

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 17 MAY 2007

SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

A Reminder, as these field trips were advertised in the March 2007 newsletter.

May 26, 2007. Visit to Big Lake Natural Area and Provincial Park, near St. Albert, to be led by a member of the Big Lake Environmental Support Society (BLESS). For more information, or to register, please contact John Woitenko at 459-0475 or red20@telus.net.

Leader Miles Constable writes:

We meet at 9 AM at the BLESS shelter in St Albert for a quick walk under the half constructed West Regional Road bridge to the BLESS viewing platform to look over the east bay of Big Lake. From there we will drive to the south east corner of the park for a hike into the new lands acquired by the province for Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. Time permitting we can view some of the lands south of the park to see the future human pressures on the park, or possibly an over look area that has a good view of the west side of the park (assuming the soil is dry enough to walk on). Right now water levels are quite high, but should subside by May 26." The BLESS shelter is located at the end of Rodeo Drive. (See map and picture of shelter at end of newsletter.)

June 23-26, 2007. Field trip to **Cardinal Divide area** (Whitehorse Wildland Park) in the Coal Branch south-west of Edson. Alison Dinwoodie will be organizing and leading this long weekend. Contact her at 437-7183 or adinwoodie@shaw.ca. Camping and motel accommodation is available.

Another field trip that stewards may be interested in is the Alberta Native Plant Council annual Botany AB field weekend. This year it will take place June 8-10 at the Milk River Ridge north of Lethbridge. Contact Lorna Allen at lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca for more information.

OTHER EVENTS

The provincial government's annual **Steward Conference** will take place **September 7-9**, at Crimson Lake Provincial Park near Rocky Mountain House. Stewards, campground hosts and other volunteers will be notified of the details by Coral Grove, Volunteer Steward Coordinator with the Department of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture (formerly Community Development).

SAPAA Annual General Meeting will be held once again at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre, Red Deer, on **October 20**, 2007.

FEATURE ARTICLE

By Alison Dinwoodie

CONSERVATION AND USE IN OUR PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS: DO WE HAVE A BALANCE?

In the last newsletter (March 2007) I commented on the distinction between Parks or Protected Areas, as defined by legislation. As there will be more discussion on increasing public use of our Parks and Protected Areas (P/PA), I thought it might be useful to check what we have now by looking at a few figures to highlight the quantitative balance between areas set aside primarily for conservation and low-intensity use and those promoted for more high intensity recreation.

The province boasts that we have 504 Parks and Protected Areas. Their total area is just over 28,000 sq. km, or about 4% of the province's land base, exclusive of the federal parks. (In comparison, the area leased for deep (in situ) oil sands development is over 38,000 sq.km.)

Figure 1 shows the reality of the numbers and areas for each Park category legislated under the Willmore Wilderness and Provincial Parks Acts (WWA, PPA), i.e., Willmore Wilderness (WW), Wildland Parks (WP), Provincial Parks (PP) and Provincial Recreation Areas (PRA). These are shown in order of increasing recreation use and decreasing conservation priority.

Park	No.	Area (sq. km)
Willmore W.	1	4596
Wildland P.	32	17,289
Provincial P.	73	2182
PRA	229	845

Fig. 1

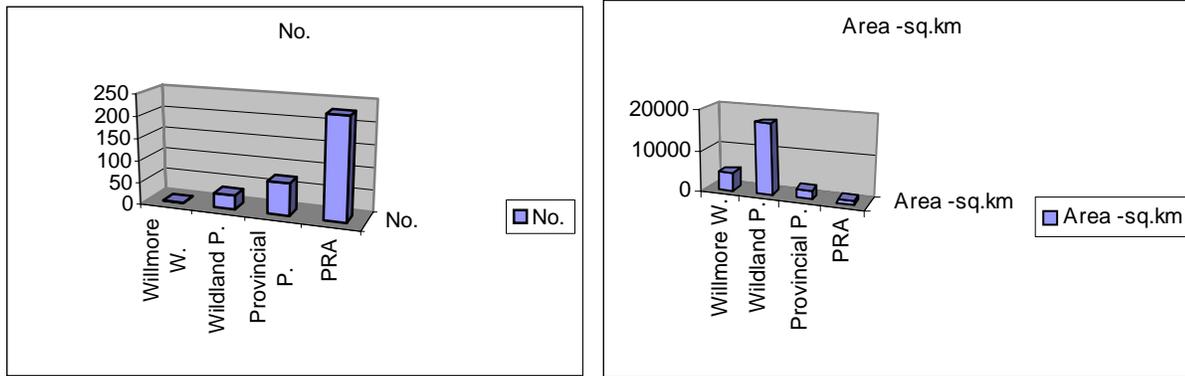
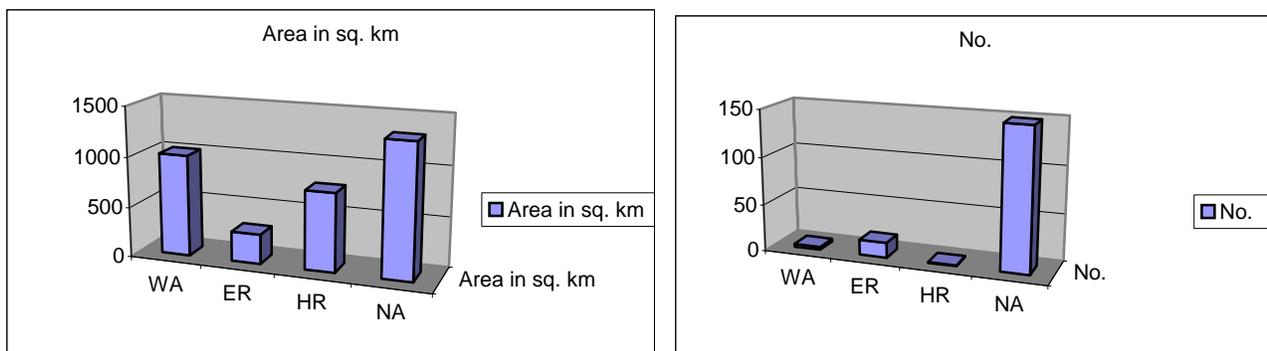


Fig.2 shows the numbers and areas for each Protected Area category under the Wilderness Areas (WA), Ecological Reserves (ER), Natural Areas (NA) and Heritage Rangeland (HR) Act (WAERNAHRA). (Sorry for all the abbreviations!) These are also shown in order of increasing recreation use and decreasing conservation priority.

Protected Area	No.	Area (sq. km)
WA	3	1010
ER	16	294
HR	1	776
NA	149	1324

Fig. 2



It can be seen that, under the PPA, we have a few large reasonably well protected areas, but the majority (68%) are PRAs, which are mainly campgrounds, or larger Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) areas, and the remainder are Provincial Parks, which are the major tourist attractions.

Similarly, under WAERNAHRA, we see that there are a very few larger protected areas and the vast majority (88%) are the Natural Areas, which have virtually no protection under existing legislation. The NAs also include 6 larger HR, which skews the size of their area. These 6 HR account for half the area of the total NAs, but most NAs are usually much less than 10 sq. km.

It is obvious from the P/PA website <http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/parks/lrm/index.asp> (from which all these figures were taken) that P/PA staff have been concentrating, rightly, on the PP and PRAs, to bring them more under control. But it is also obvious that NAs have a very low priority. No new NAs have been designated since 2000, with 2 exceptions, Wagner (long delayed) and Garner Fen. One has the impression that P/PA would really like NAs to disappear – which may well happen if Stewards don't make a lot of noise! And this doesn't even count those NAs which are not designated, but only have a protective notation (PNT) flag, which seems to be virtually meaningless. Most of the Stewards look after NAs, many of which are the PNT orphans.

So where does the balance lie? A few large areas (10% of the total) with minimal disturbance, and the rest for increasingly intensive recreation activities, or not controlled at all (NAs)? For example, off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are supposedly allowed in only one NA (Redwater), but as Stewards familiar with these areas, we know there are many NAs where OHV use is a big problem.

After many years of attrition, (e.g., 30% staff cuts in the 90s), there at last seems to be signs of a thaw. In a recent press release, it was announced that “with an \$8-million boost in Budget 2007, funding for Alberta’s 69 provincial parks and more than 500 protected areas grows to \$73 million this year. This increased funding will allow 34 additional permanent parks staff and about 60 additional seasonal staff to be hired. There will be more conservation officers, maintenance service workers, planners, interpretive and visitor information staff, and gate staff to better serve the public and protect the land and facilities.”

This is very welcome news: not only the remedy for the neglected infrastructure, but also the increase in on-the-ground staff. The latter will be available to help educate the public in appropriate behaviour, and enforce regulations when these are ignored. Having proper management plans for each area is essential for adequate direction but here again, the NAs are at the bottom of the heap, and are likely to stay there.

So at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I have to say to all Stewards, it is still only your voices that keep our NAs on the government radar, so make sure you are heard - by your MLA, land manager, P/PA personnel, and as many other interested friends who can help spread the word as you can muster!

All these statistics are available on the government website: <http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/>

SAPAA Officers, 2006-2007

President – **Peter Kershaw**

Vice-President – **Hubert Taube**

Treasurer/Membership Secretary – **Marilyn Shannon**

Recording Secretary – **Alison Dinwoodie**

Directors: **Jim Pratt, John Woitenko, Tony Blake**

Newsletter – **Patsy Cotterill, Linda Kershaw**

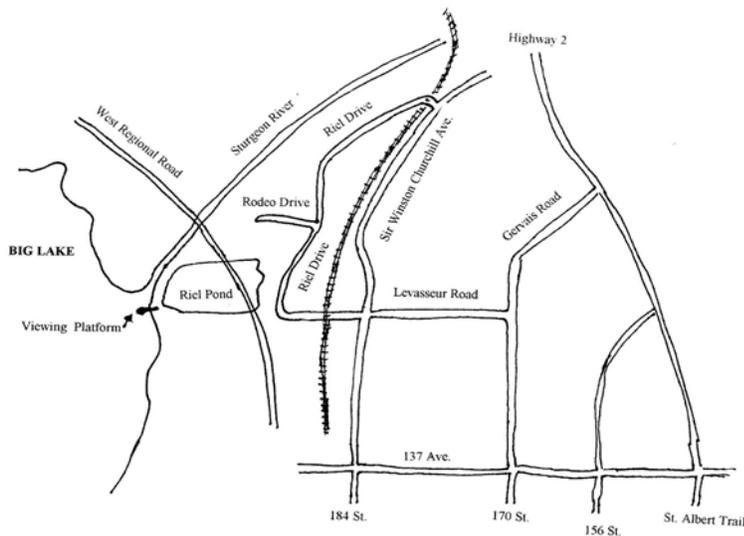
For more information on SAPAA, please contact Marilyn at 780-438-8071, mshannon@oanet.com or Alison at 780-437-7183, adinwoodie@shaw.ca.

SAPAA would welcome an additional board member, and is always looking to groom successors for the executive.

Debating point!

The Parks Division is now named **Parks, Conservation, Recreation and Sport** and falls within the Department of **Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture**. Hard to remember? You bet! Even the bureaucrats have trouble keeping them straight. According to Anne Douglas, Director of Communications for the Department, the Division's new name reflects its heritage preservation role. I presume she is referring to the inclusion of the word "conservation." Still, what's in a name? Well, maybe quite a lot in this case. Clearly the government still considers parks and protected areas as amenities for people rather than as a means for the protection of the province's biodiversity. Then again, given the larger area given over to wildland parks, relatively speaking, could this be just a front for the benefit of the public? Does the government believe that the public will only accept the setting aside of land that has obvious recreational value? If this is the case, then perhaps we should be taking every opportunity to disabuse it of this notion. – Ed.

Map to BLESS shelter,
courtesy of John Woitenko



BLESS shelter; photo courtesy of Elke Blodgett



Wildlands Advocate – check it out! Writer/editor Shirley Bray has written three excellent articles on the Stewards' Program. Find them at <http://albertawilderness.ca/AWRC/WLA.htm>.

Land Use Framework. Want to tell the government what you think about its new plan and policy for land use and allocation in Alberta? Go to www.landuse.gov.ab.ca for more information and to fill out the survey. You have until June 15. To obtain a hard copy of the workbook/survey, call The Praxis Group at 403-310-4455.

The third in the series of articles in graminoids, a sequel to the previous article on the Sedge family, is attached to this newsletter. Thanks to Linda Kershaw for doing the lion's share of the work on this one.

Part 3. The Sedge Family (continued)

Apart from the sedges (the large, widespread genus *Carex*) and bog-sedges (the relatively uncommon montane-alpine genus *Kobresia*), all genera in the Sedge family have flowers with both male and female parts, and none have perigynia. Instead, the perianth (equivalent to the tepals of the rush family) has been reduced to bristles, which range from short and inconspicuous or long and obvious.

The flowers of the spike-rushes (*Eleocharis* species) have small bristles that can only be seen on close examination of the flowers with a hand lens or dissecting scope. These plants have a single flower spike at the tip of a cylindrical, leafless, rush-like stem, so the group is aptly named. A tiny, knob-like enlargement at the base of the style (at the tip of each achene), is a diagnostic characteristic of spike-rushes. This unusual swelling is called a tubercle. Tubercles vary in size and shape according to species. By far, the most common spike-rush in Alberta is creeping spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*). This widespread and highly variable species can grow from 10 to 100 cm tall. It often forms extensive green swards on the mud of shorelines or ditches. Two smaller, more delicate species, needle spike-rush (*E. acicularis*) and few-flowered spike-rush (*E. quinqueflora*), are also quite common, although the latter only grows in calcium-rich fens and seeps.

The cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) are readily identified by their fluffy white heads. The flowers of this genus have abundant bristles that lengthen considerably as the fruit develops. Mature spikes look like cottony balls. Some cottongrasses have single erect spikes, while others have clusters of fluffy spikelets. Sheathed cottongrass (*E. vaginatum*) is a common single-spiked species, and tall cottongrass (*E. polystachion*) is a widespread example of a species with multiple spikes.

The bulrushes are a diverse group, which comprise the genus *Scirpus* in the Flora of Alberta (1983), but has recently been split into several genera. In Alberta, these include following 3 genera. 1) The leafless-bulrushes (*Trichophorum* spp.), have single spikes. Leafless-bulrushes are not common in Alberta. Woolly-head leafless-bulrush (*T. alpinum*), the only species with fluffy heads [like a small cottongrass], is probably the most easily identified. 2) The bulrushes (*Scirpus* spp.) usually have keeled leaves and terminal, branched inflorescences; The most common bulrush in Alberta, red-sheath bulrush (*S. microcarpus*), is identified by its red leaf sheath and its 2-sided, lens-shaped achenes. 3) The clubrushes (*Schoenoplectus* spp.), usually have flat or no leaf blades and their flower clusters often appear to grow out of the side of the stem. Clubrushes are common in deep marshes and lakes, and hard-stem clubrush (*Schoenoplectus acutus*) is one of the most common species.

If you'd like to learn more about some of the most common members of the Sedge Family, you might like to start with the keys and descriptions in *Plants of the Western Boreal* this season. Getting to know the sedges will add an extra dimension to your plant hunting! **(See overleaf for illustrations)**

