

# CLARITY OUT OF MUD:

## Rundle College Students Teach ESRD A Lesson in Responsible Management

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Grade seven students clearly “get it.” Why does it sometimes seem that many of our elected officials don’t?

This last June, the *Calgary Herald* ran a story, “*Are you drinking McLean Creek mud?*” that highlighted a project done by teacher Beverley Ross’ grade seven class at Calgary’s Rundle College Junior High school. Her students were inspired by an article by Adam Driedzic of the Environmental Law Centre (see Adam’s story on motorized recreation in the April 2012 issue of *WLA* for a discussion of related issues) explaining how OHV misuse damages riparian areas. Like all good scientists, the class decided to find out the truth for themselves.

Over the following year, the 84 grade seven students embarked on a program of investigation and experimentation as they designed simulations, brought in speakers, and learned everything they

could about the effects of OHV use on the environment. Once satisfied they understood the issues, they turned to action.

They produced media ranging from pamphlets to a comic book describing the impacts of “mud bogging” and similar OHV activities on wildlife and stream beds. They built and enclosed a number of informative resource kits in geo-caches hidden around the Calgary region for geo-cachers and other outdoor enthusiasts to find.

Perhaps most importantly, they presented their findings and concerns to the government.

The students described to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) what they discovered about these activities. OHVs disturb ecosystems, destroy habitat and food availability, and increase the level of pollutants in the water that we drink.

In sharp contrast to the waters disturbed by OHVs the students’ fundamental conclusions were crystal clear.

Strikingly, the students proposed a set of recommendations to ESRD. No OHV use in wetlands and riparian areas. No “mud bogging” on public land. These are also very clear, fundamental, and important recommendations. They echo and reinforce the recommendations AWA has been delivering to the Alberta government over the last decade.

In short, guided by the clarity that comes from the removal of the politics and special interests surrounding the issue, the students did the science, did the research, and

drew a straight line to the inescapable conclusion. They “get it.”

Now they are waiting, along with all Albertans, to see if the government finally will get it too. AWA shares the Rundle College students’ hopes that ESRD will integrate sane OHV management regulations into the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan being developed under the Land Use Framework (LUF) planning process.

At the same time, AWA notes with caution the response from ESRD cited in the *Calgary Herald* article. A department spokesperson asserts that the students’ recommendations are already covered by existing laws but then goes on to say that “people are *expected* to keep OHVs out of wetlands” and that they (ESRD) “have been *telling* people to stay on the trails” (emphasis added). What is missing, in other words, is the enforcement.

AWA hopes the Rundle School message will prompt some real action on the enforcement front. All this expecting and telling is well and good, but without the enforcement to back it up, it ultimately comes to naught.

In a July meeting with ESRD to discuss recent OHV trail developments in the Bighorn (see the article by Sean Nichols in the August 2012 issue of *WLA*), AWA clearly communicated our position: Alberta needs better enforcement of OHV and trail regulations. Enforcement is a key component of any OHV management plan, and it’s one that is currently missing. Enforcement considerations absolutely need to be a part of the new regional plans implemented under LUF.

AWA hopes Albertans will be inspired by the hard work and insight demonstrated by Ms. Ross’ students. We look forward to the government’s “getting it” too. Will ESRD implement and enforce the regulations needed to protect riparian areas? We know one group of knowledgeable grade seven students who would like to give the department a detention if it doesn’t. 🐾



Engineered wetland at start of project.

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