

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 30, AUGUST 2014

SAPAA Reps Meet With AB Parks Staff

On July 14th, SAPAA reps Patsy Cotterill, Alison Dinwoodie and Hubert Taube met with Steve Donelon (Executive Director of Parks Program Coordination), Andy Van Imschoot (Director of the West Central Region) and Kevin Wirtanen (Manager of Learning and Stewardship for Parks) to discuss issues and concerns relating to protected areas such as Natural Areas, Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas. We discussed a number of issues including lack of regulations for safeguarding Protected Areas, confusing trail classification and signage, the future of the Steward Program, and the need for greater support for stewards undertaking land management & restoration activities in protected areas.

Donelon noted that some new regulations are being introduced, but we got the impression that the traditional split of jurisdictions between Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Alberta Environment & Sustainable Resource Development, plus with the continued lack of a new Parks Act, present major obstacles to introducing regulations that could protect the natural environment (as opposed to simply controlling human use).



Photo-Alfonso Romero/WikimediaCommons **Quadding and**

The government's inability to enforce exclusion of ATVs from protected areas is a major problem (for example, the sand hills area northeast of Edmonton is one of many suffering from off-road vehicle damage).

A specific problem, erection of permanent shelters in Natural Areas (in particular, in the NW Bruderheim NA) was brought to the attention of Parks staff. They indicated that this was a clear violation of Parks regulations and Van Imschoot assured SAPAA that steps would be taken to remove the structure.

SAPAA identified something of a provincial imbalance, with Kananaskis and the Bow Valley receiving a lot of attention, while the north eastern

slopes and northern Alberta in general get less consideration and have fewer organized volunteers. We also expressed concern that although recreational opportunities are often mentioned in connection with parks and protected areas, it is not always clear what 'recreation' means. This is one of the major causes of abuse, especially in ecologically sensitive areas.

To help educate the general public, terms used must be simple and easy to understand. For example, recreational trails that are Designated Access Trails (DATs) should first be clearly identified as Motorized Recreational (MR) or Non-Motorized Recreational (NMR), with further restrictions defined within these two classes. As an example, we suggested that in Whitehorse Wildland Park and in the adjacent Cheviot Mine (when it is re-commissioned), motorized and non-motorized trails should be clearly separated by keeping MR (i.e., ATV) trails on the east side of the Grave Flats Road, and NMR (i.e., walking, horseback) trails on the west side. This suggestion received some support, particularly by Van Imschoot.



Hiking are rarely compatible Photo-Linda Kershaw

Donelon assured us that the Volunteer Stewards program was still considered a valuable asset and would continue. This was a response to our observation that the five lease-holding steward groups in particular seem to be becoming increasingly independent of Parks, financing and carrying out their own activities and programs. He encouraged SAPAA members to maintain contact with Parks staff and perhaps meet with them on a semi-annual basis in a fashion similar to the current meeting.

As an aside on stewards' roles, Wirtanen agreed that better education of stewards in natural history could enrich their experience of stewardship. In

response to our observation that interpretive facilities seem to have declined in Parks and PRAs, Wirtanen noted that some have been reintroduced (e.g., in Slave Lake and Miquelon Lake Provincial Parks). We also questioned whether Conservation Officers, who are now under the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General rather than Parks and Recreation, may not have time for their more traditional educational activities.

The Land Use Stewardship Framework was discussed extensively in the context of increasing the amount of protected land, natural connectivity, and ability to protect existing protected area land bases by regulating appropriate activities in surrounding land. Donelon suggested that, as well as filling in the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan workbooks as individuals, we submit them as stewardship organizations. He also suggested making personal contact with members of the Regional Advisory Committee to ensure our issues are heard. The workbook should be completed and submitted by July 31st, 2014. It is available online along with a profile of the region at the following site: https://landuse.alberta.ca/REGIONALPLANS/NORTH_SASKATCHEWANREGION/Pages/default.aspx.

The government is still acquiring land for parks through purchase, donation and exchange, and by working with LUF planners, but Donelon commented that private agencies such as the Nature Conservancy and land trusts are increasing in land conservation.

Our overall impression was that in the absence of a new Parks Act, there is nothing really new in the Parks program, but rather small incremental changes and progress. For example, work is being done to reclassify (and in some cases dispose of) Protection Notation (PNT) Natural Areas. We are not convinced that ecological integrity is still a high priority with the government. On the other hand, we appreciate that three staff members gave up their morning to listen carefully to our concerns and suggestions.

Patsy Cotterill, Alison Dinwoodie, & Hubert Taube

Volunteer Stewards' Spring Conference

On May 31st, twenty-three protected area stewards attended an all-day conference at the J. Percy Page Centre in Edmonton. The Parks' staff exchanged info with the stewards, and boosted the volunteers' supply of tea-shirts, jackets and other goodies!

During the morning, Kevin Wirtanen, Manager, Learning and Stewardship for Parks, introduced the speakers. Steve Donelon, Executive Director, Parks Program Coordination, outlined some of the government's "wants" under the Plan for Parks. These included a Parks advisory committee, a science strategy involving post-secondary students and research, a focus on social science aspects to better

understand how people relate to parks, and a public engagement framework. Donelon noted that it is unlikely new parks legislation will be introduced before at least 2016, although the government is moving forward with regulations. He reported that \$81 million has been on remediation and on rehabilitating park trails and infrastructure after last year's floods.

Laura Graham, Senior Manager, Land Use & Dispositions, explained how competing uses on a single piece of land are balanced by government departments.

In the afternoon session, Coral Grove, Coordinator of the Parks' Steward Program, briefly covered a few points and provided handouts on the 2014 Edmonton Region Parks Survey, the 2014 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference (September 19-21, Cold Lake) and a summary sheet of the 133 sites with volunteer stewards and their status as to OC or PNT. She also indicated that it would be useful if volunteer stewards kept a record of the number of hours they contributed.

Breakout sessions involved three topics: What do volunteers want to learn about in the future in terms of topics/skills, etc.; what do we need to effectively carry out our responsibilities at different sites; and what are important issues with regards to program development?

Patsy Cotterill & Guy Swinnerton

J.J. COLLETT NATURAL AREA

J.J. Collett Natural Area consists of 635 acres of Aspen Parkland habitat underlain by ancient sand dunes. More than 18 km of maintained trails wind through the mosaic of shrub lands, aspen groves, white spruce stands on moist shady hillsides, wetlands and meadows typical of the region.

The Natural Area is located in rural central Alberta near the hamlet of Morningside, between Ponoka and Lacombe. It is used by the general public for educational activities, exercise and recreation. Because of its proximity to Highway #2, one of the fastest growing corridors in Western Canada, it is of utmost importance that we preserve this ecologically diverse land.



View of the new boardwalk



Entrance to the wetland, prior to completion of the boardwalk; note pilings for the future boardwalk in the distance

The J.J. Collett Natural Area Foundation (JJCNAF) was established in 1985 and consists of 11 volunteer directors who lease the area from the Provincial government. These Provincial Stewards are responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the area. In 2003 they were presented with the Outstanding Group Steward Award and in 2010 they received the Service Excellence Award from Parks Alberta.

The JJCNAF goals are to protect and preserve the land and its animal and plant communities, to instill environmental values in the community, and to establish an Endowment Fund for future sustainability.



Release of a rehabilitated hawk at JJ Collett Natural Area by Medicine River Wildlife Center staff (fall walk Sept. 2013)

A current program organized by the JJCNAF involves Grade 6 Environmental Education. Each year about 450 students from the Wolf Creek School Division tour the area and instructors assist students with plant identification and discuss environmental issues following the Alberta Grade 6 Curriculum.

Local organizations, schools, post-secondary institutions, First Nations and fitness groups use the J.J. Collett Natural Area for studies, orienteering and field trips. Guided walks are held each spring and fall, and guest speakers are provided at annual meetings. In recent years, with the expansion of the trail system and improved maintenance, use of the area has risen dramatically. Summer weekends are the busiest time for the area with about 250-300 visitors. In winter, both walking and cross-country ski trails are groomed for

recreational use. A conservative estimate is that 10,000 to 11,000 people visit the area annually.



Grandparents and their treasures enjoying a fall day at JJ Collett Natural Area

Each year the JJCNAF take on at least one major project. Last year, with money acquired through donations from corporations and businesses, grants and the sweat equity of the board members, a 212-foot boardwalk costing \$32,000 was completed across a wetland. Its installation provided full access to a trail that had been cut off because of the wet summers in the last several years. The boardwalk also serves as a bridge for the maintenance vehicle and mower.

This year The Board have chosen two projects: purchase of a new lawn mower for trail maintenance, and rebuilding or repair of approximately 1 ¼ miles of perimeter fence, much of which is through wetland.

Over the course of the last few months a new website has been constructed and is now up and running. Please visit us at jjcollett.com. The galleries section provides a visual tour of the natural area, with images of the flora and fauna and much, much more.

Roger and Flo Stawart

Halfmoon Lake NA Needs Your Help!

After 32 years of work, the battle to protect the Halfmoon Lake Natural Area is being lost. Since this spring, our trail system has been degraded to a point where one loop is no longer safe for hikers and horse riders, and others are at the breaking point.



Fall view from one of the trails at Halfmoon Lake NA

July 21st was different. While I was driving home on Range Road 234, a dirt biker ripped out of the trail at the north end of a nearby Nature Conservancy property (where it is blockaded and clearly signed) and crossed right in front of me. I had to brake hard to avoid hitting him. He performed donuts in the road, spraying gravel all over my car, then drove up to my window and threatened to 'kick the shit out of me, find out where I live and burn my house down'. I had not engaged, nor was I trying to engage, this man.

I reported the incident to the RCMP, but the constable who responded said that they are stretched to the limit. Something must be done to put an end to this 'wild west' mentality! Westlock, Sturgeon and Thorhild Counties share responsibility for the lawlessness in the Halfmoon Lake area. The area is in no-man's-land - 22 miles from the Westlock and Morinville detachments and 18 miles from the Redwater detachment. Patrols are few and far between, and if you call for assistance dispatch doesn't know where to direct your call. Vandalism and crime have become commonplace. The provincial government and departments that should be monitoring and policing crown lands must also share the blame.

You can help! Please contact your local councilors, MLAs and other officials and demand a greater police presence in this area. Talk to friends and neighbors; email, text, tweet or use other social media to spread the word. If you know someone in the media tell them our story. If you have suggestions to deal with OHVs, please share them with me (rdesmet@mcsnet.ca). Thirty-two years of stewardship is a long time. My fear is that it will all be undone if something doesn't change soon. Please help.

Richard DeSmet

SASKATOON MOUNTAIN NA: IS THIS THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

(Comments in brackets by Alison Dinwoodie)

Alberta Parks is currently holding a public consultation on its proposed re-designation of Saskatoon Mountain NA (SMNA) as a Provincial Recreation Area (PRA). This appears to illustrate the way they are dealing with plans for Natural Areas (NAs) in the future. See <http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/about-us/public-consultations/archives/saskatoon-mountain-na-proposal.aspx>

The County of Grande Prairie initially wanted to re-designate Saskatoon Mountain NA as a Provincial Park, because off-highway vehicle (OHV) use had increased significantly causing a lot of damage. Management had become more

difficult and the NA required a higher level of protection. (Sound familiar? But this time it was the local authority that was pushing for action.)



Wetland at Saskatoon Mountain NA

At that time, local public response did not support these plans, mainly because OHV use would not be permitted in a Provincial Park. (Why should a vocal minority scupper the whole plan aimed at protecting the area and providing more opportunities for other users?)

The County persisted, and public consultation is now underway on a new plan to convert the NA to a PRA, on the grounds that more controls can be put in place under the Provincial Parks Act. (Once again, it's a local authority, not Alberta Parks, that is pushing for change to the more legally controllable situation.)

Recommendations for the new PRA include a designated access trail (DAT) network for OHVs limited to the west side of Range Road 92, where the land is considerably disturbed by previous use. RR 92 bisects the NA. The less disturbed and more ecologically intact eastern side would still be open to low-impact activities like hiking. An OHV staging area would be based at the southern edge of RR 92, allowing access to the OHV DATs on the west. (The less disturbed eastern area is just across the road from the staging area, and OHV users may be tempted to stray there. It will certainly require monitoring and enforcement to make sure this does not happen.)

The plan provides for inclusion of some previously excluded lands in the centre of the area to create one distinct unit which would allow for more effective management of recreation (and conservation?). This relatively undisturbed land and the current NA east of Range Road 92 have the highest ecological value and so no high-impact development is planned. (A very positive move.)



Incised quad trails on the sandy slopes of Saskatoon Mountain

Public responses to a survey carried out by 02 Consulting identified that, apart from extensive OHV damage to various trails, a major negative impact on visitors arises from user conflicts between motorized and non-motorized activities. Other frequent comments related to a lack of clear management and enforcement responsibility. We are told that reclassification from a NA to a PRA will enable more effective management of recreational use by providing a wider range of tools (e.g., campground development, trail designation, signage) that are not accessible or are incompatible with a NA. (Who will effectively monitor and enforce these tools? Parks has neither the money nor the personnel at present.)



More quad damage in Saskatoon Mountain NA

Alberta Parks will have responsibility for managing the new PRA, but will look to the County of Grande Prairie and other stakeholders to assist in operations and facility development, such as a new campground on previously disturbed land. The OHV community and other stakeholders will be expected to help build & maintain designated OHV trails and to assist with reclamation of the many random trails elsewhere in the PRA. (Will stakeholders with vested interests be the only ones involved? Is this the beginning of privatization in our parks under another name?)

Hunting will continue with the requirement that hunters first obtain a firearms discharge permit from Alberta Parks. This was previously administered by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, which will no longer be involved. (Does Alberta Parks have qualified personnel to oversee this new activity?)

Alberta Parks appears to be promoting this sort of reclassification plan for NAs, because it does not have the legal tools to manage them effectively at present. Suggested zoning changes may look good on paper, but unless they are clearly explained and publicized, they can create further problems. Parks would like to re-classify or get rid of NAs, with or without PNTs, as they are at present, because of this lack of clarity. But without major changes to the Parks Act (which seems to be perennially on the back burner) it seems that they are doomed to fail (if the Bruderheim and Sandhills NA experiences are anything to go by). Better legislation and regulations would be wonderful, but without a significant increase in trained Parks personnel for monitoring and enforcement, not to mention adequate funding, such a positive step would be meaningless.

What can we do to help Parks in general, when so much is at stake? Fill in questionnaires and write your own responses if you don't agree with loaded survey questions. Send in your comments on the Saskatoon Mountain plan as an example - see link above. With respect to your own NA, get your local community on side (as above). Get to know your local councilors, land managers and other authorities. Write more letters (!), particularly to your MLAs and local newspapers. And if you have the energy and lots of friends and contacts, organize projects to initiate or improve a visible project. More public education is needed at all levels. Stewards' reports help to document the state of affairs in protected areas, but more action is still needed, particularly to outside authorities. Perhaps by being proactive, we can avoid the need to be reactive down the road. **Alison Dinwoodie**

Mark Your Calendar!

The 2014 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference will be held in Cold Lake this year on September 19-21. Coral will be sending out the details soon.

Join us for the SAPAA workshop and AGM at Miquelon Provincial Park, October 25th!

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, October 25, 2014

at 9:30 A.M.

Miquelon Provincial Park Visitors' Centre

PROGRAM

- 9:00 a.m. Registration and coffee
- 9:30 a.m. Speaker: **Glynnis Hood**
Associate Professor of Environmental Science & Studies, University of Alberta
Augustana Campus
Title: **The Role of Beavers in Alberta**
- 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: **Adam Driedzic**
Environmental Law Centre, etc.
Title: **TBA**
- 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. **It's a Walk in the Park** – Enjoy some fresh air and exercise before heading home. Join us for a walk around the beautiful trails and boardwalks in the park.



Bird- and bug-watching at Miquelon PP.

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Saturday, 25 October 2014, 12:30 p.m.
AGENDA

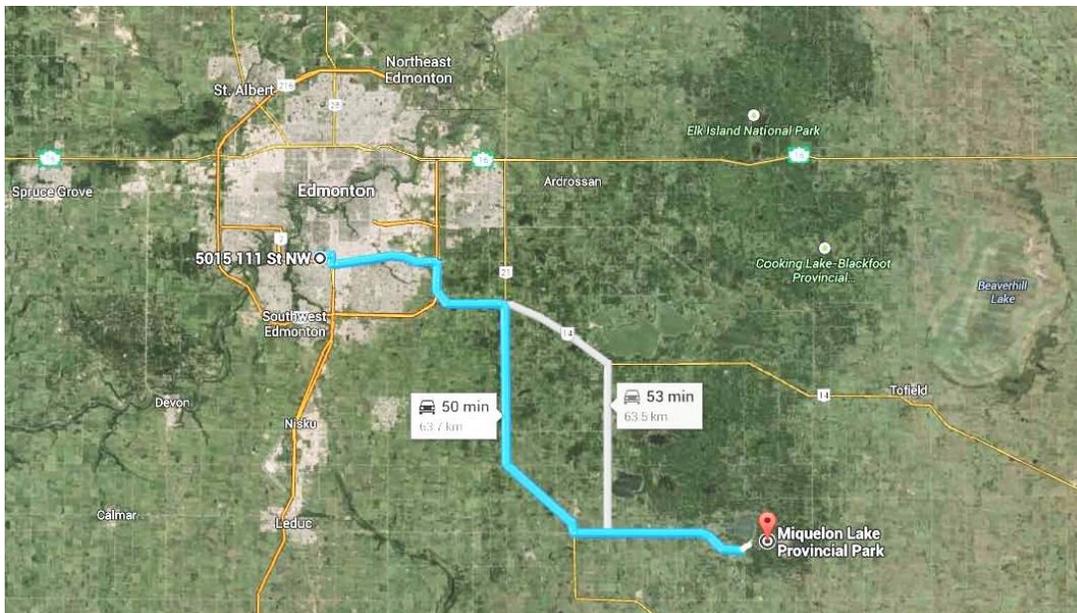
1. Acceptance of Minutes of previous AGM, 19 October 2013
2. Business arising from the minutes
3. Treasurer's report
4. SAPAA web site update
5. Election of the Board

Current board members are:

President – Patsy Cotterill
Vice President – Hubert Taube
Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Peter Kershaw
Recording Secretary – Alison Dinwoodie
Directors – John Woitenko (FAN Representative); Tony Blake;
Merleen Rafters; Lucille Horne; Noni Swinnerton
Newsletter Editors – Linda Kershaw, Patsy Cotterill
Webmaster – 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. Other members of the Board are elected annually. Most members are willing to stand for another year, but new people would be welcomed!

6. Other business



DIRECTIONS: To reach the Miquelon Provincial Park from south Edmonton, take the **Whitemud Drive** or **Anthony Henday Drive** east to **Highway 14** (to Wainright); go east on Hwy 14 to **Highway 21** (≈ 9 km). Turn **right (south)** on **Highway 21**, and go about 25 km to **AB-623 (Rollyview Road)**. Turn **left (east)**, and drive east 16.5 km, until you see **Miquelon Provincial Park** on the left (north).

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: _____