

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 19, MAY 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

2008 Annual General Meeting, Saturday, October 18th

Please join us for this year's AGM, which will take place in Edmonton.

Doug Marvin, head of Stewardship Services with Alberta Parks, will be one of our speakers and his theme will be stewardship. Our other speaker, and the location of the meeting, have yet to be determined.

A trip to Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area with Steward Hubert Taube will take place in June (exact date to be determined) to find a location for some of the native plants that are to be transplanted from Astotin Natural Area. If you are interested in taking part in this trip/transplant please contact Patsy Cotterill (481-1525; nutmeg@planet.eon.net) for further information.

SAPAA AGM 2007

Report by *Peter Kershaw*

The 2007 AGM was held at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre in Red Deer on 20 October. We had a typical turnout of 17. Bill Werry, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Parks, Conservation, Recreation and Sport gave his presentation titled "A Fresh Look at Parks and Protected Areas and the Stewards". Bill put recent developments in funding and staffing within the context of the history of Parks and Protected areas. He reviewed the current state of the parks and protected areas network – the staff, land base, infrastructure and use. His presentation prompted a discussion on competing uses of Natural Areas including off-highway vehicles and industrial developments such as hydrocarbon-related leases. There was a frank discussion of the decision to trade existing natural areas (Astotin and Northwest of Bruderheim) within the Alberta Heartland zone east of Edmonton for land elsewhere in the region. Attendees were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss issues relevant to Natural Areas with the ADM directly.

Bill's presentation was followed by the AGM which included election of the Board of Directors (**President – Peter Kershaw, Vice-President – Hubert Taube, Treasurer/Membership Secretary – Marilyn Shannon, Recording Secretary – Alison Dinwoodie, Directors – John Woitenko, Rod Olstad, Tony Blake, Newsletter Editors – Patsy Cotterill and Linda Kershaw**). A working definition for 'non-intrusive activities' was adopted. This pertains to the organization's objectives which include "To promote the use of Protected Areas for non-intrusive educational, research and recreational activities". It is now understood that *non-intrusive* means "activities that can be sustained while conserving the biological integrity of the area and without impinging on the enjoyment of other minimal impact users."

After the AGM Rebecca Reeves, ParksWatch Program Coordinator, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Northern Alberta Chapter, gave the group a presentation titled "Working Together to Improve the State of Alberta's Parks". Many of the facts that she presented had been compiled for the first time and they showed how the disparity between the land base and provincial funding of parks and protected areas has been increasing since the early 1990s. She suggested that recent budget increases were a move in the right direction but that the system is still suffering from resource shortages. She suggested that one of the critical problems is the low number of field staff and stewards in the audience agreed that this was a serious issue affecting the future integrity of Alberta's parks and protected areas network.

The final activity of the day was a walk around the well-maintained trails at the Centre. Many of us reflected on the foresight and dedication of the founders of the Kerry Wood Nature Centre and the importance of volunteers in the establishment and maintenance of such areas. We are all concerned that there is a need to encourage more Albertans to become active so that areas such as Kerry Wood are there for future generations.



Boardwalk along the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area

Photo by J. Derek Johnson

Wagner Natural Area Society will be celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the construction of its Marl Pond Trail this year. For more information on the history of the trail see the next issue of Alberta Parks' *The Steward*.

PLANS FOR PARKS AND / OR RECREATION?

by *Alison Dinwoodie*

Two years ago, at the Stewards Conference, we heard about a new Plan for Parks, so where is it now? As I mentioned in our last Newsletter (Sept 2007), Premier Stelmach's mandate to Parks to "accommodate population growth and improve quality of life opportunities" is driving the new Plan. It is supposed to be released sometime this summer for feedback from stakeholders and others, so watch for more opportunities for comment. There will probably be more emphasis on providing recreation facilities so we will have to make sure the emphasis is on low-impact, sustainable activities that provide optimum enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world, not just for Parks to become a playground for people.

Already there are a number of 'interest groups' who are pushing for more access. The Off Highway Vehicles Association (OHVA), and its numerous brethren, are making sure their voices are heard at any Parks stakeholder meetings. For example, at the recent Rock Lake open house in Edmonton, at least 6 motorized groups were represented, as well as several outfitters and others, but only one conservation group, and a SAPAA member. One may wonder why so many motorized users were there, when a Provincial and a Wildland Park were being discussed, neither of which are supposed to allow OHVs. In fact in this case, there is little change in the activities permitted, although the Recreation Area is now more properly designated as a Provincial Park, for safety reasons and to allow better control of activities. See the article by Marilyn Shannon in this newsletter for more information, particularly the deadline of May 30 for comments.

I have been at a number of 'stakeholder' meetings in the last year or so and am increasingly concerned with the heavy lobbying by the motorized recreation groups. This includes other groups with innocuous sounding names, e.g. Alberta Outdoor Coalition (AOC), which is co-chaired by the OHVA and Fish and Game Association (also heavily in favour of motorized access, ostensibly for hunting). And Trailnet (an off-shoot of the Trans-Canada Trail), while not directly part of Parks, has also been high-jacked by the motorized users; non-motorized users have been essentially shut out of the planning process.

Two other groups are presently being formed to provide more balance: an Alberta Environment Network (AEN) Parks Caucus, and a Hike Alberta Association. The latter is hoping to represent ordinary hikers at a provincial and regional level, as their voices are never heard at these stakeholder meetings. If anyone knows of any hiking groups, large or small, local or regional, please let me know (adinwoodie@shaw.ca), as we are trying to extend the membership of HAA.

Another source of pressure on Parks is the demand for larger and more developed campsites for the increasing number of huge RV campers and motor homes. Parks would have to divert a significant amount of its scarce funds to meet all these demands, to support these high-impact and non-sustainable vehicles. The private sector should be encouraged to develop facilities outside Parks and charge accordingly for these expensive monsters!

These are a few of the challenges confronting Parks, and if we want to ensure its conservation mandate is not submerged, we have to make sure our voices are heard and support Parks as much as possible. Watch for any opportunity to provide input, but you don't have to wait, **letters to your MLA, the Minister and Premier are good at any time!**

ROCK LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK – INPUT REQUIRED!

by *Marilyn and Ken Shannon*

Prior to November 2006, the small Rock Lake Provincial Recreation Area existed within the larger Rock Lake – Soloman Creek Wildland Park. The provincial recreation area was then re-designated as Rock Lake Provincial Park using land from the Wildland Park.

The boundary was changed to improve public safety by eliminating the use of firearms in and around campgrounds, roads, lodges, and trails. It was also expanded to allow for potential future recreational development (if needed to meet Albertans' demands) that is more appropriate within a provincial park than a wildland park. Also, as a provincial park, this area will receive more funding.

Consultation is now being done, even though the area was increased last year, because the government received complaints from several parties (mostly hunters). These parties felt proper consultation was not done before the boundaries were changed nor was the public informed the park boundaries were going to be increased. Some discovered the change when they went to the area to hunt and saw the posted signs. At the open house, everyone was encouraged to provide written feedback and to suggest a re-drawing of the boundary – either **increasing** or decreasing the area. We attended the open house and recommended the boundaries be extended to Switzer Park to create a wild life corridor.

A decision will be made later this year as to whether or not the boundaries will remain the same or be reduced to the original size. **It is imperative that interested parties voice their opinion before May 30, 2008.** The survey can be downloaded from the website at www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/rocklake.

INTERVIEW WITH DOUG MARVIN ON THE PROPOSED STEWARDSHIP PLAN

by *Patsy Cotterill*

“We’re all in this together: caring for our land”

Doug Marvin

Lovers of adventure sports and nature-lovers imbued with a conservation ethic may not be poles apart if Doug Marvin has his way. Doug, Head of Stewardship Services with the Parks Division of the provincial government's Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, sees a greater diversity of Albertans, and more of them, being brought together under the umbrella of stewardship, which he defines as people caring for the land.

Author of what he dubs the new Steward Program Plan Initiative, at the moment doing the rounds of the various departmental managers, Doug seeks to engage Parks staff and the public in a community and “culture of knowledge, caring and action toward a sustainable future.” As both a goal and an outcome this is heart-warming for those of us who feel we are engaged in constant conflict to protect and sustain the landscape we value so highly.

In 2006 Doug began a re-evaluation of the existing volunteer steward (now some 20 years' old) and campground host programs, with the assistance of Brad Marshall, Volunteer Services Coordinator, and Coral Grove, Volunteer Steward Coordinator. This was in response to perceptions of change: for example, a rapidly growing population in Alberta, modern developments in volunteer management, and a demographic in which the younger generation in particular is increasingly experiencing “nature deficit disorder.”

Doug sees parks and protected areas as being the natural vehicle for stewardship and connecting people to the natural world. He also believes the new initiative should start with Parks staff, with the ethic of stewardship coming to underpin all their work. For the public at large, Doug envisages stewardship will take many and varied forms. Volunteers will be better trained, and there will be opportunities for “teaching and learning.” For example, mountain bikers and OHV users will learn to build and maintain trails, exercising responsibility and getting

closer to nature in the process. Special effort will be made to engage young people in stewardship activities, in recognition of the urgent need in an aging population for “succession planning.”

Doug intends to bring more organization into the program, making the best use of budgetary resources and at the same time creating a better-informed, safer cadre of volunteers. They will be au fait with such things as the Canadian Code of Volunteer Involvement, insurance and health and safety issues. Volunteers will provide input into management plans, which will be science-based and guided by monitoring and research. In this way, volunteers will find their roles more meaningful. For volunteers who would prefer intense short-term projects rather than long-term commitments, a network will be established to match them to appropriate projects.

A major consideration for stewards of natural areas has always been the fate and future of their particular natural areas, which they naturally wish to see protected and managed in perpetuity. Doug believes the transfer of responsibility from Public Lands (in Sustainable Resource Development) to the Parks Division, which will then become the land manager, is an important first step. Parks thus acquires the right to change laws (affecting protection of a natural area, for example). The next steps will be to draft and implement new legislation.

SAPAA stewards can surely buy into this ideal of a culture of stewardship and responsibility. Indeed, I believe we cannot do otherwise. The land clearly needs stewardship, and our society cannot function without volunteers. What, then, can SAPAA do to help? How can we care for the land we steward? Can we contribute to the culture of “teaching and learning” about landscape and nature? Can we fire up young people to join us and eventually take over our stewardship roles? Can we instill our values in others?

At a recent workshop of the Alberta Native Plant Council, long-time Albertan naturalist and conservation advocate Cliff Wallis lamented the fact that the public had so little say in the fate of public land. Volunteering as protected area stewards and passing on our legacy to others is an obvious way in which we can keep the “public” in public lands!

AND FOR A MODEL OF STEWARDSHIP...



“Moose lick” wetland from “The Viewpoint”, Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary, May 2008

Those of us to whom Eric and Doris Hopkins were familiar faces for so many years miss their regular attendance at various stewards’ meetings, and of course at the Sanctuary itself, where they maintained a residence and led tours. At the same time we remember them through their legacy of protected land, in which we can witness the constant renewal of life.

In the fall of 2007 the Alberta Region of the Nature Conservancy of Canada presented their inaugural Eric and Doris Hopkins Stewardship Excellence Award to... Eric and Doris Hopkins. This honour was bestowed in recognition of their 35 years’ conservation and stewardship work on behalf of the Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary. The area to date comprises 1,651 ha of Natural Area protected by the Province of Alberta and 538 ha protected by the NCC, the latter largely due to the efforts of Eric and Doris and their original donation of land. Eric died in November 2006 aged 96, and Doris very recently moved away from the Coyote Lake area to be with her family in Edmonton. Stewardship of the Sanctuary continues, however, and it remains open to the public under the administration of the NCC. Recently the Alberta Region of the NCC also established the Eric Hopkins Memorial Fund to help realize the Hopkins’ additional dream of conserving the lands along Coyote Creek to the North Saskatchewan River.

From information in the NCC’s magazine, “The Ark”, Spring 2007.

STATISTICS FROM REGISTRATION FORMS – MAY 11, 2008

Compiled by *Marilyn Shannon*

Responses – 95

Problems with:

- Oil & Gas: 35/95 or 37%
- OHV: 53/95 or 56%
- Vandalism: 33/95 or 35%
- Overuse: 40/95 or 42%
- Grazing 17/95 or 18%

Other issues:

Snowmobiles; keeping it natural
major country residential development has been proposed 4 mi NE
Herbicide being sprayed to control weeds; coal mine
cougar & other predator precautions
trail Maintenance
maintaining area as a designated NA
snowmobiles
exotic weeds
garbage, lack of enforcement, no signs
snowmobiles coming off lake
attack on water resources- protection of surface & underground water and further encroachment
small sanctuary in midst of grazing & farming
no level of government is affording NA protection
water devel.; restoration of cultivated areas; maintaining integrity of site with surrounding
development
O & G construction (97); Conserve not preserve, industry, govt staff
Appropriate uses must be applicable to each individual NA & backed up by enforceable
regulations/legislation; hunting
coal mines; need to make sure stewards voices are heard at planning
Habitat destruction; resource development; Xs recreation; sub-div
Access, boating traffic, illegal dock, inventory needed
NA must remain in undisturbed natural state
Future of NAs??
Increased recreational use, Bow Valley development
random camping; enforcement of regulations; getting things done when contact person very
busy; must maintain as ecol rev. to protect natural features
Dog control, trail maintenance
control of vandalism
abusive hunters steal the rites of wild life; must do more than supervise - introduce nesting
facility on NA
regeneration, cut lines giving access
camping, flowers being picked; Xs. rec.
TransAlta transmission lines & right of way access
Monitoring of plants/animals/birds & identifying health of indicator species.
need more information about oil and gas

Surround land zoned for heavy industrial use - fate of NA
Sustainable development?
horses on pathways, dog dropping
hunting, seismic, gravel pit
power boating
adjacent country residential development
Must take care of this perfect habitat for many species of birds, animals and reptiles
more recreation use
Area should be expanded
Too easy of access for vehicles
Canoe camping impact, poaching
hunting
Coal Bed Methane Drilling wells, pipelines, etc
snowmobiles
developments such as the Crowsnest Highway subdivision, ski resort; lack of signs
signage; public awareness
logging; keeping cattle out
define rights of oil companies
habitat enhancement and protection, upgrading of protective status, co-existence with public
grazing
inability to reduce amount of ATV use - questioning stewards role - very discouraging
should pursue enhancement projects like prescribed burns, stocking lakes with fish etc.; need
signage for entrance to park; info from O&g when working close to park
Reclassification as rec area?
Maintaining area as a NA
Stewart for 14 yr doing cleanup and trail maintenance
must save the swamp, bush, birds, reptiles.
Too much recreation use; snowmobiles
Keep clear of development

LAND USE FRAMEWORK – STILL TIME FOR INPUT

On May 22 the Province's Land Use Framework Plan was made public and was quickly lauded as a much-needed step towards regional planning. As we all know, this is a province in which development is taking place at break-neck speed and the population is increasing equally rapidly, creating huge problems and conflicts over land and resource sharing. According to the Framework, Alberta will be divided into six regions based on major watersheds. The South and Northeast Regions have priority and their regional plans are expected to be in place by 2010, the rest by 2012.

A series of public open houses was held around the province last year. The new Parks Plan will presumably dovetail with the Framework, which will have major significance for our lives as Albertans and affects many issues of particular interest to us as stewards. For more information and to provide input (before June 20th) go to <http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca>. Also watch for announcements in the media.

Main SAPAA contacts:

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