

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

## NEWSLETTER NO. 31, MARCH 2015

### Alberta Park's Volunteer's Conference 19-21 September 2014

This year's conference was held at Cold Lake, within sight of Saskatchewan. Participants stayed at the Lakeland Inn or camped at Cold Lake PP under sunny blue skies in the day and starlight with a hint of aurora at night. The campground was also the location for the "meet and greet" on Friday night with an informative and entertaining presentation about statistics on a variety of wildlife species – their body dimensions, maximum speed, distance they can jump, etc. The take-home message – you can't outmaneuver them, just don't put yourself in their personal space.



**Helen & her tent on a perfect fall day at the campground** Saturday, after a satisfying breakfast at Lakeland Inn, we boarded busses for local tours. Our driver gave us a guided tour through Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake that included a history of the base and the local community. After that we enjoyed a very informative visit to the Cold Lake Fish Hatchery, where we learned about the process and techniques of raising fish to restock Alberta water bodies. Discussions included issues around rearing fish and problems with providing stocks of healthy, vigorous hybrid varieties to natural and artificial water bodies for anglers to enjoy.



Eggs to fry to fish, at the Cold Lake Fish Hatchery

After a bag lunch we visited the Cold Lake Air Force Museum, housed in one of the radar installations that were central to the defense of North America during the Cold War. The facility included First Nations exhibits and displays dealing with local ecology and European settlement history. Because of its location, most of the exhibits dealt with the history of aviation and various Canadian squadrons.



The day was capped by the awards banquet hosted at Kinosoo Ridge Lodge where one of the chairlift supports is rumored to be in Saskatchewan. John Acorn, the "Nature Nut", provided an entertaining autobiographic glimpse into his life-long study of natural history. Fran and Connie Lavoie were awarded the Outstanding Individual Steward Award. They were honored for their enduring commitment to stewardship at Snakes Head Natural Area.



Sunset at Kinasoo Lodge

Sunday morning provided sessions on Aquatic Invasive Species, Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, Campground Host Chat, Dwarf Mistletoe at Moose Lake, and Steward Chat. All sessions were well attended and the one on invasive species presented by Kate Wilson (Aquatic Invasive Species Program Coordinator) was

particularly informative and gave a significant “heads up” re: problems on the horizon for Alberta’s aquatic systems. After lunch and booty sharing (some Parks goodies were being liquidated) it was time to head home. As in other years, AB Parks’ staff did an excellent job of managing the whole affair. Transport, catering, tours, and presentations all flew by without a glitch. Kudos to Alberta Parks! **Pete Kershaw**

### **Steward Chat Session at the Conference**

Kevin Wirtanen shared some information on the Parks rearrangements announced by premiere Jim Prentice's new Provincial Government a few days ago.

- 1) Parks has been joined with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD). Kevin felt that this could be a good balance, with possible opportunities. Tourism Alberta is now in Culture and Heritage. Parks staff remain in Visitor Services with Tourism, but this still has to be sorted out.
- 2) WAERNAHR is still a grey area, particularly for Natural Areas, but Parks under AESRD should be strengthened by the Public Lands Act, which is administered by AESRD. Too early to say how this will work out, but could be positive, with better co-ordination between the two departments.
- 3) The Parks Act hasn’t changed; it will require a lot of political will to move it up the list of priorities.
- 4) The new Minister of AESRD is Kyle Fawcett, previously Minister of Jobs, Skills and Labour. Previous Deputy Minister, Bill Werry, and ADM Graham Statt, continue in their positions.
- 5) Enforcement for Parks is still under the Dept of Justice, but Justice will no longer be our contact in the field; who this will be has yet to be decided.
- 6) Stewards may have access to more funding for activities, (e.g. in non-fire years when more \$\$ are available).
- 7) In response to queries, information on Protected Area inventories (e.g. flora, fauna, etc.) is available from Parks/ACIMS. Stewards’ reports help to add to this database. Some of the research studies done in Protected Areas are also available on request.
- 8) Public Lands needs to give WAERNAHR authority to act (e.g. ordering signs), but there is now a blanket default instead of individual exceptions.
- 9) Opportunities to increase membership of SAPAA. include. Junior Forest Wardens, Educational and Research activities, and better publicizing of events being held by Stewards). A communal events calendar for all sites (including with contact names) was suggested. Younger members should be encouraged to make a long-term commitment.

- 10) Opportunities to increase the number of sites with Stewards should become easier once the current situation is sorted out.
- 11) Other items mentioned but not discussed much further included: participation in Land Use Regional Plans (especially the N. Saskatchewan RP); regional trails systems (including Designated Access Trails) types and terminology which the public does not understand (e.g. multi-use vs. mixed use) , clarification and determination of protected area boundaries (preferably landscape oriented, rather than based on townships, etc.).

These comments were compiled from my notes at the meeting. It is obviously too early in the political game to be sure of anything these days, but some of the early signs are moderately hopeful! **Alison Dinwoodie**



Linda & Pete enjoy a lunch-time walk at Cold Lake harbor

### **Environmental Stakeholders’ Meeting with ESRD Minister Kyle Fawcett**

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Patsy Cotterill represented SAPAA at an environmental stakeholders’ meeting with Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) Minister, the Honorable Kyle Fawcett. The following organizations were also invited: AB Council for Environmental Education, AB Energy Efficiency Alliance, AB Lake Management Society, AB Wilderness Association, CPAWS (Northern and Southern Chapters), Environmental Law Centre, Land Stewardship Centre, Miistakis Institute, Pembina Institute, Recycling Council of AB, and Sierra Club (Prairie Chapter). Each group had the opportunity to provide a brief report of their mandate, and to discuss their achievements, issues and challenges. Several high-level bureaucrats and policy-makers attended, including Deputy Minister Bill Wherry, Assistant Deputy Ministers Dr. Graham Statt (Parks Division) and Shannon Flint (Policy and Planning



Division). The Parks Division is currently being integrated into ESRD.

Minister Fawcett outlined his mandate from the Premier, and identified the following as “hot” issues within the department: improving Alberta’s reputation vis-à-vis the oil industry and responsible environmental management, conducting monitoring to assess the provinces’ environmental resources (e.g., water, air, biodiversity – AEMERA is a new arms-length agency created for this purpose), updating climate change strategy and minimizing losses due to catastrophic events, continuing to develop the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan and Land-use Framework (the AB Land Stewardship Act, Integrated Resource Management Plan, AEMERA and AB Energy Regulator all fit into this), and continuing caribou range planning. A note of caution was made regarding fiscal constraints.

A major concern, echoed by several organizations, was that despite all the work we do, including work on LUF plans, little attention is paid to our opinions by the government and even less finds its way into policy documents. Groups who work closely with the public (e.g., watershed and lake management groups) noted that there is a disconnect between the public, ENGOs and government, often leaving the public confused, ill-informed and frustrated over government policy, regulations and enforcement. Better partnerships between public organizations and government were recommended, for greater efficiency.

There was little opportunity to discuss specific SAPAA issues at the meeting, but assurance was given that stewardship would continue to be an important part of government policy. Dr. Graham Statt opined that the Plan for Parks gives due consideration to conservation, and contributes to 43% of conservation offsets in the LUFs. However, it was also noted that there are no standards for monitoring biodiversity, as there are for biophysical parameters such as air and water.

**Patsy Cotterill**



An autumn walk at Hastings Lake Natural Area, one of the many PNT Natural Areas left in limbo without new legislation

## **Land Stewardship Centre Meeting**

Following the January meeting with Minister Fawcett, SAPAA members Patsy Cotterill, Alison Dinwoodie, Nonie Swinnerton and Hubert Taube met with Jenna Curtis and Amrita Grewal of the Land Stewardship Centre (LSC) on February 18. SAPAA outlined their objectives and activities and LSC provided theirs. LSC began as a successor to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), and has expanded to be involved in the management of all natural capital (land, air, water, biodiversity). Its mandates include support for grass-roots community stewardship (primarily directed towards private and municipal landowners) and promotion of networking between conservation organizations. LSC is a non-profit organization funded by grants from government (e.g., AB Ecotrust) and private organizations (e.g., TD Friends of the Environment; Alberta Real Estate Foundation) and by selling ‘green’ guide books (e.g., Green Acreages Guide). LSC has six staff who work to develop green guides, maintain Conservation Land Registries and operate the Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN). ASN maintains the Stewardship Directory which now lists 200+ organizations Canada-wide (but most from Alberta). For further details of their activities, visit their website: [www.landstewardship.org](http://www.landstewardship.org). SAPAA has applied for listing in LSC’s directory. Eventually, a detailed description of our activities will appear in the directory. How could SAPAA benefit from cooperation with LSC? At present, LSC generally supports private and municipal landowners, but their mandate could be extended to include stewardship of public lands, specifically Natural Areas, Ecological Reserves and Heritage Rangelands. Individual stewards could request LSC’s assistance in managing their properties, creating stewardship groups, writing management plans and obtaining funds to put plans into practice. LSC support might also help us to gain greater recognition of the Alberta Protected Areas program. These ideas remain to be worked out in more detail.

**Hubert Taube**

## **Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve Nomination**

The Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI) is a group of more than 30 volunteer partner organizations, including representatives from all three levels of government, the science and academic community, residents, industry, and non-government organizations. This group came together in 2002, because it was concerned about the cumulative effects that increased growth and economic activity were having on the distinctive landscape of the Beaver Hills Moraine (Beaver Hills) located just east of Edmonton, Alberta.



110s of lakes, ponds and other wetlands dot the Beaver Hills

The Beaver Hills, an area of 1,595 km<sup>2</sup>, is an outlier of the Dry Mixedwood Boreal Forest within the Aspen Parkland in central Alberta. Almost 40% of the Beaver Hills remains as natural habitat, with extensive areas of wetland and upland forest. A quarter of the region is protected by federal, provincial and/or municipal governments, including six of Alberta's Natural Areas. For the past 13 years, BHI has been demonstrating beneficial outcomes to be realized from working for a sustainable region, through shared initiatives and coordinated action.

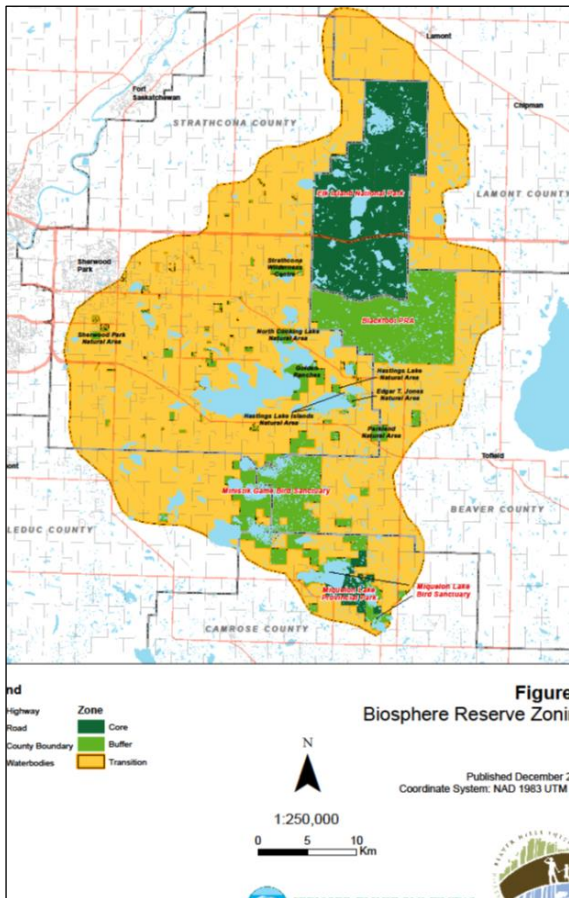


Figure 1: Biosphere Reserve Zoning

The BHI is now preparing a nomination to have the Beaver Hills designated as a Biosphere Reserve under

the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Program of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This action is being taken because the Beaver Hills is geographically and contextually well placed to encourage innovative approaches to conservation and sustainable development in a manner consistent with the Biosphere Reserve Program. The global network currently includes 631 Biosphere Reserves in 119 countries. Sixteen of these Reserves are in Canada, and one (Waterton B.R.) is in Alberta. Biosphere Reserves are the only global designation or accreditation for an area demonstrating excellence in sustainable development in practice at a regional scale. They represent regions that exhibit how society can live and work in harmony with people and nature. The structure and function of Biosphere Reserves support three inter-connected functions: (1) conservation: conserving genetic resources, species, ecosystems, landscapes, and cultural heritage; (2) development: fostering economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and (3) logistic support (capacity building): providing support for applied research, monitoring, education, and information exchange.



The role of people in the Beaver Hills is central to the Reserve

In order to carry out these three functions, each Biosphere Reserve contains three elements: (1) core protected areas: these legislatively protected areas include provincial and national parks that conserve biodiversity and provide research monitoring opportunities in minimally disturbed ecosystems; (2) buffer zones: these usually surround or adjoin the core protected areas and emphasize conservation in connection with cooperative activities compatible with sound ecological practices; (3) transition areas (areas of cooperation): these generally comprise the largest proportion of a Biosphere Reserve and consist of the lived-in and working landscape, where sustainable economic and human development is demonstrated and



practiced through the involvement and collaboration of local communities.

In the case of the Beaver Hills Biosphere nomination, Elk Island National Park and Miquelon Lake Provincial Park are the proposed core areas, and the buffer zones include the Ministik Lake Game Bird Sanctuary, the Cooking Lake–Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, the Strathcona Wilderness Society and the six Natural Areas. The transition area (the lived-in and working landscape) accounts for almost three-quarters of the proposed Biosphere area.



Sunset at Elk Island NP

The Beaver Hills' nomination proposal has to be submitted to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO by the end of May 2015. It documents how the region and the work of the BHI meet the requirements set down by UNESCO. Further review will be undertaken by UNESCO's International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves. The final decision will be made by UNESCO in the summer of 2016.

In the meantime, the BHI is seeking support for the nomination. Readers can go the Beaver Hills website at <http://www.beaverhills.ca> and click on the "Support our UNESCO Nomination" button. Letters of support for the nomination are also appreciated. These letters of support are an extremely important component of the Biosphere Reserve nomination package, and will be included as part of the formal submission. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and subsequently UNESCO's International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves pay particular attention to letters as indicators of the breadth and level of support for the nomination. For further details, please contact [guy.swinnerton@ualberta.ca](mailto:guy.swinnerton@ualberta.ca)

**Guy Swinnerton - Chair,  
BHI Protected Areas Working Group**

## A Multi-Year Plan to Re-Naturalize a Natural Area

On the eastern edge of St. Albert in the County of Sturgeon, the provincially protected area known as Riverlot 56 Natural Area offers a bit of wild and natural-looking space in an urbanizing environment. Many years ago, a very small group of keen individuals recognized the value of this land, formed The Riverlot 56 Natural Area Society and volunteered to act as stewards to care for it.



The Society recently started the re-naturalization of those parts of the site that were deforested before the area gained 'Natural Area' status. This task is a big one. Major financial and labor inputs are required when trying to convert agriculturally-modified land back to its natural wooded state. Invasive weeds have been a key factor impelling the Society to take on this task. It should be noted that the open fields, which make up about a fifth of Riverlot 56, have not had the chance to naturally return to a forest condition because of the imposed requirement to control weeds. Two noxious weeds, creeping thistle (also called Canada thistle) and

field scabious are especially problematic. Annual haying by a local farmer has appeased county weed inspectors, but this has proved unsustainable and costly, which has forced the Society to consider a long-term solution – the re-establishment of forest cover. So, in early 2014, the Riverlot 56 Natural Area Society announced a plan (a number of years in the making) in May of 2014 to reintroduce, support and sustain the native plants that historically dominated this landscape. Trembling aspen and white spruce were top-rated for the project – the former because it dominates the surrounding forest and the latter because it is safe from browsing by the locally plentiful deer. The first four years will be planting years, with many years of maintenance and oversight to follow.

In 2014, the plan focused on a 5.2 hectare (13 acre) field in the lower (northern) part of Riverlot 56. Work began in late May, with 20 irregular-shaped ‘planting islands’ demarcated with stakes in the open pasture. Many were located adjacent to existing forest. Through collaboration with one of the main Riverlot 56 user groups, the St. Albert Nordic Ski Club, funding for ski trail development was used to finance this first stage. As a bonus, a new ski trail was established in the planted area. Natural Area Society volunteers planted 40 to 170 trees and shrubs within each ‘planting island’ and the remaining open field was mowed twice that summer and fall by Sturgeon County personnel and equipment. Of the 2,069 plantings, more than half were white spruce. Four of the ‘islands’ with a total of 600 plantings were fenced to keep deer away from the shrubs and saplings, especially deciduous species such as trembling aspen, dogwood, balsam poplar, bracted honeysuckle, pin cherry, wild rose, wild raspberry, gooseberry, saskatoon and buckbrush.

The focus in 2015 will shift to the southern third of the remaining open portion. Once again, a set of 10 irregular-shaped ‘planting islands’ will be perimeter-staked and then planted. Also, there are 80 or 90 large white spruce which were planted over 20 years ago as a windbreak for one of the ski trails. More trees are present than are necessary for the windbreak, and by moving these larger trees, huge savings can be achieved to propel the reforestation process forward. Much of the effort and potential for 2015 rests on the success of grant applications to cover the cost of seedlings, water, etc. Hopes are high that the project will be viewed as environmentally sound and worthy of financing. We’ll find out in May!

In 2016 and 2017, the remaining two-thirds of the southern section of Riverlot 56 will be planted with trees and shrubs. In total, it is estimated that over 2,500 spruce trees and up to 2,000 deciduous trees and shrubs will complete the initial 4-year planting phase. In the long term, success will depend on the continued

support of Sturgeon County, the City of St. Albert and user groups such as the St. Albert Nordic Ski Club.



A new ski trail edges some of the tree & shrub plantings.

Volunteer involvement in planting, mowing, watering and general maintenance will be critically important, and grant funding will also be needed. Much is yet to be determined but hopes are high that weed-infested fields can be transformed into habitat not unlike that which existed before the forest was removed. Deer, moose, coyotes, squirrels, owls and many more local residents await the transformation. **Dan Stoker**

## SAPAA Workshop at Miquelon Lake PP

On Saturday, 25 October 2014, SAPAA members met in the beautiful new Visitor Centre at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park for our annual workshop and AGM. In the morning we were treated to two excellent presentations. First Glynnis Hood (Assoc. Professor, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta) told us all about the biology and history of beavers in the Cooking Lake Moraine region. Glynnis lives next to the park, and her fascinating mix of facts and anecdotes held everyone’s attention and stimulated lots of questions and stories from the audience. After coffee-break, Adam Driedzic (Staff Council, Environmental Law Centre) discussed the management of recreation on Alberta’s public lands. Once again the speaker gave us lots to think about, and was open to dozens of questions and comments from the audience. There’s always lots of animated discussion with this group. It’s great to get together and gather information, ideas and energy from our fellow stewards. **Linda Kershaw**



Miquelon Lake PP Visitor Centre

**STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION**  
**Summer 2015 Field Trips**

**Field trips to two well established Natural Areas are planned for the summer of 2015.**

If you're interesting in joining one or both trips, contact Hubert Taube, [taubeha@shaw.ca](mailto:taubeha@shaw.ca), for further details, such as potential carpooling or clarification of directions. The hosts for both events are Stewards of the respective areas. Both areas have interesting histories, and participants will benefit greatly from the hosts' intimate knowledge of these properties.

So, mark these dates on your calendar and come out to learn more about these two significant Natural Areas. Members of other Edmonton area naturalist organizations (ENC, ENPG) will also be invited to attend.

**Halfmoon Lake Natural Area**  
**Saturday, July 18, 2015.**

**Meeting Spot:** Rainbow Equitation Society Picnic Shelter and Facilities at 10:00 a.m.

**How To Get There:** From Edmonton, take Highway 28 past Bon Accord. About 1 km east of Bon Accord, turn left onto Lily Lake Road. Travel north 22.4 km to Township Road 584. Turn right onto Township Road 584 and travel east 1.6 km to Range Road 234. Turn left onto Range Road 234 and travel north for 2 km where, on the right hand side, you come to the Rainbow Equitation Society Facilities.

Our hosts for this event will be **Richard and Vera Desmet**. We will spend up to 6 hours at this site; however, requests for shorter visits will be accommodated.

**Mount Butte Natural Area**  
**Saturday, August 22, 2015.**

**Meeting Spot:** Battle Lake Park at 10:00 a.m.

**How To Get There:** From Highway 2 South (QE 2), take Highway 13 west towards Falun and Westeros. After Highway 13 crosses Highway 771, travel 1.6 km west on Highway 13, at which point you will turn right (at Range Road 14) onto Battle Lake Trail. Continue on Battle Lake Trail for approximately 5.6 km until you get to Battle Lake Park, approximately halfway up on the northeast shore of Battle Lake.. The site has an old building on it that was to be an interpretive centre (that didn't happen) and a couple of picnic tables.

Our host for this event is **David Doze** from the Battle Lake Natural Area Preservation Society. We will spend between 3 to 4 hours at this site.