

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

No.10 April 2004

MAKE A NOTE FOR YOUR DIARY!

SAPAA'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Saturday, October 23, 2004

At the February 26, 2004 executive meeting it was decided to hold our AGM as usual at the end of October, on **Saturday, October 23, 2004**. The Parks and Protected Areas Division Annual Volunteer Stewards Conference is at Yamnuska on Sept. 24 - 26 2004, so after much discussion, it was decided that our meeting should be held in the Edmonton area. The Executive have chosen the **Strathcona Wilderness Centre**, about 20 km east of Edmonton, as the location. The topic for the presentation and workshop is '**Enhancing Your Skills as a Steward**'. Further information and a map to the site will be published in the September 2004 newsletter.

MORE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY!

FIELD TRIPS 2004

Attendance at Field Trips in the past have been disappointing. This is a pity, as we really need to make the public more aware of our Natural Area treasures, if we are going to get more support in the future. So we hope for a better turnout this year - and tell your friends too!

J.J.COLLETT NATURAL AREA. Sunday, 27 June 2004. About 2 km S.of Morningside, off Hwy 2A. Contact Sylvia Glass (403) 782-6353 for information.

This is an interesting area of Aspen Parkland, with a mosaic of shrublands, aspen stands, meadows, wetlands, and stabilised sand dunes, and a diverse flora and fauna to match. The Stewards over the years have built trails and shelters and provide many school groups with instructive outings. A place worth visiting!

CLIFFORD E. LEE NATURE SANCTUARY AND NATURAL AREA Date: TBA

13 Km south of Hwy 16 on Highway 60, and 1.6 Km west on Woodbend road.

Contact Margaret Reine, (780) 430 - 07134 for information.

This beautiful Nature Sanctuary and smaller Natural Area is near the Devonian Gardens on the Devon Sandhills, which are now covered with aspen and pine woods, meadows and marsh. This gives a great diversity of bird and plant life (and bugs!). There is a boardwalk round the edge of the marsh for some fine bird watching.

WHITEHORSE WILDLAND PARK - WHITEHORSE CREEK. Date: TBA

110 Km south of Edson on Hwy 47 and Hwy 40 to Cadomin. Contact Alison Dinwoodie (780) 437-7183 if you are interested. **Please note, the road to the Cardinal Divide beyond**

Whitehorse Ck. campground is closed for the summer as Elk Valley Coals is building its new haul road up the McLeod valley to the Cheviot Mine and upgrading the public road alongside it.

WAGNER NATURAL AREA

The Wagner Natural Area Stewards conduct a number of interesting walks during the summer, to which you are all invited. Dates will be available on their website, wagner@fanweb.ca

LAST YEAR'S FIELD TRIPS REPORTS, 2003

N.W. BRUDERHEIM, 24 May, 2003

Hubert Taube (steward) and I (Alison) were the only SAPAA members present but there was a good contingent from Ft. Saskatchewan Natural History Society, who are Stewards of the nearby Astotin NA. It was a late spring so the trip was notable for some fine displays of saskatoon and pincherry blossom, not to mention early purple violets and a few prairie crocus, amongst many others, not to mention several songbird species, which Hubert was much better at identifying than me. This NA is interesting jackpine and sandhills terrain, with oil wells and associated roads, which equals OHV access, heard but not seen.

WHITEHORSE WILDLAND PARK, 9 Aug, 2003.

There were only three SAPAA members on this official SAPAA trip, Frank Busconi, Patsy Cotterill, and myself, but also the two new Edmonton ACC Stewards of the WWP, Lucy Scharfenberger and Terry McIntee, plus three FAN members. We surveyed recent 4WD tracks through the area replanted by the ANPC eight years ago, which was only just beginning to come back. The alpine flowers were mainly over except in the damp draws, where there was still a brilliant garden of flowers. Lots of fresh grizzly bear diggings kept us on the alert! Illegal camping activity by the roadside was also noted. This is a big area to cover (175 sq. km.), and only the second time I'd been on this particular ridge, so it is difficult to monitor unless we can get more bodies to make regular (or irregular?) visits. Any offers? If anyone is thinking of visiting this area, or has done recently, please get in touch with me (Alison, phone 437-7183).

VOLUNTEERS IN MOTION WORKSHOP March 13, 2004, Red Deer

This workshop was an extension of Canada's Stewardship Agenda, which Alberta, and other provinces, are taking up. Governments are realising the important part that Volunteer Stewards play and are willing to facilitate their activities, by forming a network of Stewards. Many of the groups at the conference are fairly substantial organisations, such as Cows and Fish, so their budgets and activities are on a different scale from ours. But all stressed the fact that you can't buy enthusiasm and commitment, so these are the qualities to nurture to get effective Stewards. Stewards can look at the big picture and a long time frame and as one speaker said, we are the Heart, Head and Hands as exemplified by fostering Awareness and Knowledge, leading to Action. So recognition is good, but we still need some assistance!

**NOTES ON SAPAA GENERAL MEETING.
RED DEER, 25 OCT. 2003.**

Glen Semenchuk, Executive Director, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, gave us an excellent talk on **IS ADVOCACY THE WAY TO DEAL WITH GOVERNMENT?** His answer was clearly 'Yes'. In his search on the web, he found that nearly all Steward groups, particularly in the States, include a strong directive for Advocacy. It is unfortunate that the words 'Environment', 'Conservation' and 'Advocacy' raise red flags with the government, when they should be realizing that we are there to help them - and that they need us too. We are their 'army' and can help them to protect the value of their assets, when they lack the manpower themselves. There should be a partnership, with mutual trust and respect and with benefits on both sides, but this will not happen if Stewards are treated as unpaid, dumb labour.

If Stewards, with our specific and local knowledge, do not act as Advocates for Protected Areas, who will? Glen pointed out that **we are not a lobby group**, as that implies 'vested interests' and as volunteers, we have no monetary stake. This term is frequently used in a derogatory fashion about groups such as ours, at stakeholder meetings with industry etc - who are 'vested interests' if ever there were any! We are not advocating for benefits for ourselves, but for those with no voice, such as the environment.

There are two major concerns for Stewards groups, like ourselves, across the country, i.e. impacts of OHVs and liability, and the government lack of action on both. With OHVs, lack of rules means no enforcement, so regulations are essential to get any sort of action. Group liability is a big issue, and Stewards should not have to waste their time raising money for insurance (up to 80% in some cases) which should have been going to their cause. The Finance Act is just an excuse for inaction, and Glen suggested we should be asking for changes to the Act by writing to your MLA.

Glen also referred to the Federal Volunteer Sector Forum which identified across Canada three areas of concern: liability again, government funding, and advocacy. The voluntary sector is the backbone of growth in government policy e.g. environmental protection, smoking, etc.

The second talk at the meeting was by **Nigel Douglas**, Outreach Coordinator for Alberta

Wilderness Association, as Christy Olson, the Executive Director, was unable to come as advertised. Nigel spoke on **STEWARDS OR ADVOCATES - OR BOTH?** The AWA certainly does both, but the advocacy functions of the Association are seen as being separate from their Stewardship actions of clean-up, trail maintenance etc. in their Beehive NA, Plateau Mountain ER and Bighorn Historic Trail. He agreed with Glen that Liability is a big issue and also called for changes to the Finance Act. His definition of Environmental Stewardship was 'respecting nature, trying to understand, and accepting responsibility for the health of wilderness' while Environmental Advocacy was 'recognizing when something you care about is not right, and trying to make it right'. Other groups, such as the OHV groups, are effective advocates, so why not Stewards?

There was considerable discussion afterwards, particularly regarding the draft Stewards Manual, which had just been received by some members of the Executive for review. We were disturbed that it lacked Goals and a Vision for the Stewardship Program, was not encouraging better communication, and did not reflect more of a true partnership. Alison commented that we hoped to be meeting with the VSP people in the next couple of weeks to discuss this further. (The results of this meeting are given below).

There was also concern expressed about people's lack of interest in getting involved with SAPAA. They may feel passionately about their Areas, but don't realize the dangers of political apathy. There is also confusion in some peoples' minds between SAPAA and the Stewards Program itself. We must strive for better communication, and education, in all directions. And if this is Advocacy, all Stewards need to be involved, not just groups! **Advocacy is Not a Bad Word!** It was agreed that a questionnaire should be sent out with the next Newsletter to try and find some answers.

It was unfortunate that there was such a poor turn-out for the speakers, as if more people had been there, they might realise that SAPAA does have an important role to play, and they should give it their support as members.

Alison Dinwoodie, Past President, SAPAA.

SAPAA EXECUTIVE MEET WITH DEPARTMENT STAFF

On Monday December 15, 2003, Alison Dinwoodie, Marilyn Shannon and Don Scott met with June Markwart, Director, Visitor Services Branch and Sandra Myers, Volunteer Stewards Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting was to continue an open discussion of issues and concerns that SAPAA has and provide members of the Department with an opportunity to respond to these concerns as well as share information of mutual interest.

At the previous meeting, members of the Department requested that SAPAA reconsider their objectives as they were seen as serving an advocacy role, and this being the case, then the Department would find it difficult to support SAPAA. Alison shared that at SAPAA's AGM in Red Deer, the Stewards unanimously supported leaving the objectives as written. Alison further emphasized that SAPAA should be able to work as partners with government in a positive advocacy role, to promote the preservation and protection of our Parks and Protected Areas, according to Parks and Protected Areas mandate.

June expressed concern regarding SAPAA communicating directly with the Minister when there are issues and concerns. This type of communication only hinders the response to concerns, as these action requests as they are called, only make more work for Sandra and June. The procedure the Department wants SAPAA to use is due process, with management concerns expressed to June or Ted Ritzer. If the Department involves SAPAA in management issues, then it is essential that confidentiality is respected.

On behalf of all stewards, SAPAA executive expressed their appreciation for the hard work Sandra Myers has done over the years. Without her dedication and support, the volunteer stewards program would not be what it is today.

As John Woitenko, SAPAA's current president was not at the December 2003 meeting, June Markwart, Ted Ritzer and Sandra Myers called him to a special meeting in January 2004. The context of the meeting was the same as in December but with a focus on what he thought was the mandate of SAPAA and in particular, their role in advocacy. John stressed again that what SAPAA was advocating for was the preservation and protection of Parks and Protected Areas, and to this end, the Association wants to do everything possible to support the Department with this mandate. At the end of the meeting, John was pleasantly surprised to be invited by June to serve as a member of a Core Group that is reviewing all aspects of the Volunteer Stewards Program.

The Core Group reviewing the Volunteer Stewards Program is made up of six staff from Parks and Protected Areas and Public Lands as well as three stewards. Although John did not become involved until the fourth meeting in February, he was encouraged by the support shown by the group for the Volunteer Stewards Program. At the meeting in February, the Core Group spent most of the day working on the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the program. John felt that his comments and contributions were positively received and may be reflected in the re-drafting of the Stewards Manual. The Draft Document produced now is in the hands of senior management staff in Parks and Protected Areas Division.

We hope that SAPAA executive can meet with Parks and Protected Areas Staff on a regular basis to facilitate better communication.