

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA)

NEWSLETTER NO. 32, SEPTEMBER 2015

Mark Your Calendar!

The **2015 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference**, organized by the Alberta Parks Volunteer Steward Program will be held in Wetaskiwin on Sept 25-27 this year. Join fellow PA stewards to hear good talks and updates and to exchange experiences! Last year, Fran and Connie Lavoie received the award for Outstanding Individual Steward for their work at Snakes Head Natural Area. Check us out at the SAPAA table at Reynolds Museum on the Friday night.

Join us for the **SAPAA Annual Workshop and AGM on Oct 17th** at the Miquelon Provincial Park, Visitor Centre. (See more info below). This year's speaker is Dr. Guy Swinnerton, Chair of the Protected Areas Working Group in the Beaver Hills Initiative. A second speaker has still to be announced. We look forward to hearing lots of important updates and information, followed by our usual spirited discussion. We also hope to welcome some new members to our executive, as a few people are stepping down this year.

Field Trip to Battle Lake & Mount Butte

On August 22, 2015, 19 people, including SAPAA, Edmonton Nature Club and Edmonton Native Plant Group members plus other interested hikers, met at the Battle Lake Park (a municipal campground operated by the County of Wetaskiwin) for a SAPAA field trip. The trip was organized by John Woitenko and Hubert Taube (SAPAA) and hosted by Dave Doze (Battle Lake Natural Area Preservation Society; BLNAPS).



Battle Lake with Mt. Butte in the background

The Mt. Butte Natural Area (NA) covers some 798 acres (323 ha) at the western end of Battle Lake, about 7 miles west of the southern tip of Pigeon Lake. Of this area 157 acres are protected under Order-in-Council and the rest are reserved (PNT) lands. Mt. Butte 'peak' itself, the area we visited, is in the northwest quarter of Section 21, Township 46, Range 2, West of the 5th Meridian. We began by exploring the short (0.5 km) trail along the shore of Battle Lake at the Battle Lake municipal campground. Even though much of this area is disturbed, we saw a great variety of plant and bird life (see the lists on the SAPAA website). Next we stopped at the park picnic area for lunch treats, including Patsy Cotterill's delicious banana bread, which vanished in seconds, and an opportunity for group photos. After lunch, the group drove to the access point for the hike to the top of Mt. Butte about 10 km northwest of the campground.



A mixed group of naturalists

Here Dave Doze provided insight into the human history (land acquisition, designation as a natural area, preservation efforts) as well as the geology and ecology of the site. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that three ecozones (parkland, boreal forest and foothills) meet here and contribute to the richness of the landscape and biota. BLNAPS members expend considerable effort to maintain the natural integrity of the area, and to block intrusion by ATVs, an all-too-common problem in Alberta's Natural Areas.

The height of land known as Mt. Butte lies between Moyer's Lake and the north end of Battle Lake. This 110 m high 'mountain' is a remnant of table lands above the Battle River Valley after it was carved out during the previous ice age(s). The hike up Mt. Butte is quite steep and heavily wooded. Altogether, 11 participants made it to the top and were rewarded with magnificent views of the Upper Battle River meandering to the northwest and Battle Lake to the southeast.



Upper Battle River Valley

On the way up, we followed the trail facing towards Battle Lake and on the way down we took the trail closer to Moyer's Lake. Some of the group got disoriented (i.e. lost) on the steep descent to the north, so pay careful attention to orientation if you undertake this hike!



Trail junctions can be confusing in new areas

After the main group returned to the foot of Mt Butte about 4 p.m., a smaller group continued up the road to the area northwest of Moyer's Lake to view the extensive trail damage caused by uncontrolled ATV usage.

BLNAPS is to be commended for its efforts to manage access and use of this area, helping to preserve this treasure of ecological richness for future generations.

All in all, it was a very successful trip, with 39 bird species and 116 plants species observed. The trip began auspiciously, when 5 partridges crossed 99 Street in Edmonton just in front of the carpooling convoy leaving the Wildbird General Store.



Colorful twisted stalk berries & coralroot capsules

During the day, we discovered many interesting plants, including a small patch of balsam fir (quite a rare occurrence in this part of Alberta), several patches of stiff-clubmoss, a clump of spotted coralroot, and an extensive patch of bee balm/wild bergamot at the mountain top. The bird and plant species lists, recorded by Emily Gorda and Patsy Cotterill respectively, can be found on our website (sapaastewards.com) under 'Natural Areas' in the 'Protected Areas' section - 'Mt Butte NA PNT'.

Hubert Taube - text and photos

Beaver Hills Nomination Submitted

At the end of May, the Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI, created in Sept 2002) submitted its nomination to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) for the Beaver Hills to become a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in accordance with the requirements of the Man and Biosphere Program (MAB). The submission is the culmination of six years of focused effort and commitment by the BHI and its Working Groups. The BHI initially submitted a proposal in September 2012. CCUNESCO commended the

BHI for the work that it had undertaken to embrace and apply a vision of sustainable development, and noted that the Beaver Hills had strong potential to become an outstanding Biosphere Reserve, but they directed the BHI to give greater attention to three areas: (1) aboriginal engagement, (2) public and citizen engagement, and (3) a clear explanation of why the BHI wanted the Beaver Hills to become a Biosphere Reserve. Meeting these requirements has been a central role of the BHI over the past three years, and the revised nomination reflects a strong commitment to addressing these concerns. The nomination document and its appendices run to almost 500 pages. The information demonstrates how people and communities in the Beaver Hills can live, work, and play in harmony with nature, and how the proposed Biosphere Reserve demonstrates innovative approaches to sustainable development and addressing various environmental issues.



Hundreds of sloughs and small lakes dot the Beaver Hills

The proposal had received signed endorsement from the four local counties (Beaver, Lamont, Leduc and Strathcona), from relevant agencies at all three levels of government, and from NGOs. The nomination package also included 78 letters of support illustrating the impressive breadth and scope of support for the proposed Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve from government, local communities (both within and outside the proposed reserve), industry, academia, NGOs, the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Submission to CCUNESCO is the first stage in a rigorous nomination review process. In Canada, the document is reviewed by the Canada MAB

Committee which submits its recommendation to CCUNESCO. If it is approved at this stage, the nomination is sent to the UNESCO secretariat in Paris for review by the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR). The IACBR is the primary scientific and technical committee that evaluates all Biosphere Reserve proposals. The IACBR decides if the proposed site nomination should be approved, recommended for approval pending the submission of specific information, or deferred, and sends its recommendations to the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC). The ICC is MAB's governing body, and it provides final approval in the nomination evaluation process. The Director-General of UNESCO then notifies the State concerned of the decision of the ICC. In our case, that decision will be conveyed through the CCUNESCO. The ICC normally meets in Paris in early June to review the recommendations from IACBR, so if the Beaver Hills Biosphere nomination proceeds successfully, we should hear the results in June 2016.

In 2015, the International Co-ordinating Council of MAB added 20 new sites to the World Network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, bringing the total to 651 sites in 120 countries (including 15 transboundary sites). No new site nominations were submitted from Canada, so the number of Canadian Biosphere Reserves remains at 16, with Waterton as the only site in Alberta.



Wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl

The BHI expresses its grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to and supported the Beaver Hills Biosphere nomination. In the coming year, updates re: the nomination review process will be posted in BHI newsletters and on the BHI website. (Photos - L Kershaw)

Guy Swinnerton,
Chair, BHI Protected Areas Working Group

Field Trips To Halfmoon Lake July 18th, 2015

The Halfmoon Lake Natural Area is about 25 km north of Bon Accord in Sturgeon County. We arrived on a sunny, warm summer day after a moderately heavy rain, so everything was looking verdant. Nine participants included five members of the Rainbow Equestrian Society (RES), the Volunteer Steward Group for the Natural Area.



Enjoying the greenery on a beautiful summer day

The protected land in this area (north of Township Road 584 and west of Range Road 232) includes about 8 quarter sections, assembled through the cooperative efforts of the Alberta Natural Areas program [± 880 acres], the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) [320 acres] and the Rainbow Equitation Society (RES) [80 acres]. Detailed map information was available in brochures on-site. In the morning we visited the NW Alberta quarter (the Raven/Ghost Horse Hills Loop) which contains a large variety of landscapes and plant communities, including steep hills and well drained soils. At the southwest corner of this quarter we found a lookout with a magnificent semicircular view to the south, west and north overlooking forests, a wetland, agricultural developments and a few signs of human habitation. A truly inspirational viewpoint!

Our hosts, Richard and Vera DeSmet, provided some interesting historical background. In the 19th century, a trail connecting the Athabasca and North Saskatchewan watersheds ran through the area, and evidence of ruts made by Red River wagons is still visible. Halfmoon Lake Natural Area was established by Order-in-Council in 1971. Richard and Vera started taking care of the site in 1980. In 1987, the Volunteer Stewards Program

began, and Richard and Vera plus the RES became Volunteer Stewards. In 2004, the RES was given the Award of Excellence for Stewardship by the province of Alberta. In 2001, the Society purchased an 80-acre property that linked the two parcels which make up the Halfmoon Lake Natural Area. They also negotiated with local landowners and made a down-payment on 320 acres adjoining the Natural Area; this parcel is now owned by the NCC.

A wide variety of vegetation exists in the north-west part of the government property. Trees included white spruce, jack pine, aspen and birch; shrubs included beaked hazelnut (lots of immature fruit), saskatoon (heavily loaded with ripe fruit), pin cherry (mostly barren) and bracted honeysuckle. A vegetation highlight was re-discovery of two patches of ground-pine. On another part of the trail, patches of tansy were found, which the RES intends to eradicate. Huge cow parsnips (taller than 2 m) were found, as well as white and red baneberry, wild sarsaparilla, star-flowered Solomon's seal.



Hubert takes a moment to relax and enjoy the pines on the August 5th trip

After lunch at the RES picnic facilities, we circled the two northern quarters of the east portion of the Halfmoon Lake Natural Area (Bridge Trail/Rim Trail loop) which, at times, allowed glimpses of Halfmoon Lake and the properties beyond. Except for the slopes and gullies bordering the lake, with their rich variety of vegetation, the landscape was flat, dominated by scrub jack pine and aspen, with fleabane and golden-aster blooming everywhere and sages providing most of the ground cover. This part of the trail was degraded by ATVs, which fortunately were absent elsewhere. Along

the trail on the slopes to Halfmoon Lake we discovered two patches of a mystery plant which was later identified as spotted coralroot.



Spotted coralroot Hidden structure near the trail

The trip ended around 3 p.m.; it was hot and most of the group was exhausted. This was a good outing. I only wished more people had come out to participate in the experience. On the other hand, it probably indicates how extremely lucky we are in Alberta that treasures of this nature go largely unnoticed, even by dedicated naturalists. The DeSmets and RES extended an invitation to naturalist groups and individuals for future visits. They are to be commended for their work in assembling this large conservation area, for building visitor facilities and trail signs, and for their ongoing efforts to maintain the site in its natural state. **Hubert Taube – text & photos**



Dense shrubs filled the understory of aspen stands

Hubert sang the praises of this Natural Area so much that on August 5th a group of four of us decided to undertake an “unofficial SAPAA field trip,” with Hubert retracing routes he had taken in mid-July under the guidance of the deSmets. I was particularly delighted with the abundance of native grasses in the various plant communities, with the alien smooth brome and timothy (signaling the human footprint) only rare occurrences. In the aspen woods, purple oatgrass was particularly common, outnumbering the large rosettes of hairy wild rye, as well as white-grained mountain ricegrass and fringed brome. In the open lichen-bearberry patches, most of the ground cover was provided by poverty oat-grass and thin-leaved clumps of northern ricegrass, punctuated by tufts of June grass. Intermediate oatgrass occurred on the more disturbed sandy soils near the entrance to the RES facilities. Depressional spots in deep woodland harbored marsh reedgrass and, occasionally, drooping wood reed. Wheatgrasses were likely more common than their sporadic panicles indicated.



Cow-wheat, a root parasite, grows in well-drained pine stands

In terms of wildflowers (forbs) we were definitely into the blue and gold flowers of late summer and fall, the blue of asters, smooth fleabane and Alaska harebell and the gold of golden-asters, goldenrods and wormwoods.

Conspicuous fruits included those of velvet-leaved blueberry, wild red raspberry, the reflexed crimson capsules of spotted coralroot orchid, and the round, orange and red berries of fairybells, a plant so common in one area of the woods that we named it fairybells glade.



Fairybells in fruit

Congratulations to the RES, who have worked so hard to extend and maintain the area under protection through acquisition and management. It preserves a landscape typical of the sandhills region north of Edmonton in a near-pristine condition while making it accessible via trails to hikers, equestrians and berry-pickers. Considering that the fates of some Natural Areas are now uncertain, and some have already been lost to development and ATV abuse, this is an especially worthwhile accomplishment.

Of course we got wet on this showery day, but after months of drought we considered it a rare pleasure to walk in the rain. We left many kilometres of trails unexplored, and plan to go back soon! **Patsy Cotterill – text & photos**

For more information about the Halfmoon Lake Natural Area, including species lists, maps and photos, check the Protected Areas section of our website [sapaastewards.com].

Conservation News from Government of Alberta releases

This past election our government made a commitment to enhance the protection of the Castle area, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the South Saskatchewan Region and part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP). The area has experienced significant growth in competing land uses through commercial forestry, grazing, oil and gas development as well as tourism and recreational opportunities. The Castle area is also home to over 200 rare or at-risk species and acts as an essential wildlife corridor

along the eastern slopes for mammals such as grizzly bear and cougar.

To honour its commitment of protecting the Castle Special Management Area, the Government of Alberta is moving forward with a plan to amend the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan by expanding the designated Castle Wildland Provincial Park and creating a new Provincial Park, bringing the entire Castle area under Parks' legislation. For more information about the planned amendment visit landuse.alberta.ca/Newsroom/Pages/PublicConsultations.aspx.

To ensure you have the opportunity to provide your input, the Land Use Secretariat will be consulting with all Albertans. You may provide your input by completing the online survey at <http://albertaparks.ca/consult> or submitting your feedback by email or mail before **5 Oct 2015**.

Please send your comments to LUF@gov.ab.ca or to the address below:

Attn: Land Use Secretariat

Re: Enhancing the protection of the Castle
9th floor, Centre West Building

10035 – 108 Street

Edmonton, AB T5J 3E1

We look forward to working with and consulting all Albertans to move forward with enhancing the protection of the Castle.

New Consultation Director at the Land Use Secretariat

We would also like to take this opportunity to introduce our new Consultation Director, Scott Duguid. Dave Bartesko has retired after over 40 years of service with the Government of Alberta. Scott brings 10 years of experience working with different aboriginal groups on planning, environmental monitoring, stewardship and regulatory issues. He has experience with the development and consultation for our first two regional plans and we are delighted to have him join our team.

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, October 17, 2015

at 9:30 A.M.

Miquelon Provincial Park Visitors' Centre

PROGRAM

- 9:00 a.m. Registration and coffee
- 9:30 a.m. Speaker: **Dr. Guy Swinnerton**
Chair, BHI Protected Areas Working Group
The Beaver Hills: A proposed Biosphere Reserve. Background and Status
- 10:15 a.m. Questions and discussion
- 10:30 a.m. Coffee Break (coffee, etc. provided but bring your own mug if you can)
- 11:00 a.m. Speaker: **TBA**
Affiliation: TBA
Title: **TBA**
- 11:45 a.m. Questions and discussion
- 12:00 noon **Lunch** (Please bring your own lunch, as kitchen facilities are limited)
- 12:30 p.m. **SAPAA Annual General Meeting** (see agenda on reverse)
- 2:00 p.m. **It's a Walk in the Park** – Enjoy some fresh air and exercise before heading home. Join us for a walk around the beautiful trails and boardwalks in the park.



Bird- and bug-watching at Miquelon PP.

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Saturday, 17 October 2015, 12:30 p.m.
AGENDA

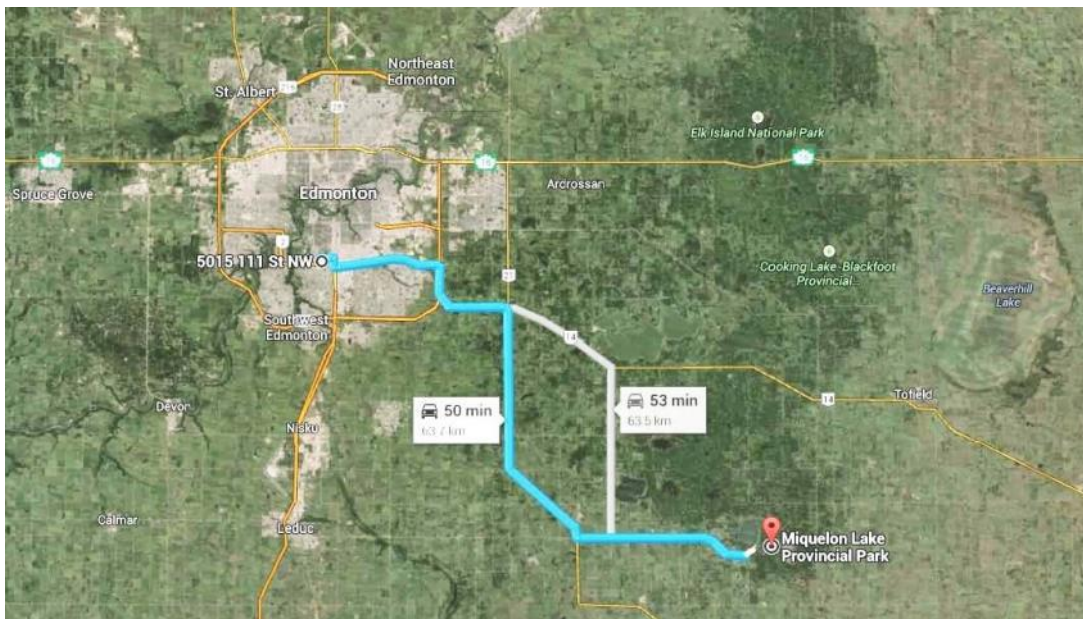
1. Acceptance of Minutes of previous AGM, 24 October 2014
2. Business arising from the minutes
3. Treasurer's report
4. SAPAA web site update
5. Election of the Board

Current board members are:

President – Patsy Cotterill
Vice President – Hubert Taube
Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Peter Kershaw
Recording Secretary – Vacant
Directors – John Woitenko (FAN Representative); Merleen Rafters;
Lucille Horne; Noni Swinnerton
Newsletter Editors – Linda Kershaw, Patsy Cotterill
Webmaster – Linda Kershaw

Please consider helping out on the executive. Some members are willing to stand for another year, but some are stepping down. New people would be welcomed!

6. Other business



DIRECTIONS: To reach the Miquelon Provincial Park from south Edmonton, take the **Whitemud Drive** or **Anthony Henday Drive** east to **Highway 14** (to Wainright); go east on Hwy 14 to **Highway 21** (≈ 9 km). Turn **right (south)** on **Highway 21**, and go about 25 km to **AB-623 (Rollyview Road)**. Turn **left (east)**, and drive east 16.5 km, until you see **Miquelon Provincial Park** on the left (north).

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association Membership Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Natural Area: _____ Organization (if any) _____

Mailing Address: _____ City or Town: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

- **To save paper and reduce costs, may we email your newsletter to you?** ____ yes ____ no
- Would you be willing to have your name and phone number put on a list that would only be distributed to other SAPAA members? ____ Yes ____ No

Renewing membership ____; New member ____

Membership fee \$ 15 (Includes FAN insurance fee of \$5)

Donation (Optional)* _____
TOTAL _____

*SAPAA is not a registered Charitable Organization as yet, so receipts for income tax purposes cannot be issued.

Please return this form, with total listed above to:

Peter Kershaw, 51163 Range Road 204, Sherwood Park, AB T8G 1E5

(Make cheques payable to SAPAA)

For membership conditions, please see reverse side of this form.

Issues of importance (old or new – this info would help for future Stewards Conference discussions):

___ Oil / Gas ___ Off Highway Vehicles ___ Vandalism ___ Overuse/Abuse ___ Grazing
___ Other _____

Willing to help with: ___ Newsletter ___ Executive ___ Phoning ___ Speakers ___ Meetings ___ Field Trips ___ Other

If you are a new member, please provide the following details about your Stewardship Area:

Natural Area ID #: _____ Approximate size: _____

Location: _____

Brief description of significant natural features (please include a brochure if available): _____

If you require more information, please contact

Patsy Cotterill – (780)481-1525; nutmeg@planet.eon.net

Alison Dinwoodie – (780)437-7183; adinwoodie@shaw.ca

Peter & Linda Kershaw – (780)662-3626; linda.kershaw1@gmail.com

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

Membership in SAPAA is open to anyone who

- **is a Steward who volunteers time assisting in the care and management of Alberta's Protected Areas (i.e., lands currently set aside under the Alberta Provincial Parks Act, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas & Heritage Rangeland Act, and the Willmore Wilderness Act), and**
- **is in general agreement with the following Purposes of the Association.**

Purposes of the Association

1. To establish a network of Volunteer Stewards to exchange information and expertise and to provide mutual assistance and support.
2. To promote the preservation, protection and restoration of the ecological integrity of Alberta's Protected Areas.
3. To promote the use of Alberta's Protected Areas for educational and research purposes, and for non-intrusive, nature-oriented activities compatible with each individual site.
4. To identify common issues of concern in Alberta's Protected Areas for the purpose of dealing with them more effectively and comprehensively.
5. To work with appropriate government departments and with other groups and agencies to resolve issues regarding actions and activities that affect Alberta's Protected Areas.
6. To represent members of the Association at meetings of stakeholders and in events, issues and situations that affect Alberta's Protected Areas.
7. To increase and enhance public awareness of the value of Protected Areas and of the Volunteer Stewards' role in preserving these areas.
8. To support knowledge and skill development for Stewards and supporters of the Association through conferences, workshops, seminars and publications.

Name (please print): _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____