

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 23, SEPTEMBER 2010

A Profile of Bilby Natural Area

Bilby Natural Area (PA Site 55, protected by Order-in-Council) encompasses 126 ha southeast of the town of Onoway. Its official access points are at two openings on the west side of Range Road 14, or just south of the railroad tracks on Range Road 15. It includes gently rolling upland, largely covered by deciduous or mixedwood forest on well-drained soils and moister, more organic soils in small depressions. Kilini Creek is a major feature in the northwest part of the natural area. This fast-flowing, wide, shallow stream winds through extensive sedge meadows and drains various dams, the work of generations of beavers.



Kilini Creek flows through Bilby NA

The upland forests of aspen, balsam poplar, white spruce, and scattered Alaska birch rise above typical understory shrubs, such as hazel, saskatoon, chokecherry, pin cherry and rose. Red-osier dogwood, bracted honeysuckle, willows and various gooseberries and currants grow in wetter areas. On coarser soils, common bearberry and common blueberry occur, but populations of the latter have become less common in the absence of fires. Several orchids can be found on organic soils of the hollows, including round-leaved orchid, white adder's-mouth (a rare orchid), and northern green bog orchid. Marshy areas are home to arrow-leaved coltsfoot, marsh marigold and a host of other moisture-loving plants.

The common woodland bird species are present, including healthy populations of red-

winged blackbirds, crows and ravens. Bald eagles occasionally fly overhead on their way to nearby Devil's Lake. Bilby NA also provides good habitat for common mammals, including deer, moose and beaver.

Hiking trails in the NA follow two pipelines, one running northeast-southwest and one aligned parallel to Range Road 14, plus an old east-west road allowance. Signs were installed in 1983, before the Volunteer Steward Program began. The first Stewards (1987-1990) were the Allers family from Onoway, followed by Mary Bosiak (1990-1993). In October 1993, the current Steward, Mrs. Gertie Meyer, a member of a local farming family, took over. She received the Outstanding Individual Steward Award in 2009 for her commitment to stewardship in Bilby NA.



Alison Dinwoodie (left) and Gertie Meyer

A fire in the northeast portion in 1983 resulted in a lot of deadfall. The burned trees had been in poor condition after being infested with forest tent caterpillars for several years. New growth is now evident and is doing well.

Bilby NA has had problems with ATVers, who leave trails and cause ruts in wet weather. Weeds are another problem. Gertie has targeted scentless chamomile, which invaded the mud around Kilini Creek during dry years, but perennial weeds tansy, orange hawkweed (a recent arrival) and hoary plantain (*Plantago media*, an unusual introduction related to common plantain) also pose threats.

Bilby Natural Area has education as its main raison d'être. Gertie invites the public to visit the Natural Area to bird-watch, hike, pick berries, ride horses, cross-country ski and watch wildlife, while showing respect for Bilby's natural values. If you're planning a visit, you can also check out nearby Imrie Park (south of Highway 37 on Range Road 15). The park offers public picnic facilities as well as trail access through a fen to the west shore of Devil's Lake. Here a blind provides an excellent opportunity to watch water birds.

Your turn! Do you have some interesting information and/or photos to share about your special protected area? If so, we'd love to hear from you. Please send text and photos to Patsy Cotterill (nutmeg@planet.eon.net) or mail your info to SAPAA c/o Linda Kershaw, 51163 Rge Rd 204, Sherwood Park, AB T8G 1E5.

Gertie Meyer

New Parks Legislation & the Recent Stewards Conference

New Legislation Background

Most of you have heard about the proposed changes in Parks' legislation. We were informed about some of the details in a questionnaire earlier this year. This follows Alberta's Plan for Parks, which caused consternation last year because it didn't mention conservation as a goal for parks, only recreation and tourism. After considerable public outcry, a nod was given to the principle of conservation by including the word "protect" in the vision statement. This now reads *"Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations."*



Beautiful lakes & great bird watching at Switzer P.P.

The new legislation basically combines the two existing Parks Acts, the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangeland Act* (the act controlling Alberta's Protected Areas) and the *Provincial Parks Act* into one *Parks Act*. Heritage Rangelands will be moved to a separate Act and Willmore Wilderness will keep its own Act. The remaining 3 types of parks (Wildland Parks, Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas) and 3 types of protected areas (Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas) will all be lumped into "**Provincial Parks.**" The alleged reason for this is to simplify the parks system so that the public knows what to expect.

Parks will be zoned as 1 or more of 3 Zones: Zone A (Recreation), Zone C (Conservation) and Zone B (Mixed Use, everything in between). Note that Recreation comes first. Unfortunately, nobody seems to know how this system will work in practice, so how it will clarify things is currently as clear as mud! People have been given limited information and asked to fill in questionnaires, so statistics from public consultation may be of dubious value.



Ancient ice-wedge polygons in Plateau Mtn ER.

Parks Act Update at the Conference

When we asked for more details of the legislation at the recent Stewards Conference in Sherwood Park (12 Sept 2010), Parks staff admitted they knew no more than we did. The lack of public discussion and staff input doesn't inspire confidence that the new legislation will provide the necessary protection for our parks. Protected Areas are no longer recognized as a distinct and important group; they are just one of many Provincial Parks, mostly classed as Mixed Use or Zone B. This could permit any or all of the following activities: hiking only, horse riding, hunting, OHV access, biking, etc. With

luck, the few Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves could be Zone C (Conservation).

We are told there will be no downgrading of protection, but the name changes convey very different expectations, and the Zones can be changed at any time by Ministerial order.

SAPAA reps Pete Kershaw and Alison Dinwoodie spoke briefly to Deputy Minister Bill Werry after the banquet on Saturday evening. He said it is important to get the *Parks Act* through this fall, because the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) has to be able to coordinate it with regional Land Use Framework (LUF) plans. Asked if the law would define the intent of parks, he said conservation will be a primary objective. We can only hope!

Negotiations and Regulations

Detailed regulations are not part of this new legislation, but will be debated sometime during the next year. A Memorandum of Understanding must be negotiated first, between TRP and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) to determine who has jurisdiction over which lands.

Once jurisdiction has been finalized, TPR will have more authority to enforce regulations on the land it controls. As Stewards at the conference pointed out, there is no point having regulations if you can't enforce them, and a lot more funding will be required to do this.



Quad-initiated fire in Beaverhill NA

Other Comments

At the Stewards' Chat session on Sunday, Stewards' expressed concern about the lack of information on and participation in parks and protected areas plans. This is not entirely the fault of parks staff, as communication within

and between departments appears to be limited. Dr. Guy Swinnerton also had some interesting comments. Swinnerton is an international expert on parks, and has been a respected member of various national and international committees dealing with biodiversity and conservation. He said that the proposed Plan for Parks is a major regression, setting Alberta back over 60 years in terms of conservation progress. The Plan does not conform to any of the international standards for maintaining world inventories or protecting biodiversity, and it confirms Alberta's lack of commitment to meaningful conservation initiatives.

Stewards' Concerns

At the beginning of the chat session, Coral suggested having dedicated workshops for Stewards, because there is insufficient time at these larger conferences to discuss their issues. It was agreed that these could be useful, given sufficient notice. The part played by Stewards was also discussed. People questioned whether Stewards are still relevant, as we are often left out of the loop. Many Stewards have extensive knowledge of their area and valuable expertise that could be used in management plans, outreach programs for locals or students and in mentoring new Stewards, but they need support from Parks.



Writing-on-Stone PP, one of many sensitive AB gems

Land Use Framework (LUF) Session

Rebecca Reeves, a LUF planner for TPR, started with the 3 objectives: 1) healthy ecosystems and environment, 2) people-friendly communities with recreational and cultural opportunities and 3) a healthy economy supported by our people and natural resources. Although "healthy environment" is now shown

first in fact sheets, she mentioned that they all have equal importance, so there will probably be the usual trade-offs. Will environment be shifted to the bottom of the list? Rebecca also mentioned that the new Alberta Land Stewardship Act has the potential to over-rule municipal plans, if they are not in the best overall (provincial) interests.

One encouraging aspect is that as the new Parks Plan is being aligned with the LUF, TPR is expected to take a much greater lead in the LUF deliberations. Gaps in the Parks system will be addressed, more cumulative effects will be taken into account, and more information on recreation features and Environmentally Sensitive Areas will be made available. An attempt is also being made to put a value on scenic and conservation lands. Management of recreation on public lands also has to be implemented. A survey was recently distributed by SRD on proposed Regulations under the Public Lands Act.



**Captivated audience at Strathcona Wilderness Centre
Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI)**

On Saturday, Conference participants were bussed to 3 major conservation areas in the area covered by the BHI: Strathcona Wilderness Centre, Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreational Area and Elk Island National Park. If you thought you knew these local areas, think again! The guided field trips were so informative they warrant their own article in the next newsletter, along with an explanation of what the Beaver Hills Initiative is all about.

The information provided at these visits indicated what can be done in a region with a diverse land base and a number of groups cooperating at different levels. When one or two leaders get everyone onside and involved, particularly the local officials and other

interested agencies, great things happen! The Beaver Hills Initiative is also a model of how the LUF could work.

Alison Dinwoodie

The Future Of Alberta's PAs?

At this point, no one can say what the future holds for many of our current protected areas under the new Parks Act. Who decides how each Natural Area, Wilderness Area, Ecological Reserve, etc. fits into the new Parks system? Although the reorganization is supposed to simplify land classification, there are many worrying, unanswered questions, and a lot of land is at stake. The classification and control of over 300,000 ha of land, designated under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*, has yet to be determined. Decisions will define who controls these areas, and how each site will be classified and managed in the future.

What criteria will be used to define and delineate the new Park Zones? If an area was originally designated as a Conservation Subtype, will it automatically be zoned for Conservation? Will all Recreation Subtypes now be zoned for Recreation? What about Education sites or sites that haven't been given a Subtype designation? Once Zones have been assigned, which lands will be controlled by TPR and which by SRD?



Pelicans feeding in the bay at Hastings Lake NA (PNT)

Of special concern for many Stewards is the future of our unprotected Natural Areas. Five Natural Areas (total 2,310 ha) have Consultative Notation (CNT) and 104 sites (total 41,976 ha) have Protective Notation (PNT). This means that 109 sites still are not protected by Order-In-Council. What will become of them? Few are publicized and most lack Stewards, so they are easily overlooked in the greater scheme of things. Stewards of PNTs might want to inquire into the proposed reclassification of their sites.

Linda Kershaw

Clyde Fen Faces New Challenges

Clyde Fen Natural Area is a Protective Notation site (PNT, not yet designated under Order-in-Council) that has the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) as its official Steward. This year, the fen was seriously impacted by development, and no government authority knew anything about it until Derek Johnson, representing the ANPC, alerted them.

Clyde Fen NA is classified as a conservation natural area. It occupies about 120 hectares in Sections 15, 16 and 27 of Twp 60, R 24, W4M, northeast of Clyde in Westlock County. Part of the NA contains black spruce-tamarack-bog birch fen with populations of pitcher plants and other herbaceous fen species. There are also smaller areas of jack pine forest on sandy soils; these stands are regenerating thickly after a devastating fire in 2001.



Carnivorous pitcher plants in Clyde Fen

In late June, Derek discovered that a gravel road had been constructed on a road allowance (formerly a drainage area with fen vegetation) adjacent to the fen. Culverts were not installed, and this resulted in flooding of the fen. Derek sent pictures to Alberta Parks, who contacted Westlock County and asked that a culvert be installed promptly, with which the County complied. The County had granted a permit to a contractor to build the road to haul gravel from nearby land, apparently without knowledge of the existence of the fen and the possible impacts.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) is responsible for the Natural Area under the Public Lands Act, but was not familiar

with Clyde Fen, and staff stated that they couldn't do anything, unless the road allowance encroached on the Crown land. The road development had, in fact, caused erosion and silting in adjacent parts of the fen. (As a PNT site, Clyde Fen is a Natural Area in name only; it is Crown Land without legislated protection, so it is not under the jurisdiction of Alberta Parks.)

Fortunately, the culvert installed in July appears to have drawn down the water levels in the fen to more or less normal by late summer. However, to the Steward's knowledge, neither ASRD nor Parks has shown any interest in monitoring the NA to determine whether there have been permanent or seasonal effects. Westlock County plans to have a biologist look at the site next year, but hiring a professional hydrogeologist to advise on drainage issues seems to be too much of a budget challenge.



Surprise! A new road!

There are lessons to be learned here for Stewards. First, if you're a Steward of a PNT site, don't expect much help from the provincial government in protecting your site. The Public Lands Act and the Municipal Government Act just don't allow for it, and as someone pointed out in the course of this sad story, authorities tend to do the minimum required by legislation. Second, endeavor to strike up and maintain a friendly liaison with the municipality for your site. This will allow you to promote your natural area both to the municipality and to local residents, and to be more informed of impending developments in sufficient time for you to have some influence.

Something to bear in mind is that Parks has indicated that the new conservation legislation

will give them greater powers to manage natural areas. As Stewards we need to put this to the test. Of course, this begs two further questions: what natural areas will remain after LUF negotiations, and if natural areas are retained, will they have sufficient conservation status to protect them?

Patsy Cotterill

Visit to NW of Bruderheim NA

One of our summer field trips this year was to Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area on August 7th. The trip was led by site Steward, Hubert Taube. The site was recently burned, and it was interesting to see how much regeneration had taken place.



Hubert Taube, steward of Northwest of Bruderheim NA since 1989

This picture shows Hubert standing amidst a lush ground cover of hairy wild rye grass, with burned jack pine trunks in the background.

Steward Service Awards

Several dedicated Stewards received awards at this year's Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference in Sherwood Park. The presentations were made by Deputy Minister Bill Werry and his wife Joyce at the banquet on September 11th.

The Outstanding Individual Steward Award went to Robert Faulds of Edmonton for his work at Isle Lake Natural Area over the past 20 years. Isle Lake NA is located north of Highway 16, about 80 km west of Edmonton.

The Steward Service Excellence Award was awarded to J.J. Collett Natural Area Foundation Board, with Gail Hughes and Sylvia Glass accepting on behalf of the Board. The J.J. Collett Natural Area is located near Morningside. Watch for more information on the NA in an upcoming newsletter. In the meantime, everyone is welcome to enjoy the area and participate in nature activities. For more information on the NA or the Foundation phone Gail at 403-782-3970 or Sylvia at 403-782-6353.



Dedicated Stewards Sylvia Glass (left) and Gail Hughes accept the award

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION
GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, October 23, 2010

at 9:30 A.M.

**at the U of A Devonian Botanic Gardens,
Devon, AB (see direction overleaf)**

PROGRAM

- 9:00 a.m. Registration and coffee
- 9:30 a.m. Speaker: **Kevin Wirtanen**,
Recreation Stewardship and Partnership Coordinator in the Land Use Planning,
Recreation and Tourism Unit of Sustainable Resources Development.
Title: **Land Use Planning and Recreation Management**
Kevin will discuss how the Land Use Framework works in practice, and how this
affects management of increasing recreation pressures on public lands. This includes
working closely with Tourism, Parks and Recreation, particularly the last Division.
- 10:15 a.m. Questions and discussion
- 10:30 a.m. Coffee Break (coffee, etc. provided but bring your own mug if you can)
- 11:00 a.m. Speaker: **Martin Osis**, Edmonton Mycological Society
Title: **A Great Season for Mushrooms**
Martin will introduce us to some of the amazing mushrooms we can discover in our
Natural Areas
- 11:45 a.m. Questions and discussion
- 12:00 noon Lunch (Please bring your own lunch, as kitchen facilities are limited)
- 12.30 p.m. SAPAA Annual General Meeting (see agenda on reverse)
- 2:00 p.m. Walk in the Park –Although the Devonian isn't open to the general public at this time of
year, we will have access to the Gardens after our meeting for a short walk.



STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

Saturday, 23 October 2010, 12:30 p.m..

1. Acceptance of Minutes of previous AGM, 17 October 2009
2. Business arising from the minutes
3. Treasurer's report
4. New Parks legislation, SRD regulations on Public Lands, and other Parks concerns
5. New SAPAA web page information
6. Election of the Board

Current members are:

President – Peter Kershaw

Vice President – Hubert Taube

Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Linda Kershaw

Recording Secretary – Alison Dinwoodie

Directors – John Woitenko (FAN Representative)

Richard deSmet

Bertha Ford

Newsletter Editor – Patsy Cotterill, Linda Kershaw

Please come prepared with nominations. Members not present at the meeting may be nominated, provided their willingness to stand has been confirmed prior to the meeting.

The President and Vice-President have served 1 year of their third 2-year terms.

Other members of the Board are elected annually.

7. Other business

Directions: The Devonian Botanic Garden is located in Parkland County, 5 km north of Devon on the east side of Hwy 60, within 30 minutes west of downtown Edmonton.

As you enter the main gates of the Devonian Botanic Gardens, park in the main parking lot. Walk up the Administration Road to the right to follow round the back of the buildings, then left up the hill to the parking lot by the classrooms and trailer. We will be in the trailer on the west side.



Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

Membership Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Natural Area: _____ Organization (if any) _____

Mailing Address: _____ City or Town: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

- Would you like to have your newsletter emailed? ____ yes ____ no
- Would you be willing to have your name and phone number put on a list that would only be distributed to other SAPAA members? ____ Yes ____ No

Renewing membership ____ New member ____

Membership fee \$ 15 (Includes FAN insurance fee of \$5)

Donation (Optional)* _____

TOTAL _____

*SAPAA is not a registered Charitable Organization as yet, so receipts for income tax purposes cannot be issued.

Please return this form, with total listed above to:

Linda Kershaw, 51163 Range Road 204, Sherwood Park, AB T8G 1E5

(Make cheques payable to SAPAA)

For membership conditions, please see reverse side of this form.

Issues of importance (old or new – this info would help for future Stewards Conference discussions):

____ Oil / Gas ____ Off Highway Vehicles ____ Vandalism ____ Overuse/Abuse ____ Grazing

____ Other _____

Willing to help with: ____ Newsletter ____ Executive ____ Phoning ____ Speakers ____ Meetings ____ Field Trips

____ Other _____

If you are a new member, please provide the following details about your Stewardship Area:

Natural Area ID #: _____ Approximate size: _____

Location: _____

Brief description of significant natural features (please include a brochure if available): _____

If you require more information,

Contact Alison Dinwoodie – phone 780-437-7183; email adinwoodie@shaw.ca
or Peter & Linda Kershaw – phone 780-662-3626; email lkershaw@xplornet.com

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

Membership in SAPAA is open to anyone who

- **is a Steward who volunteers time assisting in the care and management of Alberta's Protected Areas (i.e., lands currently set aside under the Alberta Provincial Parks Act, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas & Heritage Rangeland Act, and the Willmore Wilderness Act), and**
- **is in general agreement with the following Purposes of the Association.**

Purposes of the Association

1. To establish a network of Volunteer Stewards to exchange information and expertise and to provide mutual assistance and support.
2. To promote the preservation, protection and restoration of the ecological integrity of Alberta's Protected Areas.
3. To promote the use of Alberta's Protected Areas for educational and research purposes, and for non-intrusive, nature-oriented activities compatible with each individual site.
4. To identify common issues of concern in Alberta's Protected Areas for the purpose of dealing with them more effectively and comprehensively.
5. To work with appropriate government departments and with other groups and agencies to resolve issues regarding actions and activities that affect Alberta's Protected Areas.
6. To represent members of the Association at meetings of stakeholders and in events, issues and situations that affect Alberta's Protected Areas.
7. To increase and enhance public awareness of the value of Protected Areas and of the Volunteer Stewards' role in preserving these areas.
8. To support knowledge and skill development for Stewards and supporters of the Association through conferences, workshops, seminars and publications.

Name (please print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____