

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

## NEWSLETTER NO. 28, JUNE 2013

### Parkland NA: A Water Wonder

The name Parkland is a misnomer for this Natural Area. It may cause you to envision open spaces interspersed with clumps of aspens, but what really comes to mind as you wander the area is "Beaver Maze Natural Area", where the only open spaces are due to excessive water. Here is a good example of our national symbol taking full advantage of a wet year in the knob and kettle topography of the Cooking Lake Moraine to utilize every pond available. All that water, combined with aspen poplar bluffs in higher areas and scattered balsam poplar, white spruce, larch and birch trees elsewhere, results in an extensive, biologically diverse complex of wetlands and uplands.



One of the dozens of wetlands that dot Parkland NA H.Trefry

The Parkland Natural Area covers one full section between Highway 14, Secondary Highway 530 and Wye Road, east of Sherwood Park, straddling the Strathcona County/Beaver County boundary. The Fort Saskatchewan Naturalists Society (FSNS) assumed co-stewardship of the area in 2012. Since then, members have observed the use and, occasionally, abuse of the area. Issues recorded in site reports have been similar over the past 20 years, dealing mainly with concerns over too much and too little access.



Quad damage in one small wet area in the NA H.Trefry

Until the mid-1980s access was confined to devoted naturalists, as the entire perimeter had been fenced by Alberta Parks. In the 1990s, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails proliferated, with hunters accessing the area along trails and cut-lines created prior to the site being declared a natural area. Short fences were installed on the west and east sides of the area and these reduced traffic. Alas, stewards found that as the trails re-vegetated hiking became much more difficult. Sometimes you just can't keep everyone happy!



Bird watching from the pipeline right-of-way L.Kershaw

ATV concerns reappeared about 5 years ago, when the ATCO gas pipeline right-of-way was cleared, running west-east through the Natural Area. In the past 20 years there has been a marked increase in the number of local residents with quads and with no place to take them except public lands. Consequently, some head for the Natural Area. The pipeline route crosses five permanent wetlands, and these have received the most abuse. The right-of-way has also become a favorite spot for hunters, even though it is only 140 m from the road. This spring, a man hunting crows or squirrels and randomly shooting along the pipeline was reported to the RCMP.



Mature aspen forest covers most of the uplands L.Kershaw

The removal of beavers by the county has been an issue in the past. Also, removal of signs is an ongoing problem, along with garbage dumping and occasional party trash. The FSNS is working to replace the signs and keep the area tidy. In the absence of stewards, trash has often been cleaned up by concerned citizens.



Wood frogs & bluebells are common in the spring L.Kershaw

When the FSNS held a field trip this May, we were greatly assisted by nearby residents Josh and Danielle Cunnings, who guided us through the maze of hills and wetlands. We discovered that we can navigate much of the area using a system of human and game trails. Although we covered less than half of the area and it was a windy overcast day, we located 44 species of birds. Geoff Holroyd entered these species in E-bird <http://ebird.org>, so the records are now available to everyone. Waterfowl was especially abundant. The duck boxes installed by Ducks Unlimited about 10 years are no longer maintained, but many remain standing and Bufflehead were common. Eastern Kingbirds, Red-throated Grebes and Horned Grebes were observed on ponds, while Baltimore Orioles were calling and mating. Based on previous stewards' reports, Red-tailed Hawks have nested in the area for decades, and they continue to do so. Great Horned Owls were heard earlier in the year, and in early May a Goshawk was seen carrying a Richardson's Ground Squirrel into the Natural Area, suggesting nesting.



Plains Garter Snakes were discovered this spring H.Trefry

Beaver, muskrat, moose and deer were observed at close range. Prairie garter snakes were seen in the northeastern corner early this spring, a sighting at the northern edge of their range. Many animals are easily observed from the roads that border three sides of the Parkland Natural Area, making it a great wildlife-viewing spot for those with mobility issues.

Despite the late spring, Linda Kershaw compiled a list of 73 vascular plants within the Natural Area. One highlight was the discovery of a large population of a rare aquatic liverwort, Crystalwort (*Riccia fluitans*). The rare fern, Crested Shieldfern (*Dryopteris cristata*), is also known to grow in a small fen in the area, but there was no sign of it yet this May.

To summarize, the Parkland Natural Area is generally in good shape, except for the pipeline/ATV route. Together with the Parks Division of Alberta Recreation and Parks and ATCO, the FSNS plans to use signage and strategic fencing to control ATV traffic. Signs identifying the land as Parkland Natural Area will help local residents, who use the area to hunt, hike, bird-watch, snowshoe, skate and watch wildlife, to put a name to the land and recognize it as something special, rather than just "that piece of bush".

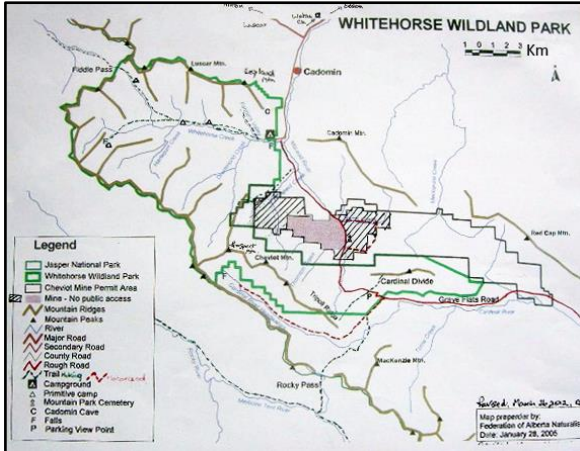


Neighbours play hockey on a NA slough by the road H.Trefry  
Helen Trefry & Lucille Horne

## Update on Whitehorse WPP and Area

As many of you are aware, the Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park surrounds the Cheviot and Prospect open-pit coal mines on three sides, with the public Grave Flats Road, south of Cadomin, as the fourth side. Although active mining on the east side of the road will continue for several years yet, the two west pits are expected to be finished within the next couple of years. Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) users are already pushing for renewed access to Prospect Creek and Drummond Ridge. The whole area, particularly Prospect Creek, is recognized as an important ecologically sensitive area with a wide diversity of wildlife and many unusual plants. Premature arrangements for OHV access would severely jeopardize the long term viability of the

Whitehorse WPP, both for ecological and wildlife concerns. In addition, it could also compromise Cardinal River Operations' (Teck Coal Ltd.) efforts to reclaim the land and mitigate the impacts of their mine. The situation has changed markedly, geographically and ecologically since the original Access Management Plan of 1994. Hills are now holes (mine-pits!) and the original ecosystems are long gone. Consequently, recreational access needs to be reassessed.



OHV traffic can create permanent damage by killing slow-growing plants, increasing erosion in this fragile environment and disturbing wildlife over a wide area. Damage has multiplied by a marked (at least 10-fold) increase in OHV users in the last 10-15 years. Adequate enforcement is impossible because the Park boundaries are non-existent and staff is extremely limited. Past experience in the area has shown that OHV users ignore signs and regulations in the WWP, particularly with illegal access along Drummond Ridge, on upper alpine slopes of Prospect, Cheviot and Thornton Creeks and on the Cardinal Divide Ridge.



I. Hodson, A. Dinwoodie, H. Anderson and P. Cotterill surveying plants at the Divide Photo supplied by A. Dinwoodie

Recreational access plans need to address regional concerns, rather than trying to meet individual demands. We are suggesting that a solution to improve the post-mining rehabilitation of the Prospect-Cheviot

Creek mine disturbance would be to **designate the Grave Flats Road as the boundary between non-motorized recreation (i.e. hiking, horseback riding and hunting, as at present ) on the west side and motorized traffic on the east side of the road.** This clearly recognizable boundary would also result in better public understanding and compliance, and would allow more practical enforcement of the regulations.

**Please show your support** for this proposal by writing to your MLA and:

Andy Van Imschoot, Regional Director, West Central Region, Tourism Parks and Recreation, #1, 250 Diamond Avenue Spruce Grove, AB T7X 4C7; andy.vanimschoot@gov.ab.ca

Brent Schleppe, Area Manager, Foothills Area, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, #107, 1<sup>st</sup> fl. Provincial Building, 111 54 St., Edson, AB. T7E 1T2; brent.schleppe@gov.ab.ca

Sharad Karmacharya, Land Management Planner, Environment & Sustainable Resource Development, 3<sup>rd</sup> fl. Civic Centre, 131 Civic Centre Road, Hinton, AB T7V 2E6; sharad.karmacharya@gov.ab.ca

**Alison Dinwoodie**

## Whitehorse Wildland Wildflower Guide

In SAPAA's continuing attempts to create a popular wildflower guide to this area, we will be organizing three more field trips to the Cadomin-Cardinal Divide area this summer on the following dates.

**June 13-17** (Thursday–Monday)

**July 12-15** (Friday–Monday)

**August 15-18** (Thursday–Sunday)



Eight-petal mountain-avens (*Dryas octopetala*) L. Kershaw

Camping is available at Watson Creek campground north of Cadomin, at Whitehorse Creek Recreation Area to the south of this, and in Cadomin itself at the Cadomin Motel (780)692-3663. **Alison Dinwoodie** would like to know if you plan to attend at these times or at other times. For more information, and/or for an

information sheet on the guide project, including a priority list of flower photos wanted, call Alison at (780)437-7183 or email [adinwoodie@shaw.ca](mailto:adinwoodie@shaw.ca)

## Wagner Natural Area Update

The Acheson Industrial Area Structure Plan was supposed to designate lands south of Wagner as a Special Study Area within the plan for industrial development. However, the plan did not receive the necessary approval from the Capital Region Board and the land, including the groundwater recharge area, remains zoned for agriculture. Nevertheless, Parkland County is going ahead with the special studies. Their goals are to determine an adequate buffer for the Natural Area, identify an appropriate transition of land uses away from the Natural Area, and recommend appropriate land use in the groundwater recharge zone.



Jones' Pond, Wagner Natural Area Photo P.Cotterill

The Wagner Society launched its new self-guiding trail guide for the 1.2 km Marl Pond Trail on 2 June 2013, to coincide with the start of Environment Week. After 25 years, it was time to relocate some of the original posts and make relevant changes in the guide text.



Bog Violet (*Viola nephrophylla*) Photo P.Cotterill

Restoration has begun in one of Wagner's southern fields this spring, with the creation of "eco-islands" of native vegetation. Also, in mid-June we are planting white spruce seedlings for two of our northern fields undergoing succession, courtesy of The Carbon Farmer (Brad Rabiey) and his clients. **Patsy Cotterill**

## Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve Nomination Update

In March, SAPAA, along with other supporting organizations, was advised that the Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI) proposal did not gain the support of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for onward submission to the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The BHI plans to resubmit its proposal next year, after addressing the Commission's recommendations, which include demonstrating more engagement and involvement from local First Nations groups, the general public and youth. – **from a letter by BHI Chair, Guy Swinnerton**

## Upcoming Stewards' Meeting

Last summer, Alberta Parks held an informative stewards conference at Hastings Lake Hall, just east of Edmonton. Then in September, stewards enjoyed an excellent weekend of field trips in fine fall weather at a conference in Grande Cache, gateway to Willmore Wilderness Park.

Now, stewards are invited to another day-long meeting, this time in Edmonton, on **Saturday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>**, at Inglewood Community Hall, 12525 - 116 Avenue, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The meeting will update us on what has been happening with the Division and the Department (Tourism, Parks & Recreation) and some of the ongoing work. Lunch will be provided, but please advise Coral Grove of any special dietary needs. **Please RSVP to Coral by Friday June 14<sup>th</sup>** at [coral.grove@gov.ab.ca](mailto:coral.grove@gov.ab.ca) or phone (780) 427-8515.



Spectacular scenery in Willmore Wilderness Park L.Kershaw

## SAPAA Meeting This Fall

Be sure to mark **Saturday, 19 October 2013** on your calendar, for SAPAA's annual workshop/AGM at the Kerry Wood Nature Centre in Red Deer. Tara Narwani, Communications Manager and Science Communicator for the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, will be a featured speaker.