

# Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

## NEWSLETTER NO. 21, SEPTEMBER 2009

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17<sup>TH</sup>

Join us at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre in Red Deer for our annual get-together. Our guest speaker this year is long-time volunteer steward **Richard DeSmet** with a presentation entitled "**Keepers of the Earth.**" Richard is founder and past-president of the Rainbow Equitation Society, which received the 2004 Stewardship Service Excellence Award. He will describe the Society's approach to stewardship, including their "Keepers of the Earth" approach, challenges and successes. He will also speculate on the future of Natural Areas.



**Richard DeSmet surveys the Ghost Horse Hills**

Photo: P. Cotterill

Richard's presentation will be followed by a general **discussion on stewardship**, particularly as it relates to Provincial Protected Areas. Please come prepared with your reflections and ideas. See the attached sheet for a full program, AGM agenda, and directions to the Nature Centre)

### Where Does SAPAA Go From Here? Up, Down or Sideways?

SAPAA was formed 10 years ago to provide a provincial voice for Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas, so that they could share information and expertise and work more effectively with Parks personnel. Since then, Parks and the Stewardship Program have undergone considerable reorganization (see the New Plan for Parks article). Is there still a place for SAPAA in the Protected Areas program?

The present time is critical for Alberta Stewards and their Protected Areas. The term 'Protected Areas' appears to have been dropped in the new Plan for Parks. Will Natural Areas survive? Many Natural Areas are not legally designated by Order-in-Council, but are only flagged by a Protective Notation Term. Check the Parks website for your site. If it is not there, it is under a PNT and has virtually no status.

At the recent Stewards Conference in Medicine Hat (19-20 Sept. 09), staff emphasised that if Stewards want to make a difference to the Plan for Parks or to their area's designation, they should contact their MLA and local councillors to let them know the important ecological or other characteristics of their natural area, and the need to provide sites with more protective designations and legislation.

Many individual Stewards and Steward groups are extremely effective, but a provincial body, like SAPAA, can put more pressure on the Government for the consideration of Protected Areas in the Parks system. Organizations such as the Off-Highway Vehicle Association lobby the Government for greater access and increased high-impact activities in Parks. Support for conservation and low impact use also needs to be heard!

We are inviting all Stewards, whether or not they are SAPAA members, to join us in Red Deer October 17 to discuss the future of Stewards and Protected Areas in general, and of SAPAA in particular. SAPAA could go **UP** and expand if more Stewards are willing to get involved and work on new ideas and initiatives. If this does not happen and we fail to recruit more active members, SAPAA will go **DOWN**, or perhaps **SIDEWAYS** as we struggle on with the same few volunteers, who will eventually fade into the sunset.

Alison Dinwoodie



**We need to recruit – the more the merrier**

Photo:

Photo: Linda Kershaw

## 4th National Stewardship and Conservation Conference, Calgary, July 8–11

The Visitor Services Branch of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation generously sponsored me, as a member of SAPAA, to attend the National Stewardship and Conservation Conference. This Conference has been held every 3 years since 2000. This year the key organizing groups were Alberta Environment and the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada, both in Edmonton, Alberta.

As background for the Conference, two reports had been prepared by the Centre for Environmental Stewardship And Conservation Inc. and released in March 2009: “The State of Stewardship in Canada” (40 pages) and “Review of Stewardship Programs in Canada’s Provinces and Territories” (80 pages), both available at [www.stewardship2009.ca](http://www.stewardship2009.ca).

The objective of these Conferences is to emphasize the need for conservation and to encourage environment stewardship by all segments of the public. They provide a forum for communication between government agencies at all levels, ENGOs, private groups (such as farmers’ organizations) and individuals. Conference outcomes serve as guidelines and directions for future policy developments.

Topics ranged widely, from state of the environment accounts, records of established programs, and policy planning initiatives to case studies of successful stewardship efforts. But, as a practising volunteer steward, I was disappointed to find no discussion of planning efforts to 1) establish regulations on the use of public “Protected Areas” and the enforcement thereof; or 2) document the effects of motorized recreation on land integrity.

Prominent speakers included politicians from the Alberta Government such as Ed Stelmach, (Premier), Rob Renner (Min. of Environment), and Ted Morton (Min. of Sustainable Resource Development). The keynote speaker was former leader of the Alberta Reform Party, Preston Manning, who discussed Canada’s State of the Stewardship Report.

In his presentation, Manning advocated establishment of a National Ecological Account, promoted an “Ecological Survey of Canada” modelled after the Geological Survey of Canada, and encouraged the EEELS (Ecological, Economic, Ethical, Legal, and Social) approach for all projects. He noted that there is too much fragmentation between environmental

agencies, and suggested that creation of “ecosystem super-structures” is needed for policy development.

The main outcome of the Conference will be a Stewardship Roadmap to guide Canada’s stewardship initiatives over the next decade. For abstracts, speaker bios and more, see [www.stewardship2009.ca](http://www.stewardship2009.ca). Release of the Stewardship Roadmap is expected at the end September 2009.

Hubert Taube



**The perks of being a steward! Field trips to beautiful Alberta Parks; Annual Stewards' Conf. 18-20 Sept 09**

Photo: Patsy Cotterill

## A New Plan for Parks

The new Plan for Parks was released by Minister Ady on 20 April, 2009. It created very little stir in the press, so do we take it that the Plan reflects what Albertans really want for their Parks? The new vision is *'Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.'* Note the inclusion of the word 'protect', which was lacking in the first two drafts. We are very glad to see this change. But while the Plan states that 'both objectives of recreation and conservation must be met, as they are inextricably linked', the emphasis is still predominantly on Parks as playgrounds and on providing facilities for people.

One of the main problems has always been the lack of understanding by the public and politicians of what our Parks and Protected Areas really represent. A whole spectrum of public lands has been set aside, from highly protected Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves, through popular family-oriented Provincial Parks to Provincial Recreation Areas (**PRAs**) with more intense recreational activities.

The term 'Protected Areas' has disappeared almost entirely from the new Plan. When parks are mentioned

in the Plan, the term essentially refers to Provincial Parks, (although other categories are acknowledged in a small footnote). New legislation to 'refine' (clarify?) the situation is to be forthcoming, but that will take time, which we do not have! We can only hope that the whole idea and purpose of Protected Areas does not get lost in legal verbiage.

Several public polls have been conducted. The most recent, the Praxis Summary of Albertan's Priorities for Provincial Parks, Sept. 2008, is available at <http://gateway.cd.gov.ab.ca/pubsandmedia/Praxis%20Report%20Final.pdf>. Over 90% of the respondents referred to Provincial Parks or PRAs, so it is not surprising that their ideas for 'Parks' focussed on improved facilities, more campsites for large recreation vehicles, better washrooms etc. (promoting mobile suburbia.)



**Exploring hoodoos in Writing-on-Stone,  
Annual Stewards' Conference 18-20 Sept 09**

Photo: Patsy Cotterill

Provincial Parks and PRAs account for 60 % of the total number of Parks and Protected Areas, but make up only 13% of the total area. Alberta Wildland Provincial Parks (**WPPs**), although only 6% in number, occupy 75% of the area of our Parks and Protected Areas, and this is where the real danger of new development lies. (Willmore Wilderness Park is excluded from these figures, as it is law unto itself.). WPPs are large undeveloped landscapes set aside to “preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for back country recreation.”. They are some of the last large refuges for wildlife, with

restriction to non-motorized activities and only some minor infrastructure to minimize visitor impacts. Even so, some designated trails for off-highway vehicles (**OHVs**, including snowmobiles) have been allowed in some WPPs, but this should be the exception rather than the rule.

The new Plan for Parks Strategy (#3) purports to provide recreation opportunities, in a “responsible and safe” and “inclusive” manner that includes operational policies for hunting/outfitting and motorized vehicles (i.e., OHVs) This could be applied to WPPs, unless there is clear legislation to maintain the original wildland purpose and prevent extension of OHV use.

Motorized vehicles can not be considered low-impact recreation, as they pollute and disturb wildlife and other users. They require extensive (and expensive) hardened trails, and increase access into back-country areas, thus enabling easier hunting and poaching. The inclusion of OHVs can exclude other non-motorized users whose primary purpose is enjoyment of nature, peace and quiet. The polls mentioned above, all put nature as a high priority for Parks, and very few respondents wanted more OHV access.

OHVs are increasing rapidly in numbers, and given the many incidences of abuse, land managers agree that something has to be done about them. There are many places for OHVs to go (e.g. public lands, some PRAs). Increasing the number of campsites in PRAs adjacent to public lands designated for OHV use, would allow more control of OHV activities and would decrease large random camps. This could also provide opportunities to promote “responsible” use. OHVs do not need to encroach on our increasingly valuable WPPs.

And what about our poor neglected Natural Areas? Opportunities may exist to expand some in conjunction with some larger Parks, but without very clear legislation, there is a good chance that Natural areas will quietly disappear. Although Alberta Parks still has primary responsibility for lands in their care, Regional Councils may also play a significant role under the new Land Use Framework. So, it is all the more important to make sure that municipal and county managers and MLAs understand the value of these irreplaceable remnants of our natural heritage.

In recent decades, the government has placed greater emphasis on involving the public in stewardship. But the concept of stewardship is changing. For example, it now includes initiatives like Trail Care. OHV groups are only too happy to take care of trails in back-country

wildlands and thus assume “ownership” in these areas, but Wildland Parks should be considered unsuitable for motorized activities.

The new Plan for Parks is somewhat better than the original proposal. However, having Parks designed to meet the needs of people and wildlife, does not mean that Parks are also for machines. We need to ensure that the Minister understands this. “Finding the right balance” does not mean whittling away at the 4% of the province dedicated as Provincial Parks and Protected Areas, when 60% of the land area is already available for motorized recreation use in disturbed public lands. The Sustainable Resources Department needs to take a lead on this, and not just dump the problem on Alberta Parks! Concerned citizens must be constantly vigilant about what is happening behind closed doors, so we call upon all stewards and interested members of the public to provide us with feedback and keep us informed!

Alison Dinwoodie (6 May 2009)

### **Protected Areas Behind the Oil Curtain**

At last year’s AGM on 18 October 2008, Dr. Kevin Timoney gave an excellent presentation entitled “Protected Areas Behind the Oil Curtain.” It was based on his years of experience in Alberta as an environmental consultant, including many studies commissioned by the Alberta government.

Timoney began his presentation with some good news. 14,000 ha (approx. 220 quarter sections) have been added to Alberta’s Protected Areas in the last 3 years. Some of the most noteworthy sites are the OH Ranch Heritage Rangeland; the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park; Eagle Point Provincial Park and Blue Rapids Provincial Park (from reorganization of Natural Areas near Drayton Valley); and an exchange of lands from the Bruderheim Natural Areas for lands near Miquelon and Hastings Lakes.

Timoney then discussed a long list of threats to the Protected Areas system. Some of the most important included lack of provincial management; petroleum, natural gas and seismic activities; grazing, herbicide use and fire issues; and finally OHV use and trans-boundary pollution. He concluded on a sober note regarding the future. He believes that if current trends continue, the harm done to natural lands will be irreversible. For a complete set of presentation notes go to [www.sapaa.fanweb.ca](http://www.sapaa.fanweb.ca). Hubert Taube

### **Communication Problems!**

A Listserve was set up a few years ago through yahoo groups.ca. by Rod Olstad to allow better communication with fellow SAPAA members. This has been used sporadically, mainly by the Secretary passing on information, but there has been little or no response and it has not resulted in an increased flow of messages.

There appears to have been a problem with the group site as the group 'sapaa' no longer exists. We had discussed updating our communication systems and had hoped to have a speaker for the AGM to bring us up to date with more modern ways of 'messaging' for the more technophobic types, but were unable to find a suitable speaker.

If anyone has more information and expertise on the subject, please contact a member of the Executive as soon as possible - we need some help! With so much going on these days, it is crucial that we improve our contacts with members to keep everyone in the loop!



**Canadian Toad, Ghost Horse Hills**

Photo: Richard DeSmet

“We are the keepers of the earth, down here in the dirt with every living thing at our mercy. For a moment in the wind, you and I, my friend, are given all this power and this glory.”

Gary Fjellgard, *The Falcon and the Cowboy*

## Graminoids Part III – GRASSES

Along with sedges and rushes, grasses are a major group in the grass-like plants or “graminoids”. Graminoids all have long, linear leaves and small, inconspicuous flowers which often green or brown. All are Monocotyledons, and therefore have seedlings with a single seed leaf or cotyledon. However, the flowers of these 3 groups differ in structure, and so they are placed in separate families. In members of the Grass Family (Poaceae, formerly Gramineae) the tiny flowers or **florets** are borne in **spikelets**. Depending on the species, spikelets can have one to many florets and plants can have one to many spikelets. Within the Grass Family, clusters of spikelets (inflorescences) range from linear spikes to diffuse, branched clusters known as a panicles.

Each grass floret typically consists of two scale-like bracts, an outer **lemma** and an inner **palea**, which enclose the ovary and 3 (or rarely one) stamens. When fertilized the ovary, which has three feathery styles, develops into a single-seeded fruit or grain (technically a caryopsis). Two more bracts called **glumes** are found at the base of the spikelet. The **first** (lower) and **second** (upper) **glumes** often differ in shape and size.

Grass stems are round in cross-section, and are usually hollow, except at the points where the leaves are attached, called **nodes**. This contrasts with the typically solid, three-sided stems of sedges. The lower portion of the leaf encircles the stem as a cylindrical **sheath**; the upper portion or **blade** may grow vertically or at a wider angle to the stem. Grasses growing in shady woodlands tend to have broader, more outspreading blades than the typically narrow, more erect leaves of species growing in sunny grasslands. Grass leaves are attached in two rows (ranks) along the stem, in contrast to the three-ranked arrangement of sedge leaves. Many grasses have a flap of tissue or fringe of hairs, called a **ligule**, on the inside of the leaf, where the blade joins the sheath. Ligules vary greatly in size, shape and texture and can be a useful feature for identification, especially when other features such as mature spikelets are absent.

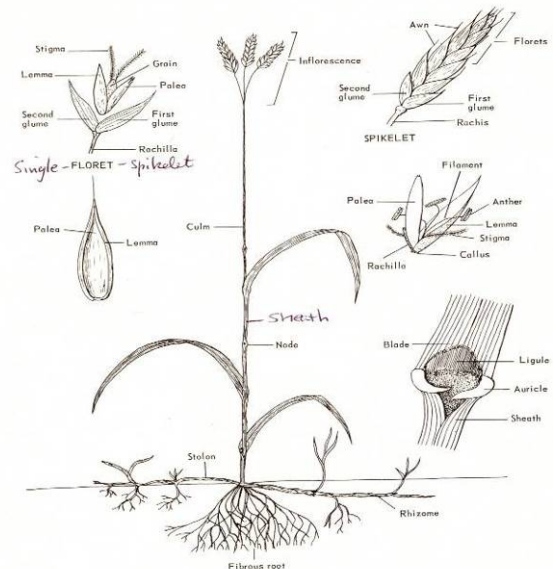
The grasses are a large and economically important group. Corn and grains are all grasses. The grass family is divided into sub-families, then into tribes, and finally into genera and species. Until recently, the grasses in our Prairie region included eight major tribes, but taxonomic research has resulted in the creation of new tribes, the reassignment of genera within tribes, and various name changes. This should not prevent you from identifying a grass to species, but you will find discrepancies in names and classification between the old and new treatments, especially if you are searching for information online.

Many grasses can be recognized by eye in the field, so using illustrations for identification is an option. Unfortunately, not all drawings and photographs are good enough to permit easy identification, so it's a good

idea to check as many sources as you can. If you're serious about getting to know your grasses, you might consult Volumes 24 and 25 of *Flora of North America*, available in the reference section of academic libraries or online at <http://herbarium.usu.edu/grassmanual/>. These volumes provide the latest taxonomic treatment, plus distribution maps and many good drawings. Simply ignore those species that do not occur in Alberta.

Some grass species can only be identified by examining them under magnification. A 10x hand lens is a good investment, or better still, a dissecting microscope, which leaves your hands free to manipulate specimens and practice using keys. Indeed, *all* plants deserve a closer look under magnification.

Another good way to narrow down your options for identification is to learn what grows in the particular habitats of your Natural Area or Park. Most plants are typically true to habitat, even when they have a wide range of distribution. For example, you can expect to find slough grass (*Beckmannia syzigachne*) and tall manna grass (*Glyceria grandis*) in freshwater wetlands and riparian habitats; Foxtail Barley (*Hordeum jubatum*) and Salt grass (*Distichlis spicata*) in saline wetlands and lake shores; June Grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) and Sand Grass (*Calamovilfa longifolia*) on sandy soils; wheat grasses (*Agropyron* species) and the needle-and-thread or porcupine grasses (*Stipa* species) in grasslands; and Drooping Wood Reed (*Cinna latifolia*) and Bluejoint Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*) in moist forests (Bluejoint also occurs on shores and in marshes). Non-native pasture grasses such as Kentucky Bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) and smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) are found in association with disturbed lands. A different suite of species occurs in a specialized habitat such as the alpine.



Structure of a grass - From Budd & Best, 1964. *Wild Plants of the Canadian Prairies*



Slough Grass (*Beckmannia syzigachne*), is characteristic of shallow marshes



Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) is very common on moist ground around marshes and in ditches



Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*), abundant in southern grasslands and on well-drained soils farther north



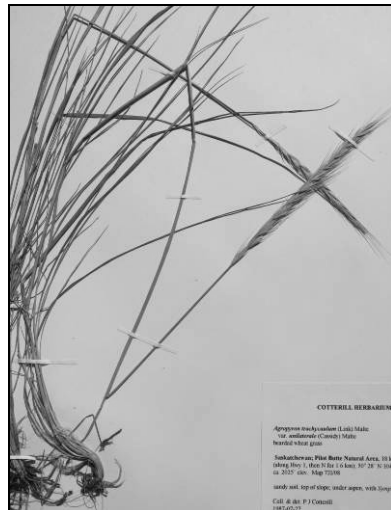
Foxtail Barley (*Hordeum jubatum*) forms extensive patches on saline shores and in meadows



Drooping Wood Reed (*Cinna latifolia*), is a tall, green, broad-leaved grass of moist woods



Smooth Brome (*Bromus inermis*) was introduced as a forage grass, and is now a widespread weed



This herbarium specimen of Slender Wheat Grass (*Agropyron trachycaulum*) shows spikelets in spikes

Photos by P. Cotterill & L. Kershaw