



Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 24, JUNE 2011

CHECK OUT SAPAA'S NEW WEBSITE!

Many thanks to Linda Kershaw who has set up a new website for us. Please check it out at: <http://sapaastewards.com/>

We will try to keep it reasonably current so refer to it for unfolding news about the Plan for Parks, etc. Linda is away quite often, so there may be some delay in updating it, but we are trying!

SAPAA AGM 2011 – FIRST NOTICE!

SAPAA's AGM will be held on **Saturday, 22 October 2011 at the Kerry Wood Centre in Red Deer.**

We hope to have a speaker from The Nature Conservancy of Canada to tell us about some of their activities in the Red Deer region. Our second speaker will also be discussing some of the relationships, responsibilities and co-operation existing among the various Divisions in Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) and with the Land Use Framework (LUF) Regional Advisory Council (RAC) activities in the Region. Make a note in your diary! More details will follow nearer the time.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF BILL 29, THE PARKS ACT?

The short answer is we really don't know! We do know that when it was first presented

to the Legislature last November it evoked such a deluge of letters that the bill only made it as far as the second reading, before being tabled. (Thanks to everyone who wrote in to protest!) It has failed to make it to the spring session, the Department of TPR under Minister Ady wanted the opportunity to consult further with stakeholders..

However, the fact that we don't know exactly what is happening should not stop us from working towards what we feel should be in the Act. The best thing that might happen is that, if there is an election in the fall with a new Premier, it would be withdrawn. But it probably won't go away entirely so we have to keep working NOW towards what we would like to see in the Act in terms of legislated directives, accompanied by recommended regulations (which do have some legal standing). Some amendments which are possibly being considered by government are more legally defined zoning and access controls, which might include limiting mining and forestry leasing.

Likely one reason for the delay is that there has been a considerable backlash, particularly from rural landowners, against Bill 36, or the Alberta Land Stewardship Act

(ALSA). This Act, which was passed in June 2010, is the over-arching legislation controlling the development LUF. Some amendments to Bill 10 were passed in the last session.



Photo: Lorna Allen

Willmore Wilderness Area will remain governed by its own Act.

As Parks are supposed to conform to the general direction of LUF, if changes are made to the underlying laws, it makes it more difficult for Alberta Parks to proceed.

The LUF is the most recent attempt of the government to ensure that municipal, regional and provincial plans are all aligned to ensure that cumulative and environmental impacts are taken into account, thus directing a more orderly development of provincial resources. This is all very well in theory and, while there are some opportunities for public participation to the Regional Advisory Councils (RACS), ALSA at present gives Cabinet almost *carte blanche* to undermine previous RAC decisions without any further consultation. More info can be found at <http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/AlbertaLandStewardshipAct/Default.aspx> and <http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/RegionalPlans/>

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS?

Again, uncertainty reigns, but so does the opportunity to promote your protected area

and convince the authorities, if they need convincing, that it is worth preserving with its ecological integrity intact. You as individual stewards must take the action, but here are some of SAPAA's suggestions for promoting and protecting your natural area.

1. If you don't know already, find out what county your area is in, and who your councilors are, and how to contact them.
2. Check the LUF Regional Access watershed maps to see in which RAC area your NA lies. It may be more than one, particularly if you are a Steward of more than one NA.

<http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/>

3. Important! Write to your councillors, and particularly your MLA, and anyone else who might have influence in your area, saying that you have been a Steward of x NA for y number of years. Say that you are particularly concerned that your NA should be given more protection and included in any Conservancy Area under your Regional Access Plan.

4. Give a brief description of your NA, its location (with map if possible), and the natural region it falls in. Stress the significance of its ecological and educational benefits, any rare or interesting species present. (You should have this in your original stewardship documents), and any other interesting historical or aesthetic points.

5. Send this description as a separate document with your letters, so that it can be distributed as widely as possible. It is also worth recording any significant activities that have taken place there, good (e.g., school or other educational field trips) or bad (e.g., destruction by indiscriminate off-highway vehicle use.) Note that only low-impact recreational activities are supposed to be allowed in NAs, e.g., walking, bird watching, etc., because of their sensitivity.

6. Talk to as many of your friends and neighbours as possible to get their support too.

7. Finally, send a copy of your letter and NA details to your land manager. Also to: Doug Marvin, Head, Stewardship Services, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, 2nd floor, Oxbridge Place. 9820 - 106 Street, Edmonton, AB T5K 2J6. Phone: 780 644-5044 E-mail: doug.marvin@gov.ab.ca

- Archie Landals, Director, Land Management, 3rd floor, Oxbridge Place. Phone: 780 427-9470 E-mail: archie.landals@gov.ab.ca

- Kevin Wirtanen, Recreation Stewardship & Partnership Coordinator, Land Use Planning, Recreation and Tourism Unit, Sustainable Resource Development, 3rd floor, Petroleum Plaza South Tower, 9915 - 108 Street, Edmonton, AB T5K 2G8 Phone: 780 422-4843 E-mail: kevin.wirtanen@gov.ab.ca

Making this particular promotional effort is important because, as already stated, considerable uncertainty surrounds the future of NAs. Unless you can raise the profile of your NA with local authorities and others, there is a possibility you may find that with the next round of Parks or Regional planning your NA has quietly disappeared, or been swallowed up in a 'mixed use' zone, which will give it even less protection.

“What is needed in Canada today is an informed public opinion which will voice an indignant protest against any vulgarization of beauty of our national parks or any invasion of their sanctity.” J.S. Harkin (1875-1955, the first Commissioner of National Parks.

Quoted by Ed Struzik in the *Edmonton Journal*, May 14, 2011, to mark the centennial of the National Parks Service. Some lessons here for provincial parks?



Big Hill Springs Provincial Park, a small park that protects a tufa-forming calcareous spring and stream, is well-visited by Calgarians.

HOW DOES THE PARKS BILL FIT IN TO ALL THIS?

This is where the saying “eternal vigilance is the price of safety” applies. Keep abreast of recent developments by checking <http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p/> and clicking the left sidebar Consultations and Notifications. For more immediate notification, click on Subscribe to *ParkNews* (it’s free!). Keep your eyes open for any hint of Amendments to the Act and write, earlier, rather than later, to Hon. Cindy Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, 229 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, AB. T5K 2B6 Phone: 780 427-4928 and copy to Jay Nagendran, Assistant Deputy Minister Parks Division, 2nd floor, Oxbridge Place, 9820 - 106 Street, Edmonton, AB. T5K 2J6 Phone: 780 422-4407 E-mail: jay.nagendran@gov.ab.ca

The Importance of Natural Areas

By Patsy Cotterill

A new plan and legislation for parks, together with new regional planning, have created a situation of uncertainty regarding the fate, management and stewardship of Alberta's established protected areas. This applies particularly to Alberta's Natural Areas (NAs) which have the least protection of all its categories of protected area.



Interpretive sign at Riverlot 56 Natural Area (installed by stewards).

It is illuminating to refer to a report entitled “A long-range strategy for Natural Areas” written in 1986 by staff of the then Natural Areas Unit, Public Lands Division, department of Alberta Energy and Natural Resources. By the mid 1980s 96 NAs were in existence and they were clearly an important plank in the government's policy for bringing people into contact with nature. The government was looking to increase the number of NAs, and their criteria for selecting them were as they had previously been:

they should be close to population centres, or situated along rivers or lakes with amenity value for the public, or located along the Green/White Zone fringe. They would of course have conservation merit because of interesting natural features or native vegetation, but public access and participation to enjoy these natural amenities would be front and centre. And it was intended that the public should be involved in these NAs in a variety of ways: by nominating sites, as members of land trusts, by managing the sites (through dispositions or leases) and through stewardship. While stewards would complement the efforts of government staff by being their “eyes and ears”, it was envisaged that the volunteering public would in return benefit from a “leadership and educational experience, and gain a positive feeling of involvement in, and responsibility for, protecting a valuable resource.” The Volunteer Steward Program was begun in 1986 and continues to this day, having 141 stewards in various categories.

The government's vision was clearly that stewards should feel a sense of pride and ownership in their sites, and they were successful in achieving this. Too successful, perhaps! Many stewards became so possessive and protective of their NAs that they were disillusioned when the Natural Areas Division proved unable to support them in their conservation objectives against conflicting land uses. This was particularly the case where oil and gas activity took place on a Natural Area, or where soils and topography made it especially attractive to all-terrain vehicle users.

It is indicative of the uncertainty prevailing in recent times, however, that no stewards have been appointed to new protected areas for the last two to three years, although some individual stewards have been replaced on already

stewarded sites. Natural Areas now seem to have fallen below the radar; scientific work is no longer being done in them, and management plans are in abeyance. The focus has shifted in a couple of directions. Regarding public engagement, attention has focused on beefing up camping and interpretive experiences in Provincial Parks, especially the high-profile ones such as Dinosaur and Writing-on-Stone Provincial Parks. To meet its conservation objectives the government appears to be including smaller Natural Areas within larger categories of protected areas, such as NAs within Wildland Parks, and so on, based on the ecological concept that larger protected areas offer increased connectivity and overall better sustainability and conservation.

Certain trends in the fate of NAs are perhaps now discernible. Protected Notation (PNT) sites, which did not complete the nomination process to receive legislated Order-in-Council (OC) status, are particularly vulnerable as they have virtually no protection. If they involve industrial activity it is quite possible they will be done away with. The same may be true of some of the “postage stamp” NAs, that is, the small, isolated areas with little natural connectivity. Some, however, and this is applicable to OC'd NAs too, may be turned over to the jurisdiction of the municipalities in which they occur. This may be a good thing, as they may achieve a higher profile in this way. On the other hand, the municipality may have little experience in managing natural areas, and conservation objectives may take second place to recreational and tourism goals. Even so, this is likely to be a better outcome than their being sold off for agriculture or development.

Another trend is to amalgamate a number of small NAs and Provincial Recreation Areas into a much larger unit which will include human

activity and settlement, but will minimize large-scale industrial and urban development. Examples of this are the Beaver Hills Initiative (on the Cooking Lake Moraine) east of Edmonton, and the Red Deer River Natural Area extending from Buffalo Lake Provincial Park in the north, to Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park in the south, and Rumsey Ecological Reserve and Natural Area in the east. Both these models include multiple partners and jurisdictions and cover large swaths of ecologically important land. Some of the conservation areas to be established under the LUF plans may well be of this nature too.



Central aspen parkland at Rumsey Ecological Reserve.

These trends are to be welcomed. Nevertheless, as naturalists and stewards, we still believe there is a place for the smaller natural areas close to home, as originally envisaged. Nature needs to be accessible so that it can be experienced often. This is surely the best way to overcome what is being recognized as a national if not international syndrome that is eroding our collective well-being, “nature-deficit disorder.” Given this era of uncertainty and flux, as Alberta’s population swells and the jockeying for land uses continues, now is as good a time as ever to advertise your Natural Area and your pride in it. Follow Alison’s directions in this newsletter and do whatever you can to raise its profile among the public and the politicians.

SAPAA Board Members

Feel free to contact any of our board members on stewardship issues or concerns:

President: Peter Kershaw 780-662-3626 peter.kershaw@ualberta.ca

Treasurer: Linda Kershaw 780-662-3626 linda.kershaw1@gmail.com

Secretary: Alison Dinwoodie 780-437-7183 adinwoodie@shaw.ca

Website Managers: Hubert Taube 780-483-7306 taubeha@shaw.ca; Linda Kershaw

Newsletter: Patsy Cotterill 780-481-1525 nutmeg@planet.eon.net; Linda Kershaw

Director: Richard DeSmet horse@icrossroads.com

Director: Bertha Ford 403-343-8126 bfordrd@telus.net

Director: Hubert Taube

Director/Nature Alberta Rep: John Woitenko red20@telus.net

Alison writes: “These are your hard-working Board members who have kept SAPAA going, many from the early days of SAPAA. Several are looking at retiring this year and unless we can get new members and volunteers for the Board now, it is difficult to see how we can keep going and more fully represent Stewards. And this is such an important time for all our Protected Areas: a representative organization for all Stewards could play a much greater role with government in helping to keep them truly Protected.

Please spread the word round and encourage your Steward friends to come aboard - NOW! Contact the Secretary, Alison Dinwoodie (as shown above) for more information, if required.”

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 nonintrusive, 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: _____