

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER

No. 6 MARCH 2002

VOLUNTEER STEWARDS CONFERENCE AT CYPRESS HILLS, APRIL

If any of you are going to the Stewards Conference, Aaron and Elise Bowersock will be the SAPAA representatives there, so contact them if you want any information about our activities (403-286-4820, abower@telusplanet.net . And if you know or meet other Stewards there who are not already members of SAPAA, you could always persuade them to join us! Aaron will have membership forms for them if necessary.

SUMMER FIELD TRIP

We thought Stewards would be interested in seeing some of the diversity of our Natural Areas, so we are arranging a site visit this summer. This could become a regular feature of the Association, as we get to know each other and share information and experiences. So what better place to start than at Coyote Lake?

COYOTE LAKE - Saturday, June 8th, 2002 from 10.30 am, to approx. 4 pm

Coyote Lake is approximately 80 km west of Edmonton, or 130 km from Red Deer. Doris and Eric Hopkins are well known to most Stewards, as they have done more to promote the idea of Natural Areas and in particular, conservation easements to protect their area, than most people.

Coyote Lake is a great area as it is in the transition zone between aspen parkland, boreal forest, and even foothills, so there should be lots to see for everyone, including orchids and one or two rare species - always supposing spring comes when it should! Greater Coyote Lake Conservation Area started when the Hopkins donated their land to the Nature Conservancy, and they have since persuaded some of their neighbours to do likewise. The government has also earmarked additional land round the lake as Natural Areas, but as Doris says, if we can get more people to realise how special this area is, the better chance we have of maintaining, and even expanding it.

There will be a moderate amount of walking, not all on trails, but some parts may be boggy. Bring your boots! Bring lunch, sunscreen (optimist!), bug screen and waterproofs (for the pessimists).

Directions from Edmonton: Take Hwy 39 west from Leduc, then straight on to Hwy 622 past Telfordville to St. Francis; keep straight on (Twp Rd.500) another 8 m (approx) then turn S. on Range Rd 44, to Coyote Lake - there are signs at the turn off.

Directions from Red Deer: Take Hwy 20 north from Bentley to Alsike, go approx. 2 km W. on Hwy 39, turn N. on Range Rd. 43 (Saskatoon Valley Rd) to Twp Rd.500, go W. 1 km, then turn S. on Range Rd 44, to Coyote Lake.

Please phone or e-mail John Woitenko if you are thinking of coming, or if you want to coordinate transport. There is limited parking space in the Hopkins yard. His phone is (780) 459-0475 , or e-mail jwoitenko@compusmart.ab.ca

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Kerry Wood Centre, RED DEER, Saturday, October 26th 2002

This is a preliminary notice, so that you can mark it in your diaries now! The topic will be a hot one 'The OHV problem'! We hope to have a speaker from the Environmental Law Centre to discuss the legal status of access and other issues affecting our Natural Areas, e.g. oil and gas, developments on adjacent lands etc. and also someone representing the land managers' viewpoint. There should be some interesting discussion!

NOTES FROM THE AGM 2001

We were very fortunate at the last AGM to have the recently appointed Assistant Deputy Minister, **John Kristensen**, from the Department of Community Development, as our featured speaker. He was able to give us some background both of his own and that of the recently reorganized government departments. (My notes say he is 'orn. & ichty.' i.e. he is a bird and fish guy!) He worked for many years in Aboriginal Affairs and is also a Steward of the Buck for Wildlife Bertona Pond area, so he can relate to many of our concerns. He indicated that we should also have good support from the new Minister of Community Development, Hon. Gene Zwozdesky and his Deputy Minister, Bill Bryson. They hope to build up the identity of Parks and Protected Areas again, including infrastructure and visitor services.

He gave a brief summary of the Stewards Program, which was initiated in 1987. It now has 304 Stewards (including 239 individuals and 65 groups or associations), who are looking after 174 sites (164 Natural Areas, 4 Ecological Reserves, 3 Wildland Parks, 1 Heritage Rangeland, 1 Provincial Park and 1 Provincial Recreation Area, and one easement for conservation purposes on private land). They hope to be working on increasing the number of sites and volunteers.

Recent changes in government resulted in moving Public Lands from Agriculture to Sustainable Development, along with Fish and Wildlife. Although site managers will be in different departments, he is hoping we will continue to be able to work together. The end of the Special Places program was announced on 24 July, with the designation of 81 new sites and 13 expanded. Grasslands and Parkland are still under-represented, and although he said we are miles ahead from where we were in 1995, it was encouraging to hear him say that they are not stopping there.

June Markwart is responsible for the parks volunteer program, but Sandra Myers will continue to be the contact for Volunteer Stewards. He reassured us that there would still be at least the same level of support for the Stewards Program and would like to see more. In the field, the Stewards should continue to work with their site supervisor, who is responsible for day-to-day land management. This includes dealing with vandalism, access, fencing, etc. If conflicts arise, Sandra can be called upon to help resolve them with the parties involved. He emphasized that **Stewards should get to know their site manager, and Sandra**, to improve communication. He also emphasized **the importance of the Stewards reports**, as this is often the only source of their information. They are in the process of producing a new Stewards Manual, which we might be able to review. (These have been temporarily set aside with all the continuing budget cuts and shortage of staff - Ed.). If site brochures are to be updated, Stewards can help with the revisions and the Department can deal with the printing.

With regard to developments on or near a Natural Area, the dispositions are managed locally - all the more reason to keep in touch with your site manager! Existing commitments have to be honoured, but they are supposed to consult with the public when these are developed. (As an aside, an oil company recently decided not to put a pipeline through the Clifford E. Lee Nature Reserve, after receiving many letters of objection from the public, so maybe we can help each other here too?)

A new Parks and Protected Areas Act is in the works, though there was no indication of when it would be introduced. John said that, as a result of our previous representations to Gary Mar, a Natural Area class will be included in the framework. (So, hey! SAPAA did make a difference!). Some areas may be upgraded, but there will be no public input prior to designations. But your **Stewards reports are instrumental in maintaining interest in the area - the more information you can give them, the more chance of upgrading.**

The OHV problem continues, and again, the **Stewards reports are important in documenting on-going abuse.** These should also be reported to the site supervisor, with any suggestions for improvement. There are few regulations restricting OHV use, but the Minister may consider the possibility of placing restrictions in specific Natural Areas. Municipal by-laws can sometimes be introduced too.

There were many questions from the audience but as usual, not enough time. We really appreciated Mr. Kristensen taking the time to talk to us.

John Rintoul, also from the Parks and Protected Areas Division, followed with another interesting talk, starting with the origins of the Natural Areas and then what is done with the data collected from the Stewards reports.

Did you know that in the late 1800s, sections 11 and 29 in each township were set aside for school or reserved land, and many of these are now our Natural Areas? In 1930, the first Provincial Parks and Protected Areas Act was passed, but Natural Areas were not recognized until 1964 along with Historic Sites, and Wilderness Areas. The current Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas Act (WAERNA) was passed in 1980, with a recent amendment to add Heritage Rangelands, but there are many loose ends which a new Parks and Protected Areas Act would tidy up - e.g. giving more legal protection to Natural Areas.

The definition of a Natural Area is 'to protect scenic and sensitive public land from disturbance', but we need to know what to protect, which is where our species lists come in. In the early 1990s the data base for the Natural Areas became the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre, (ANHIC) which is now linked with other data centres round the world. There are a wide variety of species lists: vascular plants, mosses, lichens, birds, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, fish, molluscs and even landforms. So anything of interest which you note in your inspection reports are all grist for the mill. In fact **your reports are one of the prime sources of information.**

ANHIC contains over 5500 items, listed with their species rareness priority: e.g. G1 - G5 having global significance, G1 being found only in 1 - 5 locations in the world. S1 means a particular species is found in 1 - 5 locations provincially, S2 up to 20, and S3 21 - 100 occurrences. There is a rare native plant report form, so if you find something really unusual, John would love to have it documented! More information on ANHIC can be found on the website:

<http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca>, then go to the link Preserving Alberta, then Parks and Protected Areas.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES - HELP!

If anyone would like to send me (Alison) notes of recent events, developments, sightings or other news from their Natural Area, we would love to publish them. We can maybe help each other with suggestions or information. It doesn't need to be a long article - just a few lines, so that we have a better idea of what is going on round the province. These used to be published in the Volunteer Stewards newsletter, but like many other things in a badly under-funded division, have fallen by the wayside.

At present, we only have two regular Newsletters a year, one in the spring (approx. March) and the other before the AGM, about September, but if we start getting lots of material, who knows? **It would also be nice to have an official Editor - any volunteers?**

We still need a Secretary, so please help us out! Duties are mainly taking minutes at the meeting, so it is not very onerous.

Don't forget to renew your membership if you haven't already done so. (A renewal/registration form is included with the newsletter if you haven't paid your membership.)

Alison Dinwoodie, Temporary Editor
Phone: (780)-437-7183
e-mail: adinwoodie@shaw.ca
(Note change of e-mail address)