

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

No. 9. September 2003

SAPAA AGM, 25th October 2003 - SHOULD STEWARDS BE ADVOCATES?

The theme of this year's General Meeting will be on how the Association can improve its effectiveness as a network of Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas. Our two speakers, Glen Semenchuk, from FAN, and Christyann Olson, from AWA, both have lots of experience in working with Government, so should be able to provide us with useful insights. We have left plenty of time for discussion too.

As you can see from the following article, there is a perceived impression in Government that we are acting too much as an advocacy group, which makes it difficult for them to deal with us. We requested a meeting with Department members to discuss these issues, the results of which are reported below.

Comments from this meeting and further discussions at the AGM will have an influence on how the Association proceeds in the future. **WE NEED YOUR INPUT, SO PLEASE COME TO THE MEETING!** If you are not able to attend, we would still love to have your ideas, so please write, phone or e-mail me, before 23 Oct., (see end of the newsletter for info).

URGENT!! NEW EXECUTIVE AND BOARD MEMBERS REQUIRED!

At the following business meeting, we need to elect a new Executive and Board. As both myself, as President, and John Woitenko, Vice-President, have served our two terms of office, we are not eligible for re-election in these positions. Other members, such as our faithful Membership/ Treasurer, Marilyn Shannon, have also served for several years. We badly need new blood!! And no, you do not have to live near Edmonton. If you know any of your friends who could be persuaded, but not able to come to the meeting, you could still nominate them. PLEASE HELP!

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Please renew your membership for 2004 by sending in the enclosed form TODAY!

SAPAA EXECUTIVE MEET WITH MEMBERS OF PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS

(Submitted by John Woitenko)

On June 17, 2003, three members of SAPAA executive met with three members of Parks and Protected Areas, June Markwart, Ted Ritzer and Sandra Myers. All are involved with the Volunteer Stewards Program, and the purpose was to discuss issues and common concerns.

Parks and Protected Areas staff first reviewed the purpose of Natural Areas, noting that public use has changed in some of them. June emphasized that things have changed for the better in the Department since SAPAA was formed and they have a great deal more potential support in Government. She indicated that if SAPAA would work more closely with them, there could be a greater possibility of

things getting addressed internally.

As the meeting progressed, it became apparent that the Department sees SAPAA as an 'Advocacy' group and therefore they are less willing to work with the Association. The indicators they cited as areas of concern included:

- The Department has serious concerns about the Association's Objectives, numbers four, five and six (identifying common issues, working with other groups as well as Government, and representing Stewards at stakeholders meetings.)
- Parks and Protected Areas staff do not like SAPAA members meeting or writing to the Minister about concerns which we have. Such activities generate Action Requests which create more work for them and reflect negatively on the program. Following 'due process' is preferable.
- They feel that the tone of SAPAA newsletters can be interpreted that everything the Government does is wrong. (Their interpretation, not ours! - AD)

Some issues that SAPAA executive brought forward included the frustration that many Stewards have regarding the lack of communication, the slowness the Government demonstrates in getting things done and the uncertainty of what the Department sees as the roles of Stewards. The response to these issues were addressed as follows:

- There has been a positive change in the Department since the time that SAPAA was formed. If we work more closely with them, they are confident that issues will be addressed internally.
- We were assured that things are slowly happening behind the scenes and that this action is preferable to raising a lot of public concern.
- A new Stewards Manual is progressing through its final stages and should be available by early July 2003. (September - We have not seen this yet - AD)

We felt this meeting was very useful and we should endeavour to meet annually. At the Annual General Meeting coming up in Red Deer, the membership will have an opportunity to address the issues and concerns brought forward at this meeting.

REPORT FROM VOLUNTEER CONFERENCE, WILLIAM SWITZER PROVINCIAL PARK, APRIL 25 - 27 2003 (Submitted by Alison Dinwoodie)

These Conferences are always a good opportunity to catch up with other Stewards and meet informally with Community Development staff. There were the usual successful social events in the evenings and a number of outdoor sessions - in spite of the persistent white stuff ! There were also the more informative sessions on Saturday. There were too many sessions to describe individually, but I would like to comment on two in particular, to clarify some of the questions frequently asked by Stewards.

A. The first was where Stewards had an opportunity to hear a number of CD staff present the current state of affairs, and then answer questions on a number of issues selected from popular choice on flip charts.

- June Markwart, Director Visitor Services, told us that there are no new proposals for a new Heritage Act, but that some concerns are being addressed through regulations under WAERNA.

- She also addressed the problems of insurance and legal services for Stewards and explained that other legislation makes this difficult to address, but they are looking at it. (See below)
- June also explained the Needs Assessment survey carried out earlier in the spring, when a few Stewards were interviewed by Ted Ritzer about the Stewardship program. This is normal procedure to evaluate the program and look for ways to improve it and make it more efficient.
- She also stressed that the Department is fully supportive of the Stewards program and appreciated the time and talents of the Volunteers. The land base and the number of applications for Stewardship have grown significantly in the last few years.

Ted Ritzer, Interpretive Services Coordinator, led the discussion of three questions selected from ten proposed.

- The general public is unaware of the value of Natural Areas and other Protected Areas. How can we get the message out that the Government does care for the land, and that they are not just public playgrounds? I was pleased to hear Doug Boase, from the legal and planning Division, state that the main reason for such Protected Areas is to protect examples of our natural heritage.
- What are the roles and responsibilities of Stewards? A new Volunteer Stewards Handbook is in the works, which should help to clarify a number of items. Some of the Stewards requested that they might see it before finalization (sometime on July?). Alison, John Woitenko and Miles Constable volunteered to review it.
- How do we educate or inform user groups of their responsibilities and minimize their impacts? Will new regulations clearly define where motorized vehicles may or may not go? No good answers on this one. Education yes, enforcement difficult. Stewards are invaluable for monitoring.

B. The second session was complementary to this first one, except that few people attended both, so some of the questions raised had already been answered. The purpose of this session was to identify particular problems and again three major ones were selected for further small group discussion. What worried me was that we spent over an hour on this exercise, producing a number of points of concern to many people, which were written up on flip charts, but at the end of the session, the facilitator rolled them up and put them in the waste basket. So much for our input!

I therefore retrieved the flip charts and later sent a note of the comments to June, suggesting that they could be addressed during our discussion with her staff at our meeting later on.

The first Flip Chart dealt with the issue of **Insurance and Legal Assistance**.

- As June had previously explained, the Finance Act does not allow legal support to be provided by Government for volunteers.
- Under the Financial Administration Act, the Government provides third party liability for individual Stewards but not Non-Governmental Organizations. These groups are expected to carry their own insurance to ensure their Directors and members are protected against liability.
- The Government understands the difficulties and will be investigating if they can obtain a group insurance plan for all non-profit organizations involved with Parks.
- Clear and consistent guidelines are required for Stewards. These should be addressed in the new Stewards Manual, and in new formal agreements with Stewards.
- Urgent action is required as Stewards feel increasingly vulnerable and these questions have been hanging around too long.

The second Flip Chart dealt with the **Use of Parks and Protected Areas, and OHV use.**

- The basic principle must be given more recognition that Natural and Protected Areas are designated for protection of ecological biodiversity. The importance of connected pockets and buffer zones of biodiversity should be stressed, essential for survival of the ecosystems.
- More definition is required of 'low intensity recreation'. Access must be controlled with more site-specific Management Plans. Legislation/regulations should define where motorized or non-motorized recreation is permitted.
- Capitalize and utilize the experience, skills and knowledge of Stewards to support the work of the P/PA Division.

No satisfactory answers were given to these problems except that things are now moving slowly in the background. Shortage of experienced staff and frequent reorganization has played havoc with progress in the past. Again there is an urgent need to move more quickly to address these issues before further deterioration of the whole system takes place.

CHANGE OF DATE FOR VOLUNTEER CONFERENCE 2004

The Volunteer Conference seems to have coincided with a number of rather cold, snowy April weekends, so the next one will be changed to September, 24 -26, 2004, at the Bow Valley Provincial Park. Let's hope for better weather! Should we change our AGM, normally held the last weekend in October, so that it does not overlap so much with the Volunteer Conference? Give us your thoughts!

CONGRATULATIONS!

First of all, congratulations to **Pat and Dick Clayton** for their **Individual Commitment Award at the provincial Emerald Awards**, for their involvement in active conservation work for over 30 years. They have both worked tirelessly on many committees, sharing their knowledge and expertise with many groups and individuals as well as practical hands-on activities.

Several other members have been recognized recently for the excellence of their activities, as reported in the Partners in Preservation Newsletter:

- **Outstanding Individual Steward Award to Margot Hervieux** for her work in the Kleskun Hills Natural Area, and production of a full colour guide to the area.
- **Steward Service Excellence Award to the Riverlot 56 Natural Area Society**, accepted by John Woitenko, for their active preservation of a unique natural area within the growing city of St. Albert over a period of 20 years.
- **Outstanding Group Steward Award to the J.J. Collett Foundation**, for their protection of rare and significant natural features and facilitating interpretation and school visits for the community.
- **Green Shield Award** as the highest level of recognition of Stewardship by the provincial government to the **Wagner Natural Area Society**, as a great example of the work of a community group in preserving and presenting our natural heritage.

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