

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 27, SEPTEMBER 2012

AB Parks Stewards Celebrate 25 Years

On Saturday, June 23rd, a special conference was held at Hastings Lake Community Hall to celebrate the 25 years of the Volunteer Stewardship Program in Alberta Parks and Protected Areas. The gathering was attended by about 30 people, including many long-time Stewards and Government personnel. In the morning, Steve Donelon (Executive Director, Parks) gave an excellent talk on the proposed new Parks Act (see the next article).

This was followed by lunch, courtesy of Alberta Parks, and in the afternoon everyone participated in break-out sessions discussing some of the challenges of working in protected areas. Coral Grove presented a photo overview of 25 years of volunteers and then handed out pins to the attendees, many of whom had been involved in the program since its inception. The day ended with a delicious banquet, and time to socialize outside on a perfect summer day.



Stewards and AB Parks personnel, past and present

What to Expect From the New Parks Act

At the June 23rd Steward's Conference, Executive Director with Parks Steve Donelon presented an interesting talk on some of the proposals for the new Parks Act. He began by briefly reviewing the current legislation dealing with protected areas: the Willmore Wilderness Act (1959), the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act (1965), to which was added Heritage Rangelands in 2009. This Act has no regulations associated with it, and is managed by Public Lands, not Parks. On the other hand, the Provincial Parks Act (1980) covers Provincial Parks, Wildland Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas (PRAs), has regulations, and is managed by Parks.

Donelon went on to outline the new Parks legislation. He said they had listened to some of SAPAA's concerns

after last year's unsuccessful attempt to revise the Act. The new Parks Act will include a stated purpose and policy, will have regulations, and will have limited ministerial discretion to change these. The Recreation Division (under Mark Storrie) will be responsible for making decisions on trails, but a separate Trails Act is also being developed. Designated Administrative Organizations (DAOs) will not be included in the new Act, although they are still around. DAOs will now be separate organizations that will provide administrative help with trail development.

Natural Areas (NAs) will have a systematic evaluation to determine their classification, to provide clarity of purpose, and to develop appropriate regulations and land management plans. Those NAs that are presently under Protective Notation (PNTs) and have not yet been designated by Order-in-Council, will also be evaluated.

Among the good news with respect to the new Act is the establishment of a planning advisory committee which will include Guy Swinnerton, who has international experience in parks, and Kevin van Tighem, a veteran federal parks director. Representative stakeholders on this committee will include Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) plus oil and gas companies and other industrial players.

The purpose of the new Parks Act will be 'to protect for future generations.' An important question was raised regarding whether the Purpose should also include the need to respect the intrinsic value of maintaining ecological integrity. The government's first goal (listed first but not necessarily the highest priority) is to protect ecosystems, habitat, biodiversity and watersheds. Other goals include connecting Albertans to nature through education and stewardship, and by providing a broad range of outdoor nature-based recreational opportunities.



An attentive audience gets answers to questions about stewardship concerns

Most importantly, Parks and Protected Areas should ultimately be disposition-free, so their care or possession cannot be transferred elsewhere. This would have the added benefit of allowing Alberta's Protected Areas to conform eventually with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) benchmarks. Alberta currently has low IUCN scores because of its mixture of recreational uses and regulations on sites. For example, Plateau Mountain is a candidate ecological reserve (ER), but it has one oil well, so it does not meet the criteria for an IUCN Class I site. For more information on IUCN categories see

www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/pa/pa_products/wcpa_categories.

Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Areas might be equivalent to IUCN Category I, with controlled foot access only and no dispositions. Heritage Rangelands might be classified as IUCN IV, but Provincial Parks might fall into IUCN IB, II, or III Classes, depending on their present mixture of nature conservation, outdoor recreation, and management to maintain ecological integrity. PRAs have recreation and support facilities as their primary purpose, so they may not fall into an IUCN category.

Within various Parks, land could be further subdivided into two or more of four possible zones: Wilderness, Natural, Facilities and Special (a zone for unique characteristics). An example with which I am familiar is Whitehorse Wildland Park. At present this park has four zones, a Preservation Zone (at Cadomin Cave), a Wildland Zone (the majority of the Park, no motorized access), a Natural Environment Zone (limited facilities to protect the environment and one designated off-highway vehicle trail), and an Access Zone (public road and parking facilities). The adjacent Whitehorse Creek PRA, on the other hand, is primarily a staging area with camping and horse corral facilities, and so much of that area would be zoned for Access. No one designation or size fits all, and Natural Areas will probably be the most difficult Protected Areas to define.

Donelon concluded his talk with a reference to current progress with the Land Use Framework. The next Regional Plans to be developed are the North Saskatchewan, Upper Athabasca and Red Deer. Stewards and other citizens have to keep an eye on these, because they include many Parks and Protected Areas. In some cases, concentrations of protected areas could provide a case for larger Protected Areas. We still have

to wait to see the details of the Parks Act, and stewards must be prepared to provide input, based on their extensive local experience in caring for some of Alberta's most critical areas.

If you are interested in making inquiries about these or other concerns, some of the current leaders in Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) include:

Minister TPR– Hon. Christie Cusenelli (a new MLA)
Deputy Minister TPR– Brian Pickering (2011)
Assistant Deputy Minister TPR–Graham Statt (2011)
Executive Director, Program Coordinator, Parks & Protected Areas Program –Steve Donelon

by **Alison Dinwoodie**

NW Bruderheim Field Trip

A “multidisciplinary” field trip to Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area on June 24th was organized by Patsy Cotterill and Hubert Taube of SAPAA. The trip attracted upwards of two dozen participants, including Alberta Parks staff Coral Grove and Sandra Myers, Area stewards Cathy and George Shea, and stewards who attended the conference on June 23rd.



Hiking along sandy trails in NW Bruderheim NA

The field trip experience was considerably enriched by the presence of several experts including David Lawrie of the Alberta Lepidopterists Guild, James Glasier, of the U of A, who researches ants, and Brian Stephens and Dawne Colwell, Edmonton Nature Club birders.

Apparently the field trip has increased the popularity of the Natural Area with naturalists! **Patsy Cotterill**

New Challenges for Wagner Natural Area

News has spread that the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS) is facing a new development challenge with a proposal by Parkland County to change the zoning of land south of Wagner (which serves as a groundwater recharge area for its fens) from agricultural to industrial reserve. Currently, the land in question is designated as a Special Study Area. In fact, WNAS has been in consultation with the County over zoning since 2009,

but matters are coming to a head with the approval of the Acheson Industrial Area Structure Plan expected soon. WNAS has taken the unusual step of hiring an ecological planner to present alternative land-use options to the County, and is also pondering seeking the assistance of the Central Region (planning) Board. This issue points to a larger question: what means does the provincial government have for protecting its parks and protected areas when they are affected by surrounding land uses, and for creating corridors for connectivity to maintain healthy ecosystems. Land Use Framework planning may be of some assistance here, but likely the challenges for protecting non-public land will be large in heavily settled areas.

Patsy Cotterill

The Good News!

We're usually away for the field season, so I rarely get a chance to canoe across Hastings Lake to our natural area in the summer. This summer I was home for a few days with family, and we decided to go for a paddle on the lake. Imagine my surprise when I discovered a large population of the rare aquatic plant, widgeon-grass (*Ruppia cirrhosa*) growing all around the islands of Hastings Lake Islands Natural Area and along the shore of Hastings Lake Natural Area. I had been looking for this plant for years, and it was right in my back yard.



Coiled flower stalks identify widgeon-grass (photo L. Kershaw)

This rare plant is only known from 3-4 places in the province, so it is classified as an S1 species. Long, coiled stalks carry its tiny flowers up to the surface of the water, for pollination, so when it's flowering it's unmistakable. However, for most of the year it just blends in with the other slender-leaved pondweeds and is easily overlooked. This year, we were in the right place at the right time, and we were rewarded with an exciting discovery! Hopefully, these two natural areas will provide some protection for the unusual rare species.



**Searching for widgeon-grass on Hastings Lk. (photo L. Kershaw)
Linda Kershaw**

And The Bad News...

This year Wagner Natural Area Society members discovered an unwelcome plant, pale yellow iris, or yellow flag (*Iris pseudacorus*), growing along Morgan Creek on the east side of their property. Although this plant is strikingly beautiful, it is a prohibited noxious weed and has to be eradicated. By late summer we had removed over 30 plants from one small area beside the creek. Pale yellow iris is a native of Eurasia and northern Africa, but it has been introduced into North America through cultivation and has become an aggressive invader, often crowding out other riparian vegetation.



Bad but beautiful, pale yellow iris (photo David Fielder)

Pale yellow iris grows on lakeshores or stream banks as a tall, stiff clump, with broad, ridged, sword-like leaves which are easily distinguishable from the narrower, nerve-less leaves of cattail. The typical iris flowers are large and yellow. Even after it has finished flowering (June and July) it can be recognized by its leaves and also by its large, glossy green, three-sided pods. The plants spread by rhizomes and by water-borne seeds. Although it is relatively common in eastern North America, pale yellow iris is not yet established extensively in Alberta, and the aim is to prevent it from doing so. Hence, all occurrences must be dealt with

ruthlessly. Next year, the Wagner Society plans to check upstream of the creek for any other outbreaks. If your natural area has wetlands or streams, be on the lookout for pale yellow iris, and certainly never plant any. For more information about this weed check the fact sheets at www.invasiveplants.ab.ca.

By the way, Alberta has one native iris species, western blue flag, or *Iris missouriensis*, which occurs rarely in the southern part of the province. It should be protected with equal zeal!

Patsy Cotterill

25 Natural Areas in 2012!

At the 2011 Stewards Conference in Kananaskis, volunteer program coordinator Coral Grove led a session in which she asked us how we might celebrate the 25 years of the Volunteer Stewards Program in Alberta. Impetuously I suggested that I would visit 25 Natural Areas and create a blog to share what I discovered.

The idea of all the different areas waiting to be explored intrigued me as I poured over the map. I imagined contacting the various stewards all over the province and arranging visits where they could show me around their special places. What fun to plot a route and explore three or four on a trip. In reality, I had a full-time job and a part-time job which left very few consecutive days off. My natural area was only 45 minutes away, so I could visit it after work, but Alberta is a big province. What was I thinking?!



Bark patterns at Sheep Creek NA (photo K. Reeves)

In October, a meeting of SAPAA in Red Deer and a chat with Dorothy Dickson afforded a chance to visit the Innisfail Natural Area on the return trip. A November church meeting in Edmonton and a call to Patsy Cotterill resulted in a quick visit to the Wagner Natural Area. Then in December, my husband quite unexpectedly went to the hospital with a serious condition. He was to spend four months there. In the middle of this period I struck out with friends to find the Snakehead Natural Area by

Sundre. Then in June another meeting gave me a chance to briefly see the Hastings Lake and North Cooking Lake Natural Areas on my way to explore North Bruderheim Natural Area with other stewards.



Remains after fire at North Bruderheim NA (photo K. Reeves)

Taking on another part time job filled the summer and suddenly it was September again. At the rate I was going, it would take me four years instead of one to visit 25 areas. Though I hadn't reached my goal, it had been a worthwhile endeavor. I had seen places I hadn't known existed and marveled at fens and marls, sand dunes and burnt areas. I had been shown ants and butterflies in abundance. I saw a field of wild roses that took my breath away. A wolf had stopped to watch me. And, I discovered what I had known intellectually, that nature can provide solace, to be sure.

At this year's conference in Grand Cache, Roger, Flo and Gail invited me to the J.J. Collett Area and Mary invited me to her area by Buffalo Lake. So I will continue to seek out our province's many and diverse Natural Areas and record them on a blog "25 Natural Areas in 2012". Each visit shows another reason why we must protect these special places.

Kate Reeves

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Questions Anyone??

Any questions you'd like answered? Alberta Parks and the U of Alberta want to answer Alberta Parks' Top 20 Policy and Research Questions, but first they need to determine what the questions are. Do you have suggestions? If so, it's easy to participate. Just go to <https://surveys.srv.ualberta.ca/tsqs/rws5.pl?FORM=ACS> **RC** (password: parks) for information and submissions. Do it soon! The deadline is October 19th.

SAPAA Needs Your Support!

SAPAA works hard on behalf of Alberta stewards, but we need your input and your support. Please join us, and encourage other stewards to join. Send your membership today and check out www.sapaastewards.com

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, October 20, 2012

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: **Nancy MacDonald** (Legislation Project Manager, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation at Government of Alberta)
Title: **Alberta's New Parks Act**
Nancy will fill us in on what to expect from the new Parks Act and how it may affect Alberta's Protected Areas
- 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: **Alison Dinwoodie** (SAPAA Secretary) and **Patsy Cotterill** (SAPAA President)
Title: **The Pros and Cons of Being a Steward**
Alison and Patsy will discuss the joys and challenges of being a steward, using Whitehorse Wildland Park as a case study
- 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 Membership Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Natural Area: _____ Organization (if any) _____

Mailing Address: _____ City or Town: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

- **To save paper and reduce costs, may we email your newsletter to you?** ____ 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:

Peter 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, please contact

Patsy Cotterill – (780)481-1525; nutmeg@planet.eon.net

Alison Dinwoodie – (780)437-7183; adinwoodie@shaw.ca

Peter & Linda Kershaw – (780)662-3626; linda.kershaw1@gmail.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: _____