrating the official dedication of, and the collaborative management agreement for, Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park.

Twinning these areas is more than symbolic. "We don't celebrate the international importance of our sites enough," says Wallis. "An international focus tends to keep the process more honest, and it's less likely to founder. If there is global interest, eyes are watching us. There is a higher chance of exposure if we do things wrong." We can also learn from each other through sharing information and technical expertise, he adds. "The oil and gas over there is in an earlier stage. Maybe they can avoid the mistakes we've made."

James Ahnassay, Chief of the Dene Thá First Nation, agrees. "I think it's a great idea," he says. "Both countries can work together to promote the importance of the internationally recognized wetlands. If China is able to recognize the importance of protecting such an important wildlife area, then it enhances what we are trying to protect here."



*As in Hay-Zama, the human presence in the Dalai Lake area has the potential for appropriate stewardship or ecological destruction. Overgrazing is one of the possible threats to this internationally recognized Ramsar site in Inner Mongolia.*

2007, Mackenzie County Reeve Bill Neufeld sent a letter to Minister of Energy Mel Knight protesting the closing down of two wells before complete depletion of the resource. He contacted local radio stations and newspapers and promulgated this view. Neufeld had agreed, along with the entire Committee, to those well closures and now was stepping outside of the process to push the Municipal District's economic interest. "They have the right to say what they did within the committee process," says Cabezas, "but they didn't follow the process." Cabezas immediately received calls from other distraught "neighbours" alerting him to what was going on, showing the strength of the neighbourhood's commitment to the process and the ultimate goal.

Cabezas cites another factor that has contributed to the success of the HZC: the lack of structure and paperwork. "We have no Terms of Reference and we try not to have minutes, just MOUs," says Cabezas. "This is a group of neighbours getting together to manage a sensitive area."

One of the Hay-Zama neighbours

is the Dene Thá, with three reserves bordering the Wildland Park. While as a nation they have no obligation to deal with anyone but the federal government, they joined the Committee in 1995 to be involved in discussions that would ultimately impact them directly. Chief James Ahnassay became a co-chair of the Committee in 2001.

### Party Time

The champagne that's on ice for the 2017 party will have to be uncorked 10 years early – plans are in the works for a triple celebration this fall. Hay Zama Wildland Park has never been officially dedicated. The HZC is hoping to combine the dedication ceremony with the formal twinning of the Hay-Zama Wildland Park with the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia, China (see sidebar). The third celebratory event will be the signing of the MOU between Parks and Protected Areas and the Dene Thá First Nation, inaugurating the collaborative management of the Wildland Park.

"It will mean that we have a key role in managing the area," says Chief Ahnassay. "We are working

on a plan to implement ecotourism activities because whenever a park is designated it attracts people, and our people know the area very well. We want to have some control, to create employment opportunities for our people, and to benefit people who are interested in things like birdwatching. First and foremost our cultural and traditional ways have to be upheld." AWA continues to argue for more involvement of First Nations in managing protected areas. "We must recognize the very special status they have and build on it, give them capacity to manage it well," says Wallis. "They have the rights to the land."

The HZC bus may be a little dented and dusty, but it motors on. When a fork in the road appears, the drivers stop and gather the passengers for discussion. The motor sometimes get a little overheated, the windows steam up, but consensus is reached, a pathway chosen, and the journey continues. "It's repeatable," says Wallis. "You need the right people, a common goal, something to rally around. The community does the work."

## ALBERTANS ASK PREMIER TO AVOID FUTURE DEBT BY PROTECTING EASTERN SLOPES WATERSHEDS NOW

*The following letter was sent to Premier Ed Stelmach April 3, 2007 by John Cross, CPAWS, Chief Mountain Group, Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition, Chinook Area Land Users Association, Pembina Institute for Appropriate Development, South Porcupine Hills Stewardship Association, Alberta Wilderness Association, Livingstone Landowners, Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, Pekisko Group, Sierra Club of Canada, and Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. The Southern East Slopes range from the Bow Valley to the Montana border and from the Continental Divide east to where the prairie begins.*

### Re: Some common sense for the uncommonly valuable Southern East Slopes

As residents, groups, and organizations, we are very concerned about the current and future state of the Southern East Slopes. Hence, we have a set of pressing requests of your government aimed at changing the current, undesirable trajectory to one that will sustain communities and sustain and protect the irreplaceable renewable assets of the region and its ecological integrity.

The Southern East Slopes represent an iconic landscape of mountains and foothills grading into

prairie. It is as close as one can get to the features in Alberta's coat of arms. Unlike our coat of arms, in which the landscape appears untouched, unblemished, and unfragmented, the real landscape has seen many changes. In addition, scale and pace of land use change in the area is unprecedented and is projected to continue. This concerns us as residents and as groups, organizations, and individuals who understand and value this region.

Alberta and Albertans have become wealthy from our natural resources, but many of us now are beginning to understand that prosperity has a price. We believe you are

aware of this and are also concerned about the transferral and deferral of the costs of prosperity onto our environment and to future generations. Do not misunderstand our intent as anti-development. Rather, it is our observation that a planning and policy vacuum in Alberta has given rise to growth without the guiding hand of sobriety – growth without the measures to sustain the region's ecological integrity and the renewable resource assets upon which our future prosperity depends.

The Southern East Slopes hold significant and largely irreplaceable renewable resource assets for

Albertans. This landscape currently provides the following:

- The headwaters that capture and temporarily store Alberta's most vital resource, water, necessary for life and economic opportunity in the southern part of the province and our neighbouring provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.
- The last large area of undisturbed rough fescue grassland and foothills parkland in the province, key to sustainable ranching and an important carbon sink.
- A treasury in the form of the province's richest variety and diversity of animals and plants.
- Sustainable economic opportunity with ranching, recreation, tourism, and communities.
- A place that attracts people because of unfragmented space, biotic integrity, natural beauty, and cultural heritage.

We hope you agree that these are significant assets, worthy of the attention, concern, and protection by your government through planning and the development of policy and legislation. This isn't the first time these assets and their value to Albertans have been articulated in planning exercises, hearings, and letters of concern to various government departments. In particular, the recognition of the value of the area as the headwaters for a significant portion of the prairie provinces dates back prior to the formation of Alberta as a province. Despite considerable effort to inform government, we see little substantive change in policy and legislation to safeguard these assets.

There are some promising planning initiatives: Water for Life and the Land Use Framework to name two. However, the speed and intensity of resource development in the Southern East Slopes will outpace these measured initiatives in provincial planning and policy development. We are concerned that a significant – and in practical terms, irreplaceable – loss of what the Southern East Slopes represent will have occurred by the time the planning and policy exercises of your government are completed.

The Southern East Slopes can't exist on the hopes and promises of tomorrow. The possibilities of a desired

future will only become realities if we make ourselves responsible for that future, today.

Sacrificing renewable resources, threatening ecological integrity, and creating a future economic and ecological debt is not in Albertans' best interest and cannot be justified by any rational business case. Yet that is the track we are on. The future of our landscape is being determined by the unintended consequences of multiple decisions and land uses operating without a cohesive, regional plan. A tyranny of small, seemingly unconnected decisions is leading us to unmanaged cumulative effects.

N. Douglas



We believe Albertans have both the intellectual capital and the will to change course, especially for the Southern East Slopes. Achieving a desired future will require these actions:

- Better and faster planning, with the test of success being a landscape that maintains ecological integrity, environmentally sustainable land uses, and community longevity. Effective planning will define indicators and incorporate limits and thresholds. It will be open, transparent, inclusive, and accountable.
- Allocating new resources to rebuild planning capability in the civil service and at the municipal level, as well as to support the efforts of existing community-led planning initiatives.
- Providing tools to deal fairly with existing commitments and allocations so that these do not unduly fetter policy and planning exercises.
- Developing provincial policy and legislation that supports planning and

protects the assets of the Southern East Slopes.

We think you would agree that this is a logical course to set for the Southern East Slopes, and hence, we ask that your government lead by undertaking the four actions listed above.

To add impetus to the effort, we also ask your government's collaboration with community-led planning initiatives already underway, such as the Southern Foothills Study. The use of these initiatives and the Southern East Slopes as a pilot project would add speed, community buy-in and credibility to the task of regional planning.

Furthermore, time is against us if planning continues to lag behind activities that impact land, water, air, biodiversity, and quality of life. To create space for effective planning, we strongly endorse the concept of a pause, or a "time out," for many resource developments occurring now in the Southern East Slopes. If unchecked, the frequency and intensity of these developments will significantly undermine planning efforts and regional ecological integrity. There is precedence for the province undertaking such a time out: it did so in 1973-74 during its province-wide hearings and policy development on land use and resource development in the Eastern Slopes.

The tools we have and those we can build are only as useful as our will to employ them in making the tough decisions. The Southern East Slopes that we want tomorrow require us to exercise restraint and decisiveness now. We ask you to exercise the will and make the commitment to help us achieve the desired, environmentally sustainable future for the Southern East Slopes. What an incredible legacy that will be for your government and for those who will inherit the Earth from us!

Because this issue is so important to us and to ensure that our request is not forgotten, we ask that you provide an initial response within two weeks of the date of this letter. We also request a meeting with yourself and the Ministers of Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, Energy, and Municipal Affairs to discuss these matters.



# SUFFIELD FILES REVEAL ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, NON-COMPLIANCE BY ENERGY COMPANIES, INCLUDING ENCANA

By Shirley Bray

EnCana's performance in Koomati, an environmentally sensitive area of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River, doesn't bode well for the company's plans for the Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA). Internal government documents reveal that an audit of a "minimal disturbance" shallow gas infill drilling program in Koomati found significant impacts on native grassland.

The spring 2005 audit, which included work by a qualified biologist from the Base, concluded that Koomati has suffered significant environmental impact from the winter drilling of 104 shallow gas wells. The documents acknowledge that Koomati, an area of sensitive sandy soils, is experiencing environmental decline due to increased industrial activity. Impacts included multiple access routes to wells, significant disturbance at lease sites, invasive species, disregard for species-at-risk, improper waste management, and lack of promised monitoring.

EnCana is proposing a shallow gas infill program for the NWA, including 1,275 shallow gas wells and over 220 km of pipelines and other infrastructure. The proposed project is slated to go to a panel review later this year. The company is currently working on an Environmental Impact Assessment, due in April, as part of the requirements under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

The Suffield NWA is a 458 km<sup>2</sup> protected area located inside the 2,690 km<sup>2</sup> CFB Suffield near Medicine Hat, Alberta. The NWA is an internationally significant grassland encompassing fragile sand dunes and sand plains. It provides secure habitat for more than 1,100 native prairie species, including 13 federal Species at Risk and 78 provincially listed "at risk" species.

The internal documents, many obtained through the *Access to Information Act*, include a 2005 environmental incident report sent



*Access routes create disturbances in native prairie beyond the bounds of the initial tracks, as invasive weeds brought in by vehicles spread outward. This photo shows the problem of trying to reclaim parts of trails while they are still in use: the extent of the disturbance is increased.*

by the Base to industry operating in CFB Suffield. The report speaks of "significant shortcomings" that "run counter to industry guidelines and standard practices" and has a strong rebuke of the energy industry, including industry giant EnCana. About one-third of the documents were blanked out.

The documents show that EnCana did not want their project to go to a panel review and that the corporation pressured Ottawa to streamline the approval process so drilling could occur before the end of 2005 without completing a proper environmental review. The company then applied to drill three new wells in the NWA after their original proposal to drill 1,275 wells had already begun a federal EIA. A 265-metre gas pipeline was constructed within the NWA without a permit.

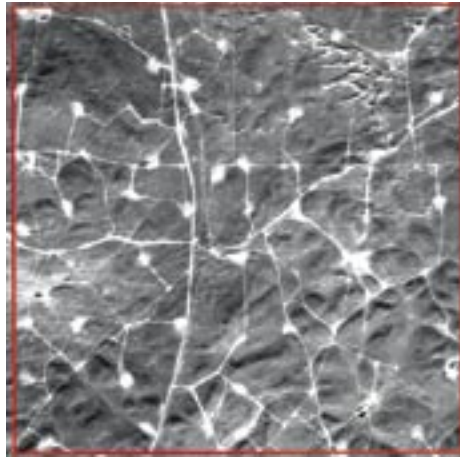
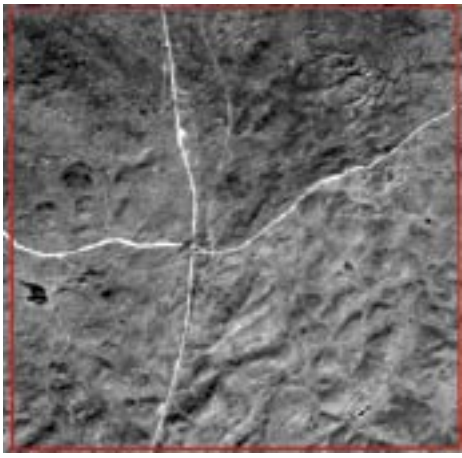
EnCana also failed to follow the rules of the Base for protection of wetlands when it drilled a well in a known wetland near the NWA and refused to remove it until given an ultimatum by the Base (see *WLA Dec. 2006*). Federal policy on wetlands stipulates no net loss of wetland function, which means zero industrial activity in wetlands on federal

land. Provincial guidelines require a minimum setback of 100 m from wetlands in the grassland region.

Base personnel also have grave concerns about the poor restoration record at Suffield. Invasion of non-native species from industry access trails and pipelines poses a big threat to native plant communities and is identified as one of the biggest management challenges. The goal in the NWA is to restore native prairie, not simply reclaim disturbances to equivalent land capability. Industry is resisting Base directives on restoration.

There are about 12,000 well sites owned by different companies on the Base, including 600 abandoned wells without reclamation approvals. Numerous access roads and pipelines crisscross the Base, acting as conduits for invasive species; multiple access routes to single wells, and a lack of access coordination. One-third of pipelines constructed from 1997 to 2005 have crested wheatgrass, an aggressive invasive species, established on them.

The Base's rangeland advisors note that the native prairie's integrity is being threatened by industrial activity and that impacts are accelerating. They



*EnCana pursued a shallow gas infill program in one section of the Suffield National Wildlife Area. Left: The area before the infill in 1997. Right: The area after drilling in 2001.*

recommend minimum disturbance procedures, compulsory revegetation with native species, and consequences for non-compliance.

The documents also showed the following:

- significantly more impact by oil and gas activity than military training, including habitat fragmentation, spread of invasive species, inappropriate reclamation practices, and lack of recovery observed in majority of areas;
- ill-defined operational and environmental protocols lacking appropriate direction;
- outdated agreements between the Base and industry;
- violation of guidelines such as minimum disturbance techniques;

- inadequate industry environmental reviews of projects and wellsites (an audit of 150 wells found half of them failed environmental protocol);
- industrial waste and site cleanup issues.
- the cutting short of a review of the 2005 oil and gas program and industry being given “silent authority” to proceed; and
- the blanking out of about one third of the documents received through Access to Information.

The Department of National Defence does not receive royalties or any revenue from shallow gas activities. Yet the documents show that CFB Suffield, as the landowner, and the Base Commander are accountable

and liable for the environment on the Base. While Alberta reaps the royalties, money that the Base spends on environmental management comes out of the pocket of Canadian taxpayers.

EnCana, which holds about 95 percent of the mineral leases in CFB Suffield, argued that it only had to comply with federal and provincial statutes and their contract rights, and that the Base does not have the authority to deny access due to damaging environmental impacts. It also argues it must serve its shareholders; however, all Canadians are shareholders in the NWA and the federal government should serve their interests.

A coalition of environmental groups, which obtained the documents, is asking the federal government to prohibit all new industrial activities in the Suffield NWA. Coalition members include Alberta Wilderness Association, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Grassland Naturalists, Nature Canada, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, and World Wildlife Fund.

*For more information, visit our website for four news releases that detail findings in the internal documents and the position of the coalition. Express your support for the Suffield National Wildlife Area. Please write to The Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, Prime Minister's Office, 80 Wellington St., Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2; Subject: CEAR 05-03-15620 Shallow Gas Proposal in Suffield National Wildlife Area.*

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# MORE COALBED METHANE APPROVED FOR RUMSEY WITHOUT PUBLIC CONSULTATION

By Shirley Bray

The Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) gave Pioneer Natural Resources approval in late February to drill a coalbed methane (CBM) well in Rumsey Natural Area (NA) without any public consultation. Although Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) and the Red Deer River Naturalists are well-established stakeholders in Rumsey, none of the groups were contacted by government or the company. AWA and ANPC are weighing what legal options they have to prevent the well from being drilled, including appealing the issuance of the licence in the courts.

The 1993 Regionally Integrated Decision (RID), which guides management in the Rumsey NA, calls for “ongoing and meaningful public involvement,” a provision that has been ignored. However, Minister Hector Goudreau has recognized AWA as a key stakeholder, and ANPC is volunteering expertise to a committee (the Technical Advisory Group, TAG) guiding research on rough fescue restoration and assessment of cumulative environmental effects in the NA. TAG’s survey of the area last year found a number of cases of non-compliance by industry, a serious problem with invasive species, and poor or non-existent reclamation.

ANPC, represented by Cheryl Bradley, found out about the well at a February 26 meeting of TAG. The groups are disappointed and angry that the RID’s requirement for public consultation continues to be ignored in spite of all the effort they have expended over the last three years registering their concerns about CBM development in Rumsey and participating in field trips and meetings.

AWA and ANPC have complained to the Public Lands Division (Sustainable Resource Development, SRD), the Parks and Protected Areas Division (Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture), and the EUB. SRD told us they had no protocol for contacting ENGOs about wells in protected areas.



NASA-World-Wind

*The Rumsey aspen parkland and northern fescue grassland in central Alberta is an island, only one-fifth the size of Calgary, in a sea of developed land. Plains rough fescue grassland communities are now on the ANHIC Tracking List as elements of biodiversity considered “rare or special in some way.” Wellsites, pipelines and access routes continue to destroy rough fescue grasslands in Rumsey Natural Area.*

However, the EUB told us IL90-21 is still in effect. It states: “The ERCB will advise the RID committee and the AWA of receipt of any applications for well licences within the Rumsey proposed parkland boundary.”

AWA and ANPC met with Pioneer on March 7. Pioneer said the groups did not show up on the Land Status Automated System (LSAS) or the Conservation Lands Registry Report and did not have standing with the EUB. Yet they said they were partners with Trident Exploration and had that company’s public consultation plan. Pioneer agreed to consult with the groups on future proposed activities.

Trident also drilled their first CBM well without public consultation, but public outcry led to several meetings with environmental groups and government to discuss their plans. Trident promised to inform ENGOs when they were going to drill. Their drilling plans fell through last year because the warm winter kept the ground unfrozen, and this year they ran into unfavourable financial weather.

Although AWA has been monitoring the EUB’s website regularly

for well applications, Pioneer’s application was dated the same day it was approved. The EUB is able to consider ANPC’s and AWA’s concerns when preparing their input, through a recommendation to Alberta Energy, on whether a continuation of the surface lease by Alberta Energy is warranted.

Pioneer planned to drill the well before the licence expired on March 6, but were prevented by unfavourable ground conditions. AWA is asking Parks Minister Hector Goudreau to request that Alberta Energy not grant a continuation to Pioneer for this well.

Public Lands and Parks approved siting Pioneer’s well within 100 metres of wetlands, violating provincial guidelines for the prairie region. The well is sited in a new location which will require 120 metres of new access road. Pioneer’s application erroneously states that the surface owner is freehold and the well is routine. Wells in protected areas are non-routine and the surface owner is the Crown.

The 149 km<sup>2</sup> globally significant Rumsey Natural Area is the largest remaining block of northern fescue grassland and aspen parkland in central Alberta. In the early 1990s, the multi-stakeholder RID committee agreed that oil and gas activity would be phased out. However, Alberta Energy bullied the committee, and it now appears Alberta Parks as well, into allowing perpetual oil and gas development. The RID did not contemplate CBM development.

In 1997, a year after Environment Minister Ty Lund designated Rumsey as a Natural Area, he promised no new wells or access routes. Alberta Energy continued to sell mineral leases in the area, even after signing an agreement in 2003 stating there will be no new commitments in protected areas, and has insisted that Parks allow surface access. They have maintained that the RID takes precedence over any subsequent agreements.

*For more information see our website under Issues and Areas/Rumsey.*





## CHALLENGING OUR THINKING (WILL WE GET THE FUTURE WE PLANNED FOR OR THE ONE WE DIDN'T?)

Lorne Fitch, P. Biol.

*The government is creating a Land Use Framework for management of land, resources, and the natural environment in Alberta, for which public input will be requested this spring. At the same time Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is leading an Integrated Land Management (ILM) Program to create recommendations for a set of principles. The following is an excerpt from the opening address at an ILM conference in January 2007. Lorne Fitch worked as a wildlife biologist for Alberta for many years and is well-known for originating Alberta's Cows and Fish program.*

A young man toiled up a dirt trail, following a narrow valley in one of the Appalachian states. At the end of the trail, he knocked on the door of a rough log cabin. An old man, clad in faded denim bib overalls, answered the door. The young man, full of self-importance, said, "I'm from the U.S. Census Bureau in Washington, and I've been sent to find out how many people live in the United States." The elderly man developed an anxious look and replied, "I'm sorry you've come this far – I don't know." If some of you harbour a similar feeling towards Integrated Land Management (ILM) – you just don't know – you may not be alone.

In 30-plus years of natural resource planning and management, I've seen and participated in many ILM-like initiatives: sub-regional integrated resource plans, regionally integrated decisions, regional strategies, integrated watershed plans, integrated access plans, municipal plans, forest management plans, water management plans, and on and on. Most of these added to my skepticism and aided my cynicism. That's in spite of the fact that a lot of effort went into them. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet and work with people with a variety of viewpoints and interests. We often had nice lunches together, salvaging something out of the process.

However, I can't really look back on those initiatives with a profound sense of accomplishment for all the effort and time. It seemed like the status quo reigned, in spite of file cabinets full of data, multiple years of planning, glossy documents, and hopeful hype and rhetoric after the plan's conclusion. After the end, we all went back to doing what we had done before the plan



Z. Deak

*Much of Alberta's approximately 350,000 km<sup>2</sup> of boreal forest is already seriously impacted by human activities, and pressure on the boreal is increasing. Although only about 20 percent of the boreal forest area underlain by oil sands has been leased, more than 1,800 lease agreements already cover 32,000 km<sup>2</sup>.*

began. It was similar to society's craze for lotteries, where everyone hopes to win but no one expects they will. I got to the point where whenever I would hear words like "integrate," "resource," "land," or "management" put in the context of planning a better future, I would hope that something would come of it, but I didn't expect anything to happen.

Do we need something new? Yes! I would submit we have fallen into a policy and planning vacuum because to engage in these two activities has been perceived as interventionist. The present situation seems to satisfy the needs of a few, and has for a while, but many question our multiple-use approach. The present practice of doing everything, everywhere, all the time, any time, heedless of the cost isn't a promising pathway to guide us to a future that sustains our quality of life or that of future generations.

Why would this initiative of ILM be any different than ones that have preceded it? I think the time is ripe, based on several compelling reasons, for this one to succeed where others have failed.

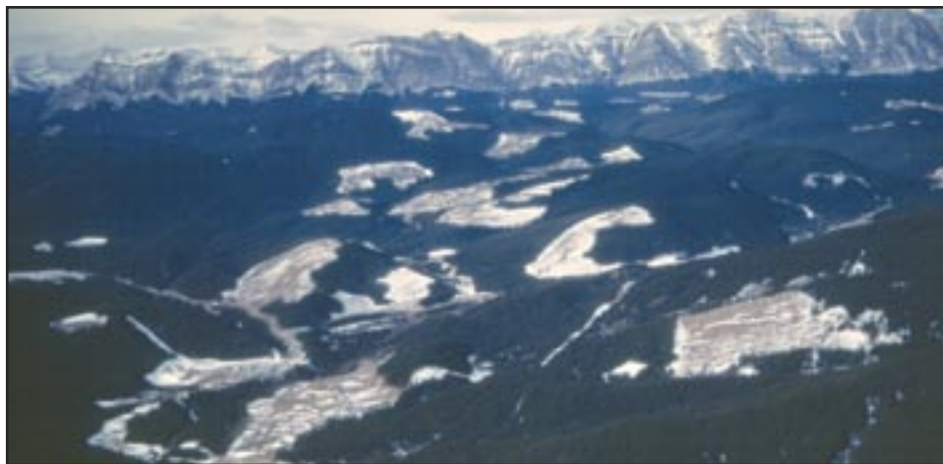
- **Thresholds/limits:** The science of cumulative effects analysis has progressed to provide us with reasonable interpretations of overlaps; what the future trajectories are, given the growth rates of today; and the signals to determine when to stop. Coupled with information that helps us see the results of stressors, the concept of a "line in the sand" becomes less theoretical and more tangible. These tools will only help us if we use them; it is counterproductive to ignore the past footprint of land use and begin as if it doesn't exist.
- **Public perception:** There is a growing awareness and literacy

among the public on environmental issues. The momentum will increase, fueled by unease over direct threats to health, economy, and lifestyle. Angus McAllister, a Vancouver-based pollster, finds some anger in people's responses to environmental issues: "What really drives people's concerns about the environment is not the incidents themselves but the sense that government and industry aren't doing anything about them." As a sign that the public is sensitized and anxious, I find people often preface their comments with, "I'm not a tree hugger, but..."

- **Shared responsibility:** There is growing recognition that solutions to land use issues are beyond the capability of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ABSRD), beyond any one provincial government department or municipal government, and beyond any one corporate entity. Although we are not quite there yet, when we agree there is a problem and all accept that we are part of the problem, we will be in a much better position to find the appropriate solution.
- **Political support:** Escalating competition, conflicts, and demands over increasingly scarce resources will create losers, and that haunts politicians. Fueled by increasing rural concerns about the intensity and impacts of development, the "no more in my back yard" movement is gaining momentum. Constituent sensitivity has and will be reflected in policy decisions. The formation of the Sustainable Resources and Environmental Management (SREM) group, a multi-department and cross-ministry amalgam with a mandate to work more closely together to reach solutions, is one sign of political support for better integration of land uses.

On the other side of the coin, what isn't different (yet) about ILM that needs attention?

- **Where's the money?** I don't know what ABSRD's budget is for ILM or if there are budgets elsewhere, in government or in business, for this task. My suspicion is that if budgets exist, they are inadequate to the task.
- **Talk trumps action:** Change is



*"I wish you could have seen the flash of a trout in crystal clear water, a splash of liquid sunshine. We clear-cut the forests, especially the old growth portion which held and stored most of the water trout depended on. Sediment from the roads, trails, fields and cut blocks clouded the water and smothered the gravels." (from Lorne Fitch's letter to his nephew and niece, which he read as part of his address to ILM conference participants in January)*

so fundamentally hard to grasp. Consider the three laws of infernal dynamics: (a) an object in motion will always be headed in the wrong direction; (b) an object at rest will always be in the wrong place; and (c) the energy required to change either of these states will always be more than you wish to expend, but never so much as to make the task appear prospectively impossible. So we continue to talk because it's easier than taking action.

- **Who's on top?** Alberta's growth imperative gives more prominence to the economy than to societal and environmental interests. We are busy sustaining development, albeit with some minor perturbations like a lack of workers, housing, infrastructure, materials, and diesel fuel. We have yet to think much about how to develop sustainably. Beyond the play on words – sustaining development vs. developing sustainably – a huge chasm separates those two concepts.
- **What's the goal?** On one Alberta government website, I found this explanation of integration: "using an integrated approach means that environmental, economic and social issues are considered, while finding ways for all uses to exist together with less conflict." Pardon me, but I think we need to move beyond an exercise in dividing up the Alberta pie to reduce bickering and start thinking about how much pie is left and what our future needs might

be. We have some core natural resources like biodiversity, fresh water, fertile soil, breathable air, and a comparatively benign climate that have no real substitutes. These resources exist everywhere, so we need to get beyond the thinking this is just an issue on public land. The Alberta landscape doesn't just produce beef, barley, oil, and 2x4s; ecological services like filtering and buffering our water resources are unseen attributes but fundamental ones to our survival. I think it will be difficult to integrate until we have a sense of the desired environmental outcomes to move towards.

In general terms, what will need to happen to give ILM a chance; what "levers" need to be pulled to engage the engine of process?

#### **Government:**

- Make some philosophical/ideological shifts to include and weight environmental and social issues in a more balanced way with economic interests. Include individuals with not only economic but also environmental and social expertise in senior management of ILM programs.
- Develop meaningful consultation with the public on the desired future of Alberta's resources and landscapes. Part of that consultation requires defining indicators, completing accurate status reports,

and monitoring results to determine if we are on the right path.

- Develop and sustain meaningful communication and education initiatives to allow Albertans to be better informed about resource and land use issues (and to think holistically about solutions).
- Increase the skill set of the civil service in communication, consultation, and dispute resolution. Resource management is a social issue as well as a technical one.
- Remove the barriers and silos between departments to allow a systems approach to land, air, water, resource allocation, and land use. Reduce the tendency to work in isolation, separating land from water, fish from timber, subsurface resources from surface ones, agriculture from air, and so on.
- Create a more level playing field for environmental interests in provincial dispute resolution forums and mechanisms. Mandate full cost accounting into decisions on resource development initiatives.
- Create a higher level of stability in the civil service, with less reorganization, to allow staff to focus on the task and gain proficiency. Success only comes from persistence and continuity.
- Resource initiatives appropriately, with new money. Include some funding for the not-for-profit sector and the public so they can participate and bring additional expertise to the discussion.
- Create a variety of incentives to encourage business and the public to adopt sustainability measures; remove the disincentives. Balance enforcement with other compliance mechanisms.
- Take the lead role in developing a shared vision of Alberta for the short and long term; incorporate that vision (including limits and boundaries) into policy, program, and budget. Set an example of excellent stewardship in the management of public lands and resources to persuade others to follow.

#### Business:

- Consider return on investment over a longer span of time to reduce the pace of development to a rate



*Although oil and gas reserves along the Eastern Slopes are declining, energy development in this part of Alberta is predicted to last a minimum of another 40 to 70 years.*

commensurate with better planning, less intensity, realistic restoration times, and a reduced footprint.

- Create mechanisms to determine overlapping interests on a common land base. Work with other interests to understand impacts and cumulative effects, share infrastructure, and reduce footprint. Institutionalize the effort to provide equity.
- Invest in research on new techniques, equipment, applications, and meaningful reclamation, restoration, and recovery mechanisms.
- Create industry-wide standards of planning, operation, and restoration that exceed regulatory ones. Encourage action from the ground up.
- Develop education programs for staff at all levels (including contractors) to enhance proficiency at reducing footprint, increasing reclamation success, and understanding environmental issues.
- Acknowledge limits and thresholds on a landscape scale.
- Develop an understanding of the need for a social licence to operate.

#### Public:

- Develop a sense of stewardship based on obligations to the present community and to the future one.
- Take advantage of educational opportunities to become ecologically literate.
- Participate in exercises to define a vision for Alberta's landscape and resources; act in the interests of the

future, not just the present.

- Use the power of a consumer/voter to encourage ethical, sustainable practices on the part of business/government.
- Lessen one's own environmental impact and footprint.

Even though these “levers” are arranged by sector, there is considerable overlap, great similarities, and shared responsibility between them. If everyone, including those in the government and business sectors, took to heart and to action the five “levers” in the public sector, we would have a substantial start on this initiative.

What if we don't (or won't) change? What if we continue to view with skepticism the warning bells, allow the denial machine a cloak of credibility, turn a blind eye to evident landscape changes and loss of vital ecological services, and point our fingers at others? It is whispered that many in power wish development would speed up because they fear the onset of some new, benign energy source or a competing foreign supply of timber products that would rob Alberta of our economic advantage.

I find that thinking disturbing and remarkably shortsighted. Is there anything worth pursuing other than money and self-interest? If sufficient numbers of people feel that the answer is no, it is worth considering whether sustainable use in Alberta is possible. I can only offer you one more



perspective to consider countering this and providing for the possibility of change.

How many of you have children, are contemplating having children in the future, associate with the children of others, or think children are our future? If you remain unmoved at this point, were you a child in the past, secure in the notion that adults were operating with your best interests at heart? I hope I've achieved some level of solidarity among you on the subject of responsibility for future generations.

I don't have children but I have a grandnephew, Alex, and a grandniece, Monica. They are aged two and ten, respectively, and will inherit Alberta in a decade or two. I spend a lot of time pondering their future. Based on my years of travel over the length and breadth of Alberta, my observations and those of my colleagues, the research findings of many, and trend analysis, I tend to worry about their future. I think it is paradoxical to continue on this growth trajectory and still profess we want a bright future for our children.

Robert Francis said, "It wasn't too long ago that my ancestors starved if they made a mistake by following their instincts to draw sustenance from the natural world. Now, if my instincts lead me astray, my grandchildren or perhaps their grandchildren will starve." That is the cost of a misstep now in our planning for Alberta's landscape and resources.

My instincts tell me we have exceeded some thresholds in Alberta, are advancing quickly on others, have no real remediation plan, and are dealing with unrealistic expectations for returns from Alberta's landscape and resources. If we can agree on that, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. If we can't agree, we will simply add more tunnel until the light goes out. The public and shareholders may want it all, but that Pollyanna-ish world doesn't exist.

With time and explanation, most people will accept lower rates of return on their investments and lower salaries if these come with assurances of water to drink, air to breathe, food to eat, and a place to live with ecological integrity. Alternatively, we could wait and see how many of these essentials we are

able to buy as they become scarcer, and let the marketplace decide the outcome. The harsh reality is change isn't necessary; survival isn't mandatory.

Will Rogers was once asked what his solution was to the problem of German submarines sinking Allied ships in World War I, a task not dissimilar to that of integrating land use in Alberta. Will said, "Well, first I would raise the temperature of the Atlantic Ocean to the boiling point. Then, when the submarines surface I'd have the navy pick them off. Now, someone is bound to ask me how to boil the Atlantic Ocean – that's not my job. I'm just the planner."

S. Rood



*Fescue grasslands such as these in the Oldman River valley have recently been described as endangered by Environment Canada. Concern about their loss has increased since only 5 percent of the original fescue grasslands remain in pre-settlement condition.*

I don't presume to have all the answers but one of the navigational aids has to be landscape health. We will have to overcome the inertia of past planning exercises ("we already did that"), the normal resistance to change ("but we've always done it this way") and the uncertainty of the outcome (which is only hinted at in the beginning). Most importantly we need to start to develop momentum, establish some working relationships, build trust, and find the small victories that can be parlayed into bigger ones.

Two stories jump to mind to motivate us. In the first, a young Polish man finds himself incarcerated in a slave labour camp associated with Auschwitz, the horror of all places. He fixes German army trucks, halftracks, and tanks under unspeakable

conditions. One day, after finishing repairs to a tank, he sits with the engine idling, waiting to move it. He has an inspiration. Putting it in gear, he rolls up to the prison gate; the guards open it and away he heads. No one stops him: why would you, it's a tank!

Across Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, to France he rolls, periodically stopping for fuel. No one refuses him fuel; it's a tank, how could you? In France he locates some relatives and they bury the tank in a large pit. He survives the war and immigrates to Canada. This was a guy faced with the prospect of a slow death who saw an opportunity, and took it.

There is currently an opportunity to take a different path in Alberta; we can take it and, as a bonus, no one will shoot us.

In the second story, images of starving African children haunt Bob Geldof, then a minor Irish rock star. He begins to ask why nothing is being done to aid these people. The answers come back with all of the expected hurdles of cost, logistics involving transportation and distribution, priorities, protocols, and politics. As it is explained, it is an overwhelmingly difficult task. Geldof responds with, "Bugger the complexities, let's save lives!" and organizes the first Live Aid concert. So to you I say, "Bugger the complexities, let's save Alberta."

*Lorne Fitch's entire address can be found on our website under Issues/Public Lands.*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Volunteer Stewards Strike a Cord Dear Editor,

What a wonderful surprise to see Shirley Bray's article "Stewards Unite Passion and Vigilance in Care and Protection of Natural Areas, Part 1: The Golden Years" (*WLA*, Dec. 2006).

I was so touched by the article that I wanted to respond right away to thank you, as I had been intimately involved in the program during those Golden Years, along with many others you mention. But then I thought that I should collect my thoughts about my "reflections in hindsight" that your article triggered. Here are my thoughts, as scattered as they are:

Why did I want to initiate a Volunteer Steward Program for natural areas? As your article states, "My goals were to set up a public watchdog for our province's special natural places and to provide training, support and camaraderie to the stewards."

I suspected at the time that there was an untapped potential "army" of Albertans who want to get involved to ensure that their wildlife and wilderness were conserved for them and for their children. I thought: "Wouldn't it be neat to see what a little leadership and facilitation and coordination could unleash?"

What happened to the Volunteer Steward Program? Well, in hindsight I should have braced myself for two things: (1) the "army" of Albertans was big, keen, and growing rapidly; and (2) an army of Albertans who want to ensure the preservation of Alberta's wilderness and wildlife was not on the Tory government's agenda of priorities – quite the opposite.

The program still exists because there are nature-loving Albertans who want something, anything, to rally around in their common cause to preserve Alberta's nature. There are some incredibly talented stewards still out there in the "wilderness," so

to speak. Your AWA article names and interviews some of these remarkable individuals and organizations, including the Alberta Wilderness Association.

But inarguably, the program has been "under strict control" for a long time now. Common sense support to the stewards is negligible, and good arguments for good preservation decisions are deliberately denied, deflected, or denigrated in "The 3 Bs of How to Kill Albertans' Nature-Preservation Attempts," which are 1) Bureaucratic inertia, 2) Bafflegab, and 3) Bullying.

What things did I learn? I learned some pleasant and not-so-pleasant things during my experience with the Volunteer Steward Program and with my employment as a public servant in the Alberta government from 1979-98.

Five pleasant things I learned:

- That many Albertans care deeply about our province's wildlife and wilderness and about nature in general. There are some deep "natural" roots among many Albertans
- That a dedicated group of people, inside and outside of government, can achieve tremendous things and have a lot of fun at the same time
- That governments can provide some incredibly rewarding career opportunities to work on fascinating projects
- That some individuals employed as public servants believe in true "public service" and are very, very talented and professional
- That just a short time ago, Alberta had many mind-blowing natural places, some of which are still there

Following are five not-so-pleasant things I learned:

- How quickly a Tory government can move its civil service from professionalism to political acquiescence at every level

- How effectively a Tory government can, as a strategic intent, move key agencies from achieving public interest goals to virtual dysfunction
- How bullying by Tory insiders can create a culture of compliance in the civil service
- How poor freedom-of-information policies that purport to create democratic access can actually achieve the opposite in a Tory government
- How a one-party (Tory) state can muffle healthy public involvement and debate resulting in one of most dramatic declines of natural capital in the developed world

If the five not-so-pleasant things that I learned seem harsh, they are meant to be. The last decades of Tory-led government in Alberta have been – well, to put it simply – simply horrible for Alberta's nature. Maybe other non-Tory governments would have been just as bad, but we had a multi-decade gridlock of Tory rule, so "they did what they did and we got what we got."

Thanks to AWA. I really appreciate the article you published. More importantly, I really appreciate the AWA. What you do makes me feel good. The AWA is a remarkable organization – it has a noble history with a noble, timeless cause. It is relevant, loyal to its values, tough, talented, and true.

All the best!  
— Peter Lee



© Marg Selkirk

## Primrose-Lakeland Update

By Joyce Hildebrand

Proponents of the Highway 881 extension through Lakeland are lobbying the current leadership to proceed with this development, which would have major negative impacts on the biodiversity of the “protected” Provincial Recreation Area (PRA). At a meeting in St. Paul on February 15, Premier Stelmach was asked about the highway extension proposal. “It’s an issue among the municipalities,” he replied. “The municipalities will work it out” (*St. Paul Journal*, Feb. 20/07).

Stelmach’s response shows an abdication of his government’s responsibility to manage protected areas on behalf of all Albertans. Pushing a highway through one of our few pristine boreal wilderness areas for the sake of saving an hour to get to Fort McMurray would be an insupportable tradeoff. AWA is monitoring this issue and speaking out in favour of increasing rather than compromising Lakeland’s protection (see *WLA*, Oct. 2006).



AWA Files

AWA continues to work toward the protection of portions of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, an area adjacent to Lakeland PRA that is “biologically diverse, relatively unfragmented, and worthy of protection,” according to a 2004 ecological study. To meet their Forest Stewardship Council certification requirements, Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries (Al-Pac) must set aside for protection a certain percentage of their Forest Management Agreement area. One region proposed for protection in Al-Pac’s plan is the northeast corner of the Air Weapons Range. Al-Pac is moving forward with that initiative in collaboration with AWA.

Al-Pac’s proposal includes extending the boundaries of Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area, a goal that AWA has had for some time. We look forward to intensifying our efforts in this regard and working with Al-Pac toward that end.

## McClelland Lake Watershed Update

By Joyce Hildebrand

Petro-Canada’s Mine Amendment Application for the Fort Hills Project was submitted to the Alberta government in December 2006. The following amendments affect the McClelland Lake watershed:

- The Out-of-Pit Tailings Area, which will be operational by 2010, has doubled in size to 16 km<sup>2</sup> but has been relocated so that the footprint within the watershed has diminished. The area previously destined for tailings storage, however, will eventually be mined.
- Mining activity in the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex is now scheduled to begin in 2020.

AWA met with Petro-Canada on February 20 at their request. They asked for our endorsement of the amended plan, telling us that they have complete confidence that the integrity of the wetland complex will be maintained through mitigation and reclamation. AWA reiterated our position that industrial development has no place in the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex and that the entire watershed should be legally protected (see *WLA*, Dec. 2006). There is no precedent or scientific basis to indicate that the patterned fen can be maintained or restored during and after open-pit tarsands mining.



S. Bray

In a subsequent letter, a senior director for the Fort Hills Project assured us that tailings ponds “probably rate about 2” on the toxicity scale (with 10 being the highest) and that “they detoxify rather quickly when not in active service.” As evidence of their low toxicity level, he reported having seen a muskrat swimming in a tailings pond. There appears to have been no follow-up to estimate the life expectancy of the muskrat, nor has the downstream effect of the bioaccumulated toxins on raptors or their eggs been determined. McClelland Lake is now almost surrounded by oil sands leases – Shell recently purchased the leases covering the entire south shore and Synenco has a large lease overlapping about a quarter of the lake on the east side.

## C5 Forest Management Plan Postponed

By Nigel Douglas

A recent decision by Ted Morton, Minister for Sustainable Resource Development, to postpone signing off on the C5 Forest Management Plan is an encouraging sign that maybe the Alberta government is beginning to recognize that Alberta’s forests are more than just vertical timber.

The 352,200-hectare C5 Forest Management Area extends from the southern end of Kananaskis Country to the edge of Waterton National Park. It includes forests in the Porcupine Hills, the Upper Oldman, and the Castle. A 2005 draft management plan was opposed by First Nations, environmental groups, and others. AWA expressed many objections to the draft plan, particularly a proposed 25 percent increase to an already considerable annual allowable cut for the region.

Not least amongst the critics was CROWPAC, the Public Advisory Committee responsible for producing the plan in the first place! “The plan centres on the sustainable harvesting of timber while considering other values,” wrote CROWPAC in March 2006. “However no one has yet been able to provide a reliable analysis of



the economic benefits derived from the other ways in which we use the forest... The forest may be able to generate equivalent revenue in more socially and ecologically friendly ways" (WLA, June 2006).

CROWPAC emphasized that water quality was its "highest priority" in the area, and it seems Morton agrees. He announced that implementation of the plan will be suspended until after

a report by the Oldman Watershed Council is completed later this year. The report will make recommendations on future management of the Oldman River basin. Morton has asked his staff to revisit the plan, "with an eye to shifting priorities to better consider environmental protection" (*Calgary Herald*, Mar. 13/07).

AWA believes that Morton's decision demonstrates a better

understanding of the many non-timber values of Alberta's forests than shown by his predecessors. Hopefully this will be the start of a renewed recognition that, if properly managed, these forests have considerably more to offer than a sustained supply of timber, including clean water, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

## ARTIST CONNECTS WITH NATURE THROUGH PAINTING

By John Geary

For most people, contracting pneumonia would not constitute a positive experience. However, if you look hard enough, you can often find some positive to almost any given experience. In the case of British Columbia artist Marg Selkirk, the silver lining to her dark cloud proved to be the rekindling of her interest in art.

"I had been sick with pneumonia, and while recovering, one day I picked up my kids' pencil crayons and started to copy a picture off a calendar. I liked the feeling of it, so I just kept going," says Selkirk. From there, she experimented with pastels. She also dabbled in watercolour and acrylic media, but it was oil painting that really appealed to her, and she eventually settled on that as her main artistic medium.

"I really like the texture of oil painting, and the feeling I get working with it," she says. "It is slow drying, and I'm slow at painting, I like to pay attention to details, so I really like that quality about it – that it allows me to play with it while it's still wet."

That approach allows her to fully experience the *act* of painting – an essential aspect of her artistic endeavours. "It's not so much the end result of my painting as the act of painting, the feeling I get while painting, that I love."

Like many professional artists, her love of her craft began at a very early age. Her first exposure to the art world came in grade one, when she won a colouring contest. Her passion for art continued from that point on throughout school. She put it aside for a



Marg Selkirk

while when she had children, but then the bout with pneumonia created the opportunity for her to pick up her hobby once again.

"I remember looking at art when I was a child, and I was just in awe of artists and their paintings," she says. "It was kind of like a dream, I'd love to be able to paint. Then when I started painting when the kids were young, people liked what I was doing and would offer to buy some of my work."

Selkirk, who currently calls Courtenay, Vancouver Island home, is a self-taught artist. The only formal training she received was a class in which she learned to mix colours. "It wasn't about style, or what or how you were painting at all, it was just about the colours," she says. "You did your own thing on canvas. It was very helpful."

A landscape artist, her work focuses mainly on the mountains and alpine areas of her home province. While not a wildlife artist per se, she often includes animals in her images. "I tend to paint small animals as part of the landscape rather than close-up wildlife," she says.

Painting often helps transport her back to some of her favourite wild places. "I've been to all the places I

paint – unless it's a commissioned painting – and they're from my own memories, sketches or photos I've taken," she says. "When I'm sitting in my studio on a rainy day, painting will take me back to that place, to the sunshine, hiking, enjoying nature."

She has produced hundreds of paintings about her chosen subject, many of which have been featured in art shows and exhibitions. She has been part of an award-winning show, "Originals Only," a group show held in Comox, B.C. twice a year. It is a very widely attended show of juried artists displaying only original artwork. Much of her work has been showcased around Vancouver Island, but some has also been featured in Vancouver.

Choosing her subject matter was not difficult. As do many nature artists, Selkirk has a real affinity for spending time outside, enjoying the natural beauty around her. "I love the outdoors, hiking, camping, just being out in the wilderness," she says. "I love the feeling I get when I'm in an alpine area. It's a real spiritual feeling. I like to reproduce that, somehow give it to others."

She also gives in other ways, having donated many paintings to fish and game organizations to raise money for salmon enhancement in B.C., and has donated prints to help trumpeter swan conservation.

If you're an aspiring artist, Selkirk says the best thing you can do is keep on painting or drawing. "If you have the desire, do it. Even if you feel you don't like the result at first, just keep doing it, simply because you like doing it."



## WILD ABOUT WILDERNESS GALA 2007, EDMONTON

AWA thanks guests, supporters and volunteers for a wonderful and successful evening!



Guests arrive for an evening of celebration.



Long-time AWA members and friends enjoyed a fine meal and excellent live music at AWA's Wild about Wilderness Gala 2007.

Environment Minister Rob Renner (right) and AWA President Richard Secord discuss Alberta's wild spaces.



Tracey Spencer of Adesa Auctions kept the fun in fundraising.



AWA Board member Jim Campbell (centre) meets members.



John Kristensen (ADM Parks, Conservation, Recreation and Sport) arrives with his wife, Sharon. During the evening, John accepted a recognition gift from AWA in honour of his years of service and upcoming retirement in April 2007.

## EVENTS

### SUMMER DAY HIKES

Pre-registration is required for all of these hikes, and will take place on a "first come—first served" basis.

Cost: \$20 – AWA members  
\$25 – Non-members

Details: [www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca)

Contact: (403) 283-2025

or 1-866-313-0713

[awa@shaw.ca](mailto:awa@shaw.ca)

Online: [shop.albertawilderness.ca](http://shop.albertawilderness.ca)

Saturday, June 9, 2007

#### **The Whaleback**

with Bob Blaxley

Saturday, June 16, 2007

#### **Porcupine Hills**

with Vivian Pharis

Saturday, June 23, 2007

#### **Kootenay Plains, Siffleur Falls**

with Bertha Ford

Saturday, July 7, 2007

#### **Adanac Ridge – Castle**

with Reg Ernst

Saturday, July 14, 2007

#### **Bighorn Ridge**

with Heinz Unger

Saturday, July 21, 2007

#### **Rumsey Natural Area**

with Dorothy Dickson

Saturday, August 11, 2007

#### **Ya Ha Tinda**

with Will Davies

Saturday, September 8, 2007

#### **Beehive Natural Area**

with Nigel Douglas

Saturday, September 22, 2007

#### **Eagle Watching in Crowsnest Pass**

with Peter Sherrington

Saturday, September 29, 2007

#### **The Whaleback**

with Bob Blaxley

Saturday, September 29, 2007

#### **Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve**

with Vivian Pharis

Saturday, May 26, 2007

#### **Grassland and Prairie Bus Tour**

Join us for a guided bus tour through the spectacular grasslands and prairie of southwestern Alberta.

Cost: \$45 – AWA members  
\$50 – Non-members

Details to be confirmed.

Pre-registration is required for the Bus Tour.

#### **Correction:**

WLA, February 2007, page 12:  
The photo is of Sheep River Falls.

## ALBERTA WILDERNESS OVERNIGHT TRIPS

Explore some of the most magnificent wilderness areas Alberta has to offer



Friday, June 1 – Sunday, June 3, 2007

### **Lakeland Canoe Trip**

*with Aaron Davies and Joyce Hildebrand*

Enjoy the tranquil beauty of Lakeland's boreal forest in early summer, when the woods are alive with the music of songbirds. Near Lac La Biche, 2.5 hours north of Edmonton, Lakeland Provincial Park offers some of Alberta's finest beaches and our only canoe circuit. Minimal canoeing and camping experience required.

Cost: AWA members \$50: Non-members \$60



Friday, July 27 – Sunday, July 29, 2007

### **Yarrow Canyon Ridge**

*with Reg Ernst and Nigel Douglas*

Stunning views of the Rockies' Front Ranges, delicate subalpine wildflowers, and refreshing mountain streams. Join us for three days of backpacking, led by experienced guides intimately familiar with the Castle Wilderness. The trip begins 1.5 hours southwest of Lethbridge and is rated moderate to strenuous.

Cost: AWA members \$100: Non-members \$125

Experience Alberta's wilderness through minimal impact backpacking and overnight camping. Our guides will share with you their intimate knowledge of the natural history of these beautiful areas.

Trips are self-catered, but your guide will make sure you are prepared with the proper equipment, food, fitness level, and trip route and will also be there for first aid and emergencies.

Book online ([shop.albertawilderness.ca](http://shop.albertawilderness.ca)) or contact AWA at (403) 283-2025 or [awa@shaw.ca](mailto:awa@shaw.ca) to book your space or for more details.

Pre-registration required for all backpacking trips. To preserve a wilderness experience, each of these trips will be limited to eight participants.

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:



**Alberta Wilderness Association**

Box 6398, Station D  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1  
[awa@shaw.ca](mailto:awa@shaw.ca)

