



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

May 2, 2014

Mayor Aurel Langevin and Councillors
Lac La Biche County
via E-mail: aurel.langevin@laclabichecounty.com

Re: Proposed Re-zoning and Development next to Garner Orchid Fen Natural Area

Dear Lac La Biche County Mayor and Council,

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) was established in 1965 to raise awareness among Albertans about the importance of protecting watershed health, important wildlife habitat, and environmentally significant areas, so that we may safeguard and enjoy their many benefits for current and future generations.

AWA has significant roots in the Lakeland region. Along with Lac La Biche's former Mayor, the late Tom Maccagno, who was a very active AWA member, we strongly supported the creation of Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area. AWA hikes and canoe trips have brought many Albertans to Lac La Biche County to discover Lakeland Park as one of the gems of the Alberta Parks network. AWA also supported the recent expansion of the Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park to include islands in east Lac La Biche.

Garner Orchid Fen is also an area we have highlighted in recent years. Since 2011, we have organized an annual hike into Garner Orchid Fen, introducing the fascinating orchid-rich wetlands to residents of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Athabasca, Bonnyville, and Lac La Biche County. The Fen was established as a Natural Area because of the vision and dedication of Tom Maccagno. These delicate groundwater-fed forested wetlands have a unique beauty and the opportunity to see 11 distinct Alberta orchid species. We have planned another Garner Orchid Fen hike for June 22, to which Council members, Council staff, and ESAC members are invited.

We are very concerned to learn recently of a proposed re-zoning of 88 acres of lands east of the Garner Orchid Fen for residential development. Residential development could divert, deplete or pollute the shallow groundwater supplying the fen. Unchecked off-road vehicle access from nearby residents and visitors could destroy the sensitive wetlands.

We appreciate that Council unanimously passed a motion to postpone the re-zoning to a future meeting of Council "to allow Administration to bring forward options for accommodating the environmentally sensitive areas as well as the new development." However, we remain concerned that accommodating residential development near the Fen will bring very intensive pressures harmful to the fen.

We ask that Council members use their land use authority to sustain the Garner Fen for the long term, by leaving the area near the Garner Fen as agriculture-zoned and by planning residential development farther away from this sensitive, ecologically outstanding area. We also ask that independent (rather than proponent-led) groundwater and wetlands studies of the Fen be done in conjunction with Alberta Parks, and that Council enhances protection of the Garner Orchid Fen Natural Area from future harmful impacts as the area's population grows.

Thank you for considering these concerns, and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn Campbell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Carolyn Campbell
Conservation Specialist

cc:

Councillors of Lac La Biche County

Lac La Biche County administration, main.office@laclabichedcounty.com

Environmental Stewardship Advisory Committee, esac@laclabichedcounty.com

Norbert Raffael, Operations Manager, Northeast Region, Alberta Parks