

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

## NEWSLETTER NO. 22, MAY 2010

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### Upcoming Events

Come and join us at our **SAPAA AGM, Saturday, October 23, 2010**. Our annual get-together will take place in the **Edmonton** area this year, at a venue still to be arranged. Our guest speaker for the day's program will be **Rebecca Reeves**, a staff member with Alberta Parks focusing on the new Land Use Framework (LUF). She will update us on progress being made with LUF, with special reference to Protected Areas.

### Field Trips

We are looking at two field trips this summer, both north of Edmonton.

**Gertie Meyer** will lead a trip to **Bilby Natural Area**, near Onoway, on Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>. Contact Alison Dinwoodie (780-437-7183) for details. This field trip will provide an opportunity for some hands-on management, as Gertie has a problem with scentless chamomile in her area.

**Hubert Taube**, will lead a field trip to **Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area** on Saturday, August 7<sup>th</sup>. Hubert suggests a couple of meeting points for car-pooling; one in Edmonton at the J. Percy Page Centre, 11759 Groat Road, at 9 a.m., and the other at Tim Horton's, on the east side of Highway 21, at the south end of the City of Fort Saskatchewan, at 10 a.m. Contact Hubert at 780-483-7306 for more details closer to the time.

### SAPAA Board Members

Feel free to contact any of our board members on stewardship issues or concerns:

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### Stewardship Issues and Concerns

#### *Road Widening at J.J. Collett N.A.*

JJ Collett Natural Area is one of the few remnants of native parkland in central Alberta. Lacombe Co. wants to widen the road east of the Natural Area, taking a 5 m strip within the fence and more at a large sand hill in the way. The road connects a proposed subdivision to the county line road to the north and to Milton Road to the south, so much more traffic is anticipated in the future. Parks Planning intervened with easement requirements at a hearing about a year ago, so perhaps the county and the developer shouldn't be surprised that the road widening could pose problems. Mr. Lodemeier, the Operations Manager, has said that the road is in poor condition, and is somewhat dangerous due to dust and washboard. He feels that the County is in a tough spot, not knowing whether to proceed. Lacombe County did a rare plant inventory, which was forwarded to the JJ Collett Foundation. CRD gave the go ahead for the road widening, but Parks rescinded this. Parks wants proof that the widening is needed.

We stewards always seem to be the last to hear about projects like this, and we've been relegated to a watch-only position. What, if anything, can we do about the rare plants and communities. We have the report, but we need to speak to it with first hand authority. Does anyone have time for a little field trip? **Gail Hughes**

#### *Wagner N.A.S. Negotiates Water Issue*

Through a mediation process, the Wagner Natural Area Society recently negotiated changes to a development proposal that would have been harmful to the hydrology of Wagner Natural Area. Consor Developers Inc. proposed a development and storm-water management area in the Acheson Industrial Area south of the Natural Area. This would have caused additional water from run off to flow into a creek through the Wagner property, increasing erosion along the stream and reducing recharge of the groundwater that supplies Wagner's fens and marl ponds. Congratulations to the negotiating teams, including reps from Consor Developers, Parkland County, and the Wagner Society (with lawyer Jennifer Klimek), for finding an outcome that is acceptable to all parties! **Patsy Cotterill**

## A Snapshot of Hastings Lake N.A.

This week, the aspens began flushing green, a full month ahead of last year's schedule. Then the Sandhill Cranes started flying over by the 1000s. It was time for a spring walk in our Natural Area. We had enjoyed a ski across the lake in January, but for me spring is the magical season - the time of hope and wonder.

When we visit our Natural Area in the spring, we always find lots of activity in local residents and wide array of new arrivals to the forest, wetlands and lake.



As long as there are squirrels, you need never be lonely

The Hastings Lake Natural Area (PA Site 472) is a 62 ha (153 acre) Natural Area on the north shore of Hastings Lake, 30 minutes east of Sherwood Park. Its legal land description is Twp 51 Rge 20 W4: SE29 and the latitude/longitude co-ordinates are 53 25.74 N, 112 54.48' W. The site was first reserved for recreation 1962, on the recommendation of the Public Lands Div. inspector. Then, in 1963, the local MLA requested that it be used for a county park. A recreation lease was granted to the County of Strathcona in 1964. In 1970, the site was referred to the provincial Natural Areas Committee, and in 1971 it was made a holding reservation (HLR4) for a possible Natural Area. Finally, in 1974, the area was designated as a Natural Area with Protective Notation (PNT).



Hastings Lake Natural Area map

The Hastings Lake Natural Area (PNT) currently has 3 stewards, of which Pete and I are two. We first became stewards in 1991, as part of our Junior Forest Warden Group, the Hastings Lake Hyper Hikers. Our active, family-based group had about 12 kids and 12 parents. Everyone was interested in natural history and loved hiking, canoeing, bird-watching and other outdoor activities. As stewards of a Natural Area, we learned to appreciate the importance of stewardship, and found ways to protect and preserve some of the natural environment in our rural neighbourhood. Each year we hiked through the site together, learning about the plants and animals, cleaning up garbage and reporting to the Volunteer Stewards Coordinator. Over the years, the kids grew up, families drifted away, and gradually our group hikes ended. Pete and I live a couple of kilometres from the lake, so we continued to canoe/walk/ski there, occasionally submitting reports.



Rolling hills are most easily seen along the gas pipeline corridor

The Hastings Lake Natural Area lies in the Cooking Lake Moraine or Beaver Hills. This area is part of the Dry Mixedwood Subregion of the Boreal Natural Region. Most of the site is covered by mature poplar stands. The moraine has undulating terrain, with rolling hills and numerous depressions, so vegetation varies greatly over short distances, ranging from small marshes in depressions to balsam poplar stands in slightly higher areas and then aspen stands on well-drained uplands. In the southeastern corner of the site, there is a beautiful little spruce bog and Hastings Lake lies along the southern edge of the site.

Most of the marshes are shallow, and have surface water only the spring and early summer. Vegetation is dominated by bluejoint reedgrass and other moisture-loving plants. In some of the larger wetlands, sedges blanket wetter areas and willows and paper birches provide cover for many birds and mammals.

Most of the Hastings Lake Natural Area is wooded. The forest is dominated by balsam poplar in low-lying areas and by trembling aspen on well-drained uplands, with the occasional white spruce. The woodland has a diverse, multi-tiered understory, with a mix of tall shrubs (beaked hazelnut, chokecherry, saskatoon, red-

osier dogwood), low shrubs (wild roses, snowberries, low bush-cranberry) and non-woody plants (wild strawberries, tall lungwort, bunchberry)



Gooseberry & aspen are among the first with green leaves

The black spruce bog near the southeastern corner of the natural area, is one of the site's more unusual features. Feathermosses and sphagnum blanket the ground in this small fragment of boreal forest. Bog cranberry/lingonberry, cloudberry, and Labrador-tea are also common.

Because of its diverse habitat and its location on the shore of Hastings Lake, the Natural Area provides excellent wildlife habitat. Moose, deer, coyotes, hares, porcupines, beavers, muskrats, red squirrels, voles and deer mice are all abundant. We've also sighted or seen signs of flying squirrels, skunks, short-tailed weasels and red foxes. Recently, black bears and cougars have been reported from nearby, but we have yet to spot them in the Natural Area.



Water levels may be low, but the pelicans are back!

The bird life is especially diverse. Mature poplars provide nesting habitat for Pileated Woodpeckers, Great-horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, Swainson's Hawks and Goshawks. Bald Eagles perch in tall trees near the shore, hunting for ducks during spring and fall migrations. Hastings Lake supports a wide range of waterfowl, and includes Gull, Cormorant, Pelican and Heron colonies. All of these birds can be seen along the shore during the spring and summer, along with lots of ducks, grebes and geese.

Land-use has varied slightly over the years. The area is under a grazing permit to a local farmer, but because of the dense shrubby understorey, cattle rarely venture far into the Natural Area. In the 1990s, a quad trail along the gas pipeline was used by hunters in the fall, but fallen trees and sprouting aspens and willows have restricted use of the route. When we first became stewards, we often had to clean up garbage in the grassy opening by the lake, but Strathcona County installed a couple of sturdy gates across the access trails, and this put an end to the bush parties. Today, visitors to the Hastings Lake Natural Area often arrive via the lake, in boats during summer and on snowmobiles in winter. We appreciate the way that most visitors respect the land, and leave the local residents to live in peace.

Linda Kershaw



A young moose looks on as we wander along his trail

**Now, it's your turn!** We hope this will be the first of many articles about protected areas in Alberta. **Do you have some interesting information and/or photos to share about your special protected area?** If so, we'd love to hear from you. Please send text and photos to our editor Patsy Cotterill (nutmeg@planet.eon.net) or mail your article to SAPAA c/o Linda Kershaw, 51163 Range Road 204, Sherwood Park, AB T8G 1E5.

SAPPA is busy developing a new and improved website, that will have more information about Alberta's protected areas. With the help of our stewards, we hope to spread the word about the wide array of stewardship sites in Alberta, and the special features that can be found in each. Look for more about this in our next newsletter!

## Stewardship and SAPAA: What Does The Future Hold?

Much has been happening since our last newsletter (September 2009). Some major activities behind the scenes will likely affect many Stewards, and there have been issues with some specific Natural Areas.

### *AGM, 2009*

Last October at the SAPAA AGM in Red Deer, we enjoyed an excellent presentation by Richard DeSmet. Through a talk entitled 'Keepers of the Earth,' Richard shared his experiences as a Steward with the Rainbow Equitation Society of Halfmoon Lake Natural Area in the Ghost Horse Hills area. He showed a couple of excellent short videos about the Ghost Horse Hills and examples of what Stewards can do.

In the following discussions, we were inspired to look at how we, as Stewards, could give a higher profile to Protected Areas under *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act (WAERNAHR)*, and to unprotected Natural Areas in particular. One main action should be to expand our local contacts and get more people involved in order to build more public awareness. Public presentations, with photographs and videos, can have a direct impact. Richard and his wife, Vera, are willing to help with others' productions. For **keen photographers among our Stewards, videos and photo presentations are a great way to showcase their Protected Areas**. If you are interested in doing this but need help, please call Alison at (780) 437-7183.

### *Changes to Parks and Protected Areas*

The Parks Division of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) has released details of their public consultations. Keep your eyes on [www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/default.aspx](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/default.aspx) more info. Several Provincial Recreation Areas, mainly small underused or poorly maintained campsites, have either been closed or transferred to local authorities. In some Parks, fragments have been consolidated (Lac La Biche), boundaries have been adjusted (Rock Lake), and lands have been exchanged (Bow River).

### *Regional Park Plans & Land Use Framework*

The future of Protected Areas will probably be determined by the new Regional Parks Plans, which TPR is preparing (independently), but which will also have to conform with plans of Sustainable Resources Development (SRD), and the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) within the Land Use Framework. New legislation under the *Public Lands Act*, currently under way (also under SRD), will eventually lead to

regulations which are required for more effective enforcement. Meanwhile, time marches on!

### *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*

It is important for all Stewards to be aware of what is happening in their watershed region. Check the maps in the LUF report to find your region (available at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca)). The Upper Athabasca and North Saskatchewan Councils will be getting under way soon. A large number of Natural Areas occur in these two regions, so there may be opportunities for some consolidation under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA)*. This Act was passed last year and gives legal teeth to the RACs. It also amends at least 27 other Acts (including *PPA* and *WAERNAHR*), to provide consistency and direction to all regions. See [www.landuse.alberta.ca/AlbertaLandStewardshipAct](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/AlbertaLandStewardshipAct) for more details.

*ALSA* provides some tools for 'conservation', but only one, a **conservation directive**, focuses on ecologically sensitive and valued landscapes (e.g., Protected Areas and 'Environmentally Sensitive Areas'; check out [www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/heritageinfocentre/enviro nsigareas/](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/heritageinfocentre/enviro nsigareas/)) for more info. This could be used in conjunction with land easements from private owners such as the Nature Conservancy and the Alberta Conservation Association, to form larger 'Conservancy Areas'. Find info about Conservation sites in your area at [www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/](http://www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/index.cfm/)). If development results in the loss of Protected Areas, there have to be off-sets of equal or greater value, as mitigation.

### *Guarding the Future!*

SAPAA and individual Stewards have to look at the bigger picture. Local groups can be extremely effective, but with all this reorganization, we need to act together synergistically. The Parks Division of TPR is not in a position of strength, and needs all the support and positive suggestions that we can give them. At the Stewards Conference last fall, it was suggested that if we don't keep stressing conservation/protection, Parks may not be able to keep this as a priority.

As a stakeholder group, SAPAA can provide input directly to the RACs, but to do this we need information from Stewards. We've started to compile an inventory of provincial Protected Areas under *WAERNAHR*, including the Protective Notation Terms (PNT) Natural Areas. PNT sites are not listed on the Parks website because they have never been recognized by Order-in-Council. Consequently, most Albertans don't know that they exist. If we can gather enough info about these scattered areas, it will help us to

illustrate the importance of Protected Areas and to focus to our position and presentations.

So, to all Stewards, we challenge you to **dust off the information in the Handbook for your area (which you should have received when you became a Steward), add info that you have gathered (a few good digital photos would be great!) and send it to a SAPAA Board member** to help us compile info about your area. Here are a few more ways that you can take action to **increase awareness of your area:**

- Form a local group, wherever possible. Talk to your neighbours to get their understanding and support.
- Talk to your land managers (Public Lands, SRD, Conservation Officers, etc.).
- Talk to your local councillors and particularly your MLA, and ask for their support. Follow up with an email or letter so you have a record.
- Give the various officials facts and photos. Include any concerns you have (e.g. local development, OHV problems, etc.) Invite them out for a walk in your Area to demonstrate its potential.

• Raise awareness; write letters to the local newspaper.

'Stewardship' is changing. More types of stewardship are being promoted by government, to save money and reduce their responsibilities. These include Trail Stewards (often OHV associations), Campground Hosts, 'Friends' of specific areas, and Cooperating Associations who help to raise funds. There is strength in numbers, so, if you are not currently a member, **join SAPAA now**, and persuade other Stewards to do so. If we want our Stewardship activities to have influence, **we need to combine forces!**

### ***Final question!***

Are you willing to step forward and lend a hand as a SAPAA Board member? We would love more help! Contact any of the Board members listed on page 1 for more information. **Alison Dinwoodie**



**Tiny kidney-leaf violet, is one of our earliest wildflowers**



**It must be spring. The chorus frogs are singing again!**

## **AB Parks Stewards' Conference, 2009**

The annual Stewards Conference hosted by Alberta Parks took place on 09 September 2009 in Lethbridge. Everyone appreciated the successful efforts of the Parks' Stewards Program to reward us with an enjoyable weekend, including a relaxing bus trip to the conference. Even campers got free bus shuttle service to the Park Lake campground! On Saturday, we enjoyed a pleasant (and unusually hot!) day, exploring Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Sunday morning only was devoted to concurrent indoor sessions, which gave us little time to learn more about what is happening in our Parks. Doug Marvin, Head of Stewardship Services, provided some useful updates in his Stewards Session, but if you attended this, you had to miss other sessions of equal interest. While it was very pleasant to have a day's recreation in one of our province's most spectacular parks, the conference is a rare opportunity for Stewards to get together to discuss what they could be doing in their areas, or to learn more about what to look for.

**Congratulations to Gertie Meyer**, winner of the **Individual Steward's Award** at the Conference. She is one of the unsung supporters of the Stewards Program, and has been working away for over 17 years at Bilby NA. I was pleased to make contact with her, and hear about her area, which like so many others, has the usual problems with OHVs and invasive weeds. I assured her she was not alone! All the more reason to try and work together! **Alison Dinwoodie**

## **Please respond to our questionnaire!**

SAPAA's usefulness and vitality depends upon its ability to communicate successfully with as many provincial stewards as possible. The SAPAA Board needs input from you, so that it can serve your needs. As Alison points out in her article, this is especially important when we are in a time of flux with regard to Parks and Protected Areas, and when the conservation of ecologically important land is being negotiated as part of the Regional Plans for the Land Use Framework. **Please complete and return the questionnaire and be liberal with your suggestions** as to how SAPAA should operate for the benefit of Stewards, and encourage the recruitment of a wider network of stewardship.

## Thanks for completing this survey

Please return the questionnaire online ([red20@telus.net](mailto:red20@telus.net)) or by regular mail (SAPAA, c/o L. Kershaw, 51163 Range Road 204, Sherwood Park, AB T8G 1E5)

Please circle your answers.

### Newsletters

- Do you read SAPAA's newsletters? Yes No
- How often would you like to see a newsletter produced? 1 2 3 4 times per year
- Have you ever contributed an article to the newsletter? Yes No
- Would you be willing to contribute to the newsletter? Yes No
- Do you feel that a newsletter is the most effective way to keep stewards informed? Yes No  
If not, is there an alternative that you would suggest? \_\_\_\_\_

### Internet

- Do you own or have access to a computer? Yes No
- How often do you use a computer for personal use? Daily Weekly Monthly
- Do you have a personal email address? Yes No
- Do you have other internet accounts? FaceBook My Space Blogging Site Online Forum Twitter

### Other

- Do you attend SAPAA Workshops and/or Annual General Meetings? Yes No
- What topics would you like to read/learn about: Advocacy Government Policy Hosting Events  
Best Practices Case Studies Nature Other \_\_\_\_\_
- It is widely accepted that meeting people in person is the most effective way to communicate. Would you attend regional meetings of stewards in your area? Yes No  
Would you be willing to host/organize such a meeting in your area? Yes No
- Would you attend an information workshop sometime in the next two months in Edmonton on "The Types of Electronic Media Available and How To Use Them Effectively"? Yes No
- Do you feel SAPAA meets your needs as a provincial steward? Yes No  
Please comment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you want to receive occasional information from SAPAA about news, Parks Updates, items of concern, notices of other meetings, field trips, etc? Yes No  
If no, how can SAPAA serve you better? Suggestions please! \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Your Protected Area \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_