

**NEWSLETTER**

**TED RITZER APPOINTED INTERPRETIVE SERVICES COORDINATOR**

Submitted by John Woitenko

Ted Ritzer has recently been appointed Interpretive Services Coordinator. In this position, as well as being Sandra Meyers immediate supervisor, he provides supervision responsibility for the Volunteer Services and Volunteer Steward Program within Alberta Parks and Protected Areas Division. Ted brings a wealth of experience to this position as he has worked with Interpretive Programs in Manitoba and Alberta.

One of his first responsibilities in this assignment has been to complete a review of the Volunteer Services and Volunteer Steward Program to determine future directions of the program. This review is necessary because Parks and Protected Areas has limited resources and Ted's recommendations will determine which programs will be reduced or eliminated. Thus far, Ted has interviewed staff in the Parks and Protected Areas Division and four Stewards of Natural Areas. His findings so far indicate wide support for the Volunteer Stewards Program. His other good news is that the program support position formally held by Amy will soon be filled in a temporary capacity.

Ted is looking forward to working collaboratively with SAPPA to protect and enhance Natural and Protected Areas and the programs offered.

**REPORT ON RED DEER MEETING October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002 - OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLES.**

Submitted by Alison Dinwoodie.

For those of you who couldn't make it to our last meeting in Red Deer, you missed some very interesting talks and discussions on Off Highway Vehicle access. I have tried to summarize some of it from my scrappy notes to give you some idea of it.

**Wayne Holland** was our first speaker, and as a land specialist in the Edmonton area, he has had many years of experience dealing with the OHV problem. He illustrated the value of cooperation between groups by using the Ministik area, an area about 30 km east of Edmonton, as an example.

Ten years ago there was a lot of conflict and abuse there by OHVs. Public Management Plan meetings produced a lot of unproductive and unpleasant hot air, but smaller Public Advisory Committee meetings with a more balanced representation produced a compromise. By sacrificing the Redwater area to the OHVs, they agreed to stay away from Ministik. This seems to have worked reasonably well at Ministik. Unfortunately, Redwater is being thoroughly trashed by OHV users who are not abiding by the agreed conditions. The problem is the large majority of these 'piston heads' do not belong to any OHV association. While the OHV Association tries to do its best with education and monitoring, they cannot keep up with the damage that is being done. Needless to say, the local landowners are not happy either.

The big problem is that as the OHV use expands, the land base is shrinking. Present legislation does allow for charging for harmful destruction, or tree cutting without permission, but is next to impossible to enforce. Better communication is still seen as a major requirement, which has not been helped in the past by inaccurate maps and lack of information!

**Keri Barringer, from the Environmental Law Centre**, then gave a useful overview of the legal status of Volunteer Stewards and some of the legislation controlling their areas. (The following is not intended to give a legal opinion, just a flavour of the situation, - with a few of my own comments added in brackets!)

1. While Volunteer Stewards cannot assume legal responsibility, or enforcement, they can promote responsible use and work on advisory committees to determine specific activities in their Natural Area. (Make sure you ask to be kept informed and involved with any such developments).
2. The Public Lands Act (PLA) allows the Minister of Sustainable Resources Department (SRD) to classify public land and declare its broad use. This is primarily for dispositions of interests e.g. grazing. (Could we get more PNT Areas classified as Protected Areas? This is where SRD and Community Development may have different ideas?)
3. A PNT (Protective Notation) indicates that the resource should be protected to retain its integrity. (Whose definition of integrity??)
4. Recreation leases are available (though not readily) to municipal or non-profit societies. Such leaseholder rights are not always clear, e.g. for liability, controlling access etc. (Check with John Woitenko if your NA has such a lease and similar problems to Riverlot 56.)
5. Section 54(i) of the PLA prohibits disturbance of the bed or shore of any water course or body in the vicinity of the public land, or creation of conditions which is likely to result in erosion. (Take lots of photos, and if possible videos of action)
6. Natural Areas fall under the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act (WAERNA). Although, there is very little defined for them under this Act, unlike the Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Areas, which are more specifically protected. (Unfortunately, too much is left to political and administrative discretion, and as ecosystem management is not specified, it is difficult to use this as an argument.)
7. Municipalities have to work under Land Use Policies, which encourage 'sustainable development', but also includes minimizing negative impacts to significant natural areas and loss of habitat. They also have control of roads in their area (e.g. any closure of road access has to go through them).
8. It might be advisable if you are making presentations for public hearings or appeals to hire a planning advisor/consultant, to help you through the planning and legal minefields. But better to keep it low key at a local level as more can often be achieved there. (If anyone wants information on dealing with a coal mine adjacent to their Natural Area, contact Alison! Stewards were recognized as legitimate local interveners at such a hearing, which is a useful precedent, when external objections are often not accepted).

Finally, Keri touched on liability issues. Volunteers or societies are not protected from someone who may initiate an action for slander or defamation, but that person has to prove the statements they are claiming for.

As positive suggestions, Keri stressed the participation in Management Plans, especially where OHV access is a concern, to explore partnerships, to continue monitoring, education and advocacy for ecological management of public land. In addition we should try to persuade the powers-that-be that there should be a more comprehensive planning policy with legal authority, not just discretionary power of the Minister to classify public land and its use.

Our last speaker, **Calvin Rakach**, shared some of the beliefs and values of the **Off Highway Vehicle Association**, of which he is president. He is a firm believer in trying to educate more users about trail etiquette. Certainly if all OHV users followed their guidelines (e.g. "avoid sensitive and restricted areas at all times, avoid riding after heavy rains, avoid running over young trees and shrubs, avoid accelerated starts and stops and turns) there would be a lot less of a problem. They are also great believers in 'designated trails' and are hard at work getting more trails designated (e.g. Bighorn, Trans-Canada Trail etc.)

OHV use has been escalating in the last few years (23% increase last year alone). He estimates 160 -200,000 OHVs in Alberta, and a similar number of snowmobiles, but less than a quarter of these are registered (35,000) and an even smaller proportion belong to the OHVA (2000 or 1%). So while they claim to be a responsible

organization, they don't speak for the other 99% out there. He suggested industry/dealers could play a bigger part in promoting responsible use, but they need information and accurate maps too!

With the increase in numbers they claim there is a decrease in the land base where they can go. (This may be true for the agricultural and developed areas, but there are thousands of km of new seismic, oil/gas roads and trails that have opened up land that was previously only accessible for multi-day horse or hiking trips). And where areas have been designated for OHV use they quickly become less attractive (i.e. OHV use is *not* a sustainable activity!)

There was a lively discussion following the talks. Many people expressed their frustration with government failure to take more positive action. Voluntary compliance has been tried and found wanting. Proper legislation is required with adequate enforcement and penalties, but also more mandatory vehicle instructions and responsibilities should be tied with licensing. Higher licensing fees were also suggested to help pay for enforcement. Manufacturers could also play their part by toning down some of their more aggressive ads! (e.g. "We don't just conquer mountains - we humiliate them" with a picture of a Jeep in some impossible place!). It was stressed that any legislation would be very slow to take effect, and in the meantime we should try to work things out locally as much as possible. One thing we all agreed was the need for better information and particularly *accurate* maps showing designated routes and Protected Areas! And Stewards know their ground better than the computer map designers, so make sure you check any and all maps including your area, if possible before they get distributed. I have had to correct or get withdrawn at least four different major maps of my area!

For more information:

- **Environment Law Centre: Phone: (780) 424-5099 or 1-800-661-4238.**  
**Web site: [www.elc.ab.ca](http://www.elc.ab.ca)**
- **Calvin Rakach, OHVA: Phone: 403-261-4060.**
- **ATV Naturewatch (Ontario): Web site: [www.ATVNW.ca](http://www.ATVNW.ca)**

### **ELSON OLORENSHAW**

We were delighted to welcome a new member, Elson Olorenshaw, to our Executive Committee last October and very saddened by the news of his untimely death on December 29<sup>th</sup> in a car accident near Beaverhill. Although he was new to SAPAA, Elson had been an active member and treasurer of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory for many years, and as an accountant, had helped many naturalist organizations, including SAPAA, keep their financial statements straight. He was a very keen birder; always ready to help others and he will be sadly missed. We offer our sincere condolences to his family.

### **AGM – FALL CONFERENCE**

**Kerry Wood Nature Centre, RED DEER, Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup> 2003.** This is a preliminary notice, so that you can mark it in your diaries now. Plan to attend.

### **PARKS and PROTECTED AREAS – 2003 Volunteer Conference**

See you all at the the Parks and Protected Areas 2003 Volunteer Conference at Blue Lake Adventure Lodge near Switzer Park on April 25 - 27

## SPRING/SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

- **Saturday, May 24: NW Bruderheim** - a natural area northeast of Edmonton – Volunteer Steward Hubert Taube. If you plan to attend please contact Hubert Taube before May 10<sup>th</sup> (780) 483-3806 for directions and/or meeting place. Planned meeting time will be around 9:00 a.m.
- **August 9, 10 or August 16, 17:** A trip to the **Whitehorse Wildland Park** (previously Cardinal Divide Natural Area) south of Hinton, may be run in August if there is enough interest. It is 3 - 4 hours drive from Edmonton so may involve camping at Whitehorse Creek Recreation Area, limited accommodation at Cadomin, or staying at a hotel in Hinton, approx. one hour's drive away. Lots of opportunity for hiking, botanising, geologising etc. Contact Alison Dinwoodie, 780-437-7183 (e-mail: adinwoodie@shaw.ca) if interested, before June 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Wagner Society holds a number of trips and has kindly let us advertised a couple. The Wagner Natural Area is located just west of Stony Plain off Highway 16X - 1 mile past Hwy 794, turn South where there is an access road to parking.

- **Thursday, May 1: Annual Frog-and-Toad Walk at Wagner.** Led by Wayne Roberts of the University of Alberta. Meet at Wagner Natural Area main gate at 6.00 p.m. Latecomers can follow the Marl Pond Trail from the north end to viewing spots at marl ponds along the trail.
- **Sunday, June 22: Wagner Orchid Walk.** Meet at the main gate of Wagner Natural Area at 2 p.m. Leaders: Irl Miller (455-3866) and other members of Wagner Society.

## NEWLETTER ARTICLES

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. 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.

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