

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER

No. 4 March 2001

REPORT ON THE RED DEER MEETING - NOV. 2000

This was a very successful meeting, even if by Murphy's Law, there is never enough time to do everything. We did at least manage to get the Bylaws ratified, although some of the management policies, particularly regarding membership fees and categories, still have to be finalized. These do not require Bylaw amendments so they can be changed as required at any General Meeting.

The good news is those of you who paid your \$15 membership fee last year, do not have to pay again until the next fiscal year, i.e. after Sept 30. (Don't worry, we'll remind you nearer the time!)

The bad news, for those of you receiving this newsletter who did not pay your membership fee last year, but had expressed interest previously, is you will no longer receive SAPAA communications or be entitled to vote at the next AGM, unless you send in your membership fee with the enclosed form. (If you didn't receive a membership form, then you have already paid.) This small fee is to cover our mailing and meeting costs (and no, the Government does not cover this as we are independent of their Stewards Program, although obviously connected with it). We hope you will join, as the Association has got off to a good start and we think we can all benefit by increased networking and communication.

The main part of the November meeting was two very informative talks given by Lorna Allen and Sandra Myers from the Parks and Protected Areas Division. For those of you who missed it, I have tried to summarize some of their remarks, as it was obvious that many of us were unaware or had forgotten some of the aspects of our Stewardship.

WHY 'MY' NATURAL AREA IS IMPORTANT AND HOW CAN I ENHANCE ITS SIGNIFICANCE? Lorna Allen, Biologist, Parks & Protected Areas Division.

Lorna explained the rationale for Protected Areas - that they were representative of the different ecosites in the province and to maintain species diversity or special features. Bigger is better, as it allows for a wider variety of habitat and species and if they are intact, better still. Small sites, while not necessarily provincially significant, do provide local educational experiences or protect rare species communities or geological features; if they provide some wildlife corridor connections these have added value. Some small isolated Natural Areas, a relic of the school allowances in every township, may have less value, but in highly developed areas, even these small areas are better than none.

Lorna emphasized that for many of these areas, the Stewards have an important role to play, as they can do the essential ground surveys, often being more knowledgeable about what is actually happening than even the local land managers. They can help maintain the integrity of the site, e.g. by weed control, reclamation or other maintenance, or report on increasing or decreasing occurrence of common species (annual counts), or rare species.

Stewards reports are extremely valuable, often being the only information on the site, and these are maintained on the provincial data base, IRIS, the Inspection Reporting Information System. Rare species should be verified, where possible, and reported on the rare species form for ANHIC, the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre. She noted that rare plants etc. should not be picked, but the location noted (e.g. a mark, a specific number of paces in a certain direction from the spot - not to draw attention to the actual plant)

She provided many beautiful illustrations for her topics. There were several points brought up in discussion, some of which will provide a focus for our future meetings, e.g. legal positions.

WHO'S WHO AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?

Sandra Myers, Volunteer Services Coordinator, Parks & Protected Areas Division.

This talk was originally to have been given by Cam Hantiuk, but as he had just recently left the department, Sandra nobly stepped in to fill the breach. We had given her a list of questions so these and her answers are shown below. Some of them may be obvious, but there have been so many organizational changes in the Department, we thought it would be useful to clarify them. As Sandra said, when you have had 5 different managers in the last 3 years, it does become difficult to keep track. (And one of the reasons for the formation of this Association!)

And as we were about to send out this Newsletter, Klein announced his new Cabinet. Parks and Protected Areas is being given the run-around again. So some of this information is already obsolete and I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the rest! But I think there is still enough information to be useful.

It will probably take some time for the dust to settle. We might need another talk on 'Who's who, and who does what!'

1. *Which department, branch, or working unit in government is currently responsible for the Stewards Program?*

Answer: **IT WAS** Alberta Environment, Natural Resources Service, Parks and Protected Areas Division, Marketing and Partnerships.

NOW Parks and Protected Areas are under Community Development, along with Persons with Disabilities.

- The Minister is Gene Zwosdesky, and Deputy Minister - William Byrne.

Public Lands, Lands and Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife, are now under Sustainable Resource Development.

- Minister is Mike Cardinal, DM - Bob Fessenden. Most of the land managers for Natural Areas will presumably be in this department.

Environment now covers 'Environment', with the above exceptions, so I don't quite know what that is, possibly more regulatory functions. air and water quality etc. It's Minister is Lorne Taylor, DM - Ken Smith.

2. *Who are the contact people for Stewards - immediate in-the-field managers, as well as higher authorities? Phone numbers and e-mail addresses please.(These may well have changed by the time you get this!)*

Answer: • Sandra Myers, Volunteer Services Coordinator - Phone: (780) 427-174

• June Markwart, Manager, Marketing & Partnerships - Ph: (780) 427-9383

• Fred Moffatt, Director, Parks & Protected Areas Division - Ph: (780) 427-8441

• William Byrne, Deputy Minister, Department of Community Services

• Gene Zwosdesky, Minister, Department of Community Services

• Local Land Managers should be in your Stewards Manual, or can be obtained from Sandra Myers.

INFORMATION on volunteering news in Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas (P/PA) can be found at www.gov.ab.ca/env/parks/volunteer/

3. *Please clarify 'white' and 'green' zones. How do individual Natural Areas fit with the zones?*

Answer: This now gets complicated!. Natural Areas in the 'White' zone were under Alberta Agriculture and those in the 'Green' zone were under Alberta Environment, Land and Forest Services. All Public Lands, including Lands and Forest Service are now under Sustainable Resource Development. What used to be Natural Resources Services, administered most Provincial and Wildland Parks and some Ecological Reserves under the Parks and Protected Areas Division. The latter is now

separated from Environment and is under Community Services, so I suspect there may be a greater emphasis on recreation facilities (e.g. Edmonton Community Services) rather than conservation, but we will have to wait and see.

Don't worry if it seems confused, as the Steward Coordinator should be able to notify you of your responsible agency and individual.

- Fish & Wildlife and Parks Rangers are now combined as 'Conservation Officers'.

4. *What is the future of the Stewards' program?*

Answer: Continuing support for Volunteer Stewards was confirmed.

- Various government volunteer programs are being integrated, e.g. campground hosts, conference workers etc. The Volunteer Stewards Program is being expanded to include Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks etc. Current activities are back-logged because of amalgamations, reorganizations (!)

- (Note: it was concern about the future of the Stewards Program that led to the formation of this Association - maybe we helped to keep it alive?)

5. *What is happening to the MLA Committee Report and Recommendations on key issues in regard to the Natural Heritage Act? What is the current status of the NHA?*

Answer: A new Act on Parks and Protected Areas, will hopefully be introduced sometime after the next election. This is badly needed to give more protection and clarity to current designations. Work is continuing on streamlining Natural Areas. Some Natural Areas may be amalgamated to make larger Protected Areas.

6. *How can NA under PNT designation be given more protected status? Please describe what PNT means. Can these NA be recognized at least on maps etc.?*

Answer: A Protective Notation is a flag placed on a site by an agency (e.g. P/PA) to register its interest, if there are no land use conflicts. The agency is responsible for updating, amending or possibly cancelling this reservation. The agency is not the Land Manager, but only registers its interest; the Land Manager however cannot cancel the PNT placed by another agency. **Stewards activities are extremely important to maintain interest in these sites.** Occasional management issues may lead to deletion, e.g. Redwater Sandhills, because it is so messed up by OHVs, therefore this might revert to Public Lands.

- More protection is given by designation by Order-in Council (O/C). Not all sites will be protected, only those justified within P/PA goals. 20 sites already O/C'd may be lost, but can only be disestablished by another Order-in-Council.

- Natural Areas are mapped on a downloadable Adobe Acrobat file or Arcview shapefile on the Parks and Protected Areas (P/PA) website under land Reference Manual. (www.gov.ab.ca/env/parks.html).

7. *What resources are available for Stewards for dealing with concerns (e.g. ATVs, fence repairs etc.) Is 'in kind' assistance still available, and if so, from where/whom?*

Answer: There is now a small budget for some materials for Stewards. There is a stockpile of signs, fenceposts and wire. Stewards should work with Land Managers to erect barriers, control weeds etc.

8. *How can Stewards obtain information about imminent activities (e.g. seismic activity etc.) in or near their Natural Areas? How do we get prior input/ consultation (similar to private landowners?)*

Answer: The following are comments I (Alison) received from Natural Resources Service to clarify this point:

Part of the process for placing a reservation (PNT) or establishing a site by Order-in-Council is a referral to Resource Development (formally the Department of Energy). For all protected areas there is in place an agreement with Resource Development on whether or not we have to allow surface access to a petroleum company who owns the subsurface resources.

Before sites were established under the Special Places (SP) process, there were approximately 322 NAs of which 37% had no surface access for the exploration or development of petroleum and natural gas. No one could authorize access to these lands for petroleum extraction. Of the remaining 63% there is a commitment to honor the access rights to any company wishing to explore for or extract the resource.

The NAs established under SP have greater protection, even though we still have to allow access to the companies which had subsurface rights under the site when it was OC'd. Companies buying rights after that date are "locked out" so there is no opportunity for them to do seismic work or drill within the site.

The final decision to allow a well (for example) in an OC'd NA is made in the Deputy Minister's office. There is no opportunity to appeal as these agreements are already in place. As for appealing site development, there would have to be a provision written into the specific site management plan which direct the proponent to contact specific stakeholders which use the site. Such would only allow a third party to provide input but not actually prohibit development. (Stewards take note - make sure your name is in any Management Plan involving your site!)

P/PA is trying to get a process for notification of Stewards. The problem is that application for land use often has a very short turn-around time of a few days.

- Volunteer Stewards have no legal standing. Licences of Occupation, (Recreational) Leases or Dispositions are legal and are legally required to be informed, but cannot stop development.
- Best suggestion - **make friends with your Land Manager and county officials!**

9. *The Stewards Newsletter used to inform about relevant activities. Who compiles it now? How can it be restored to its former quality?*

Answer: There is now an integrated newsletter for all NRS volunteers. It has a wider distribution and is accessible on the website. Articles by volunteers are always welcome. There is no separate newsletter for Stewards - hence this one! (*Yes, we would like articles from Stewards too!*)

10. *How are Volunteer Stewards appointed/recruited? How do you define Stewards? Can SAPAA be notified of new members on a regular basis?*

Answer: Recruitment is often by word of mouth. For information regarding opportunities etc. see the website above.

- A Steward is defined as an individual or group who monitors and inspects a Natural Area and does not receive wages. There are some Roving Stewards with particular expertise who assist other Stewards in different areas.
- There are currently 71 organizations and over 250 individuals recognized at present.

11. *Can you explain the new Volunteers agreement and insurance and liability policies?*

Answer: Individual Stewards who sign the Volunteer Stewards agreement, will be covered by government insurance policies, for third party liability, in the course of their duties. A similar policy is being

worked on for small groups (e.g. 'Friends of ') who may not have their own insurance as larger groups do (e.g. Boy Scouts, Junior Forest Wardens)

12. *Any suggestions as to how Stewards can be most effective in working with Government to protect 'their' Areas?*

Answer: **It is very important to make regular visits and submit regular reports.** These are often the only up-to-date information and the first to report unauthorized or inappropriate use. Stewards are the eyes and ears for P/PA. You should inform your Land Manager immediately of such incidents, for more timely action. This is your most important contact.

13. *What should be included in the inspection and monitoring reports to provide the department(s) with useful and required information? To whom should they be sent and what happens to them and their information? Is it compiled?*

Answer: Reports are very important for maintaining data bases for Protected Areas. They should be submitted, even if there is no change as this is also important. Casual visits, as well as more particular monitoring, can also provide information. See notes above from Lorna, regarding these reports.

- **These reports may be used to make management decisions and prioritize projects.**
- It is important to include an estimate of volunteer hours. This includes traveling time or days away, or time preparing documents, at meetings etc. At \$5/hr (may be increased) you can calculate how much we are contributing to the Government! Also it gives a measure of the success of the program.
- Reports can be submitted on-line. A suggestion was to make the reports 2-sided rather than inconvenient legal size.

14. *What kinds of projects (e.g. lake quality etc.) would benefit from the kind of information and assistance that the Stewards could provide?*

Answer: Projects should add value to work under way or where volunteers can contribute the best value. Depending on skills, there are a variety of projects, e.g. annual counts, plant and bird inventories.

A COUPLE OF OBSERVATION PROJECTS FOR STEWARDS

These are a couple of projects that struck me as being useful, and easy, for Stewards who are in the field frequently. If you have other suggestions, we can perhaps get more going?

Tracking the flowering dates of some common plant species (plant phenology) across the country on a regular annual basis can give important information on climate change, wildlife and crop management and human health (pollen warnings). For more information, phone (780) 987-5455, or see <http://www/biology.ualberta.ca/devonian.hp/pwatch.htm>

Anyone interested in frogs? Canadian Nature Federation Frogwatch program is monitoring these indicator species of pollution and climate change. See www.cciw.ca/emanops/ or phone (613) 562-3447, or Alberta Amphibian Monitoring Program, (780) 427-1249, e-mail lisa.takats@gov.ab.ca

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Is your Natural Area within the North Saskatchewan River Basin ? You may be interested in a group which got together about two years ago. A number of government agencies, utility corporations, (EPCOR/Aqualta etc.), agriculture and non-government organizations (e.g. Trout Unlimited Canada) formed a network group of users of the North Saskatchewan River Basin (NSRB), to work together to maintain the quality of our major river lifeline.

This has now grown to about 60 different representatives, covering just about all aspects. So far they have developed a Mission Statement ('to encourage community based stewardship of the NSRB') and are working on draft strategies. Basically the idea is good, to get everyone working together, in a cooperative and proactive manner. They will be developing an information web-site, newsletters, fact sheets etc. and networking to promote 'wise use of the NSRB to ensure its protection and enhancement'. I am not sure how effective this body will be, but I'm hoping it's not just another 'hot air balloon'!

At a guess, at least half of Alberta's Natural Areas lie within the NSRB, so as Stewards, this may be an opportunity for us to make some useful contacts and hopefully participate in discussions on 'wise use'.

I am already participating as a representative of a river recreation user group, the Northwest Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club, and as president of the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA), I would be willing to put forward any of your ideas, if you didn't mind me wearing two hats. If anyone else would like to volunteer, it would be great!

Do you have any specific concerns which you feel should be discussed with this wide group of stakeholders? There may be others out there with similar problems, looking for answers. Please let me know if you are interested.

Alison (phone 780 437-7183)

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

One of our reasons for forming the Association was to network, and provide information and help to each other. We would love to hear from you

- problems, solutions, observations, interesting facts, etc., etc.

So please drop me a note, or e-mail (I'm still trying to master the intricacies of e-mail) and we will try to have a regular column of Question and Answer and Comments.

The Newsletter is appearing at irregular intervals at present, but we'll maybe aim for quarterly, if you can supply us with enough items - or suggestions for same.

And finally, do we have any volunteers for a Newsletter editor?

As my mother used to say, don't be backward about coming forward!

Letters to the (temporary) editor,

Alison Dinwoodie

11622 78th Ave.

Edmonton.

T6G 0N7

or e-mail adinwoodie