

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 15 SEPTEMBER 2006

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

9:30 A.M.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2006

HASTINGS LAKE COMMUNITY HALL

(follow Hwy. 14 towards Wainright for approx 40 km east of Edmonton, then go south 2 km on RR 204.
The turn-off to the Community Hall is well signposted)

Speakers:

Doug Bowes, Policy & Land Use Planner, Parks & Protected Areas, Community Development, on
Land Use Challenges for Natural Areas and

Cheryl Bradley, M.Sc., biologist and conservationist, on
Industrial Activity in Protected Areas – Good in Theory, Bad in Practice

To be followed by a panel discussion.

The AGM, and a Nature Walk led by Linda Kershaw, will round out the program.

For more information please see the agenda attached. This promises to be a lively and

REPORTS

Summer field trip to Redwater Sandhills Natural Area, June 10

Four people joined **Laura and Bruce Martin** of the Friends of the Redwater Sandhills Natural Area at the north end of the OHV staging area. Access to the non-motorized area (which is less than a third of the natural area) is about 2 km along a private road off Victoria Trail. The Edmonton Orienteering Society was also having a meet there. There is quite a network of trails, so it pays to have a large-scale map (thanks to the orienteers!) or to have knowledgeable guides. We walked about a kilometre to check out a fence-line that forms a boundary between the motorized and non-motorized areas.

Unfortunately the latter keeps being reduced because the OHV riders insist on access to certain trails. (We observed a fine stand of jack pine which should have been kept within the non-motorized zone.) The damage the OHVs have done to this very fragile sand dune complex is very extensive.

One of the botanical highlights was the presence of sand heather (*Hudsonia tomentosa*) in full flower. The distribution of this species is restricted to the sandhills habitats north of Edmonton, with the exception of the Athabasca Sandhills in the far northeast corner of the Province. It is extremely susceptible to disturbance, which is all the more reason to protect this area. Our thanks go to Laura and Bruce for showing us around and, more importantly, for continuing to be stewards, helping to make sure that some "protected area" remains within the Redwater Sandhills Natural Area.



Prairie Crocus in Holmes Crossing Natural Area, another natural area with sand dunes.
Photo by Rod Olstad.

SAPAA executive meet with Parks/Protected Areas personnel (*Report by Alison Dinwoodie*)

On June 9, SAPAA directors Alison Dinwoodie, Jim Pratt, Hubert Taube and John Woitenko met with **June Markwart, Doug Marvin, Doug Bowes and Heather Lazurek** of Parks/Protected Areas (P/PA). Doug Marvin was introduced as the new Head of Stewardship Services. June, as Director of the Visitor Services Branch, gave us an overview of the personnel in P/PA, to clarify positions. Coral Grove, our Volunteer Steward Coordinator, will be working with Doug Marvin. Doug Bowes is a Policy and Land Use Planner, under Brian Kelly of the Policy and Program Development Division, and focuses on land use concerns. Heather, a Systems Planner under Archie Landals of the Heritage Protection and Recreation Management Division, addresses management issues.

Development in Natural Areas

Doug Bowes provided an update on the current status of Natural Areas, hinting that there may be new ones to come. Natural Areas established before the Special Places program, such as Rumsey, are not well defined and are administered under different agencies, which makes them more difficult to control. With regard to oil/gas or coal-bed methane, in certain Natural Areas Community Development can impose restrictions to encourage development

to take place off-site, but it has no such freedom with dispositions. However, with dispositions companies have 5 years to take action or the land reverts to the status of no-surface access. The government also restricts the density of wells per unit area, which can make development less attractive in some instances. Community Development (CD) feels that it has more control over development within Protected Areas than outside of these areas. (See also Doug's article in the *Partners in Preservation* newsletter, summer 2006).

WAERNAHR Act

The provincial *Act* entitled *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands* (WAERNAHR) was amended this year to allow regulations to be brought into effect. Amendments included changes regarding OHVs, and fines for offences have been increased. These changes will allow management of recreational activities and industrial dispositions in Natural Areas under the WAERNAHR Act, rather than under the *Public Lands Act*, in the future. For Provincial Recreation Areas where OHV use is permitted check out http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/planning/gateway/searchactivities.asp.

MOU with Sustainable Resource Development Division

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed this year with the Sustainable Resource Development Division (SRD) so that Community Development (CD) will manage sites, with support from SRD. Some overlapping mandates, such as that of the Fish & Wildlife Division, still remain. Natural Areas will still have their current managers to determine site-by-site management. Access Management Plans will also be determined by SRD along with CD. There are some current amendments to the *Public Lands Act*, but in the long term CD will issue the dispositions.

Management Plans

Heather Lazurek described the current state of management plans. This is discouraging. Only 3 planners have been hired since 1970, for a total of 6, although the number of sites has expanded to 521, making 75 sites per planner. Only 1 in 10 sites actually has a management plan, and most of these are outdated. As the planners allocate only 2-3% of their time to such plans, these naturally have low priority. The highest priority and new budget money is given to the development of park infrastructure. Most decisions are made ad hoc or site-by-site, with a view to rationalization rather than preservation. The government does not think it

feasible for stewards to assist in formulating management plans.

Safety and Publicity

The increasing concern about public safety and liability was also discussed, along with the promotion of Alberta parks. The government had a form soliciting feedback on such things as the use of cell phones and notification of comings and goings. We were given a look at a draft brochure produced for the purpose of marketing parks, and we expressed concern that the emphasis was almost entirely on activities (though with no mention of OHVs). There was no mention of low-impact use or conservation.

Other Information

Discussions continued over lunch, which was generously hosted by Doug Marvin. We covered a lot of ground. Subjects included how stewards are appointed or evaluated, how communications can be maintained (primarily with Coral Grove as the contact person), and new projects such as the Albert Native Plant Council's Rare Plant Survey.

All in all, we believe that these annual, face-to-face meetings with Parks personnel provide a useful forum at which we can represent stewards' concerns and hopefully get some answers.

SAPAA Officers, 2005-2006

President – **Peter Kershaw**

V-P – **Hubert Taube**

Treasurer/Membership Sec. – **Marilyn Shannon**

Recording Secretary – **Alison Dinwoodie**

Directors: **Jim Pratt, John Woitenko, Tony Blake**

Newsletter – **Patsy Cotterill, Linda Kershaw**

For more information on SAPAA, please contact Marilyn at 780-438-8071 or mshannon@oanet.com and Alison at 780-437-7183 or adinwoodie@shaw.ca. By the way, SAPAA would welcome an additional board member, and is always looking to groom successors to the executive.

Membership renewals

The membership year runs from one fall AGM to the next. Membership renewal is available at the AGM or by completion of the form enclosed with this newsletter. Note that the sum total for membership is reduced this year, from \$17.50 to \$15.00, reflecting a reduction in insurance costs from \$7.50 to \$5.00 per member.

A big thank-you to Glen Semenchuk of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) for negotiating this reduction on behalf of NGOs.

SAPAA ListServe

Earlier this year, Rod Olstad set up a ListServe through yahoo.com to enable members to keep in touch with each other over issues of interest. You can view our Group home page at <http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/sapaa>.

To join the ListServe, complete the appropriate box on the membership form. The Group email address is sapaa@yahoo.com. When you receive messages from the ListServ and wish to

reply, just send an email back via the ListServ. Note that when you send a message, it is automatically read by all members of the group. If you wish to respond privately, you must cut and paste the individual's private email address into your email message. If you decide you no longer want to be part of the ListServe, simply click on 'Unsubscribe', at the bottom of the Listserve messages.

Bouquets

Congratulations are extended to the following:

Glen Semenchuk. Glen was honoured with the **Alberta Centennial Award** in January 2006 for "his many years of dedicated work on behalf of natural history in Alberta." (See pages 13 & 14 of *Nature Alberta*, Volume 36 (1) Spring 2006).

Wagner Natural Area Expansion. Congratulations are due to all the partners involved in extending the Wagner Natural Area by an additional 80 acres. The addition is now owned by the **Nature Conservancy of Canada**, but it will be cared for by the Wagner Natural Area Society under a stewardship agreement. Purchase was made possible by a generous donation from the estate of the **Chevalier family** and by individual donations and grants. Several members of the **Wagner Natural Area Society** and **FAN** staff worked hard to bring this "extension property" under protection.

Red Deer River Naturalists. This year the **RDRN** not only celebrated their 100th anniversary, but also organized and hosted an excellent Canadian Nature Federation Conference in Red Deer, July 6-9. One of the highlights of the conference was their outstanding skit at the banquet! Several keen stewards belong to this energetic group.

Dennis Baresco. A long-time member of the Grasslands Naturalists and FAN, Dennis was co-winner this year of FAN's prestigious Loran L. Goulden Award, presented at the Canadian Nature Federation Conference banquet.

STOP THE PRESS! NEW LONG TERM STRATEGIC PLAN FOR P/PA!

Scott Jones, a manager in the Planning Section of Parks and Protected Areas (P/PA), gave the plenary session at the P/PA Volunteer Conference on Saturday, September 16 at Lac la Biche. Scott presented a preliminary draft of the new Strategic Plan which will set P/PA goals for the next 20 years. This important new direction requires much thought and input, and we hope to meet with him and other staff in the near future to discuss it further.

More details at the AGM! Come and find out more!

Botany Sheet # 2. Graminoids Continued: The Sedge Family (Cyperaceae)

By Patsy Cotterill and Linda Kershaw

Readers of Sheet # 1 on graminoids (grasses, sedges and rushes) will recall that members of the sedge family (Cyperaceae) have grass-like leaves (when they have them at all) that are usually arranged in three ranks (vertical rows) along the pithy, often three-sided, stems. They also have small flowers that do not closely resemble those of either grasses or rushes.

The common name 'sedge' usually refers to plants in the family's largest genus, *Carex*. Each sedge flower sits in the axil (inner angle) of a small bract, and flowers and bracts are compacted together in a loose or tight spiral to form a round or linear spike. In the genus *Carex*, the flowers are of one sex only. The male flowers have three stamens with well-developed pollen-producing anthers. The basic unit of the female flower is a unique structure called the perigynium, a membranous sac that encloses the ovary and style. The stigmas (two or three depending on the species) protrude through a hole at the top of the perigynium. The perigynia (plural of perigynium) can be from 2 to about 10 mm long, but the actual size range is narrow and very specific for each species. Most perigynia are ovoid or ellipsoid in form, and in many species, the perigynium is drawn out into a slender, sometimes forked, beak.

The ovary develops into a single-seeded fruit, an achene. Species with two stigmas develop lens- or lentil-shaped achenes, and those with three stigmas have three-sided achenes. Mature achenes usually distend the walls of the perigynia, imparting a characteristic shape.

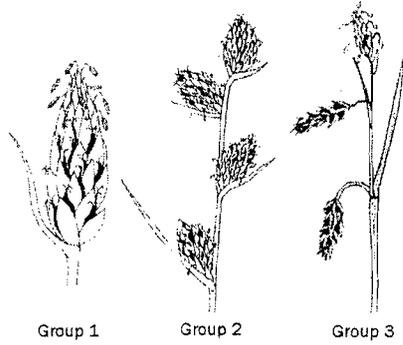
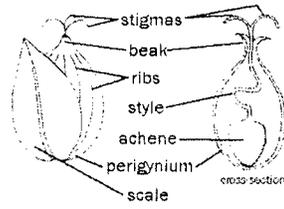
Sedges tend to fall into three groups: (1) those with a single spike; (2) those with multiple, similar spikes (each with both male and female flowers); and (3) those with male spikes at the tip of the cluster and female spikes below. In Group 2, the spikes usually fit more or less closely against the stem, the male flowers are located either at the top or bottom of each spike, and the flowers usually have two stigmas. Sedges in Group 3 have one or more slender male spikes above somewhat broader female spikes, the spikes are typically stalked, and the flowers can have two or (more commonly) three stigmas depending on the species. An example of Group 1 is bristle-stalked sedge, *Carex leptalea*, of Group 2 meadow sedge, *Carex praticola*. In Group 3, water sedge, *Carex aquatilis*, has 2 stigmas and small bottle sedge, *C. utriculata*, has three stigmas.

Sedges are often overlooked because keying them out can be difficult, due to the large number of rather similar species involved and the minuteness of the parts that must be observed when using a key. However, many sedges, once recognized, are readily distinguishable by eye. Knowing their habitat is a help to their identification: like many organisms sedges tend to be consistent in their habitat preferences. Thus, if you are in a deciduous or mixed coniferous-deciduous forest in lowland central or northern Alberta in June you are likely to see the common Peck's sedge (*C. peckii*), Dewey's sedge (*C. deweyana*), and the less common Sprengel's sedge (*C. sprengelii*), which is very beautiful with its large bright green leaves and drooping spikes. Ross's sedge (*C. rossii*), a compact little plant with tiny spikes hidden amongst its leaves, is ubiquitous along trails and on dry banks. Hay sedge (*C. siccata*) forms characteristic long lines as its rhizomes spread through the dry soils of dunes, fields, or slopes. In very dry prairie soils or rocky outcrops, especially towards the south of Alberta, the unmistakable, very densely clumped thread-leaved sedge (*C. filifolia*) occurs, its numerous fine leaves the reason for its Latin and common names. Water sedge, *Carex aquatilis*, is particularly easy to spot in spring as its pale, bluish-green leaves begin to sprout around lakeshores or in ditches. Sedge meadows are predominantly vegetated with awned sedge (*C. atherodes*) which has broad, dark-green leaves with noticeably hairy sheaths, and with the lighter green small bottle sedge (*C. utriculata*), two abundant species that everyone should know. Peatlands, especially calcium-rich fens such as at Wagner and Kilini Creek Natural Areas, and many places in the mountains, are home to a great diversity of sedges. Many of these are illustrated in the excellent handbook *Plants of the Western Boreal Forest and Aspen Parkland*, and it is worth taking the time to get to know some of them.

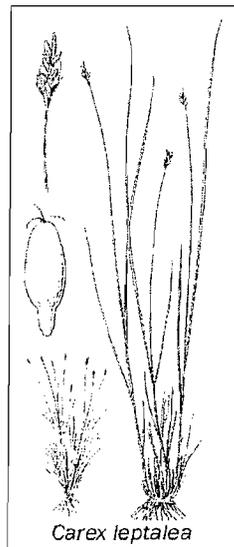
For more on the sedge family, see the spring newsletter, 2007!

Please see overleaf for illustrations.

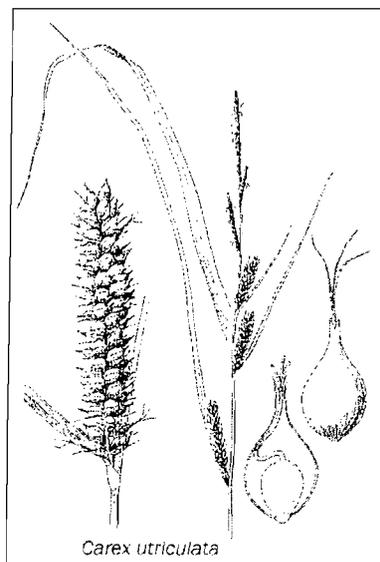
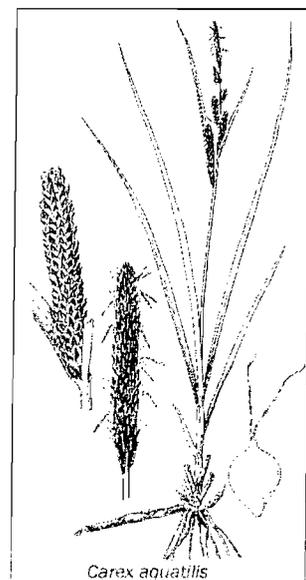
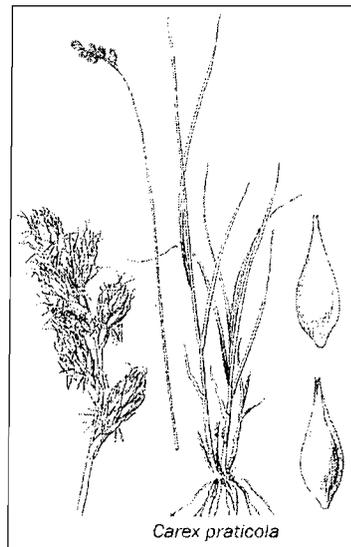
Structure of sedge
fruits (3-stigmatic and
2-stigmatic)



Group 1
(single spike)



Group 2
(several
spikes, all
alike)



Group 3 (several spikes, unlike; 2-stigmatic, left; 3-stigmatic)