

# SAPAA NEWS

Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association

"Stewards helping stewards"

No. 40, October 2021

Gerald Romanchuk

Rumsey Environmental Reserve

## SAPAA AGM

The Annual General Meeting is scheduled for **Saturday, November 13**, at **10:00 am**, to be conducted virtually. A Zoom link and a detailed agenda will be provided later by way of emails.

Currently we are planning for a regular business meeting followed by a slide show presentation (about an hour long) of selected area visits.

We welcome contributions of any recent photographs you might have to be part of this presentation. Please send them to our newsletter email address: [sapaastewards21@gmail.com](mailto:sapaastewards21@gmail.com).

Likewise, please consider getting involved as a Board member. In particular, we are looking for a person to become responsible for membership and treasury affairs.

We welcome any and all the help we can get.

## Memberships

Our society year begins October 1st so now is a good time to renew your membership in SAPAA or to join it for the first time. In a couple of weeks we will be emailing and snail-mailing membership forms out. For now, we continue to request that you mail in a cheque with the form to the address provided but we are working on getting into the modern age and setting up an e-transfer payment system for future transactions! The membership form will differ this year in that we are asking for an additional \$5.00 payment if you request a printed and mailed copy of your newsletter.

## Steward Contributions Solicited

Our current target is to produce four newsletters a year and as well we are developing a website that will include dynamic posts as well as static pages of information. For these to succeed we need a continual supply of stewards' contributions as text and photos. SAPAA is all about sharing stewards' experiences. We want to hear about your sites, their natural history and their challenges, what insights you have gained as a steward, what you have done in the way of infrastructure building, trails, education of the public, interactions with the Provincial Government, etc. We want gleanings from your submitted reports, indeed, anything you think the wider steward public could benefit from knowing. We'd be pleased to publish blogs of your personal experiences on the website also. Please submit your contributions to [sapaanews21@gmail.com](mailto:sapaanews21@gmail.com)

*Editorial committee: Hubert Taube, Judith Golub, Patsy Cotterill*

## Editorial by Patsy Cotterill

Apart from his passion for exploring Natural Areas in the parks system and stewarding his own Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area, as president of SAPAA Hubert Taube does a good job of keeping in touch regarding Alberta Environment and Parks' stewardship program. He does this chiefly through interaction with Kevin Wirtanen, Stewardship Manager, Learning. Hubert's comment in "Interactions" (below), that Kevin's job mainly involves the management of people, is interesting. It's long been my impression – though I could be wrong – that this people management has taken place mainly in the south, especially in Kananaskis Country close to the populous Calgary area, and northern stewards have often been left to their own devices. It is therefore heartening to hear (personal communication from president Dave Ealey) that Wagner Natural Area Society has received good cooperation from the government lately, and to read in the BLESS report (below) that the Big Lake area is receiving considerable attention. However, as we well know, the Government has not been active in extending stewardship to new sites.

The *ecology* of sites in the provincial protected areas system is known from work done over the years by AEP scientists (see, for example, the technical thumbnails of vegetation and regional classification for some sites mentioned in this issue), and is of course separate from stewardship activities within them. Hence I also find it heartening to hear that the Office of Chief Scientist will be involved in an evaluation of conservation initiatives. I look forward to hearing what this might consist of. I hope it might also extend in the future to restoration activities, that is, as well as *people management*, the Government might also engage much more in *land management*. For example, I have long thought that Wagner Natural Area, which added three large fields to its natural land inventory more than a decade ago, was ripe for restoration, as well as the development of a new trail or two, with all the recreational and educational opportunities these provide. The government, however, seems to have no means or process for carrying out such work, thereby adding value to its natural areas.

In this issue we provide two examples of good stewardship, an inspiration to us all: Derek Ryder's work as trail builder, reprinted from *Alberta Views*, and the activities, especially to do with children's nature education, reported on by the Big Lake Environmental Support Society, stewards of Lois Hole Provincial Park and the Big Lake area. Carry on the good work, and to all the stewards out there, don't hesitate to send in your stories too.

### In This Issue:

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- Caring for Trails
- Plateau Mountain
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- The Big Lake Environment Support Society Newsletter
- Website Renewal Project

### Interactions with Government by Hubert Taube

In the last newsletter we reported that Government was conducting a survey of stewards to assess the stewardship program with the help of the Miistakis Institute. The survey results were released on October 1<sup>st</sup> and I can forward a copy of the pdf report to you upon request ([taubeha@shaw.ca](mailto:taubeha@shaw.ca)).

Short summary:

- 100 Stewards were approached representing 77 Protected Areas (mostly Natural Areas) with responses being received from stewards of 40 of the sites.
- It is evident that the vast majority of Stewards are seniors and most of them have been active in the program for more than 20 years.

- In general the responding stewards tend to be “somewhat” satisfied with the interactions with Government although there was a clear expression that cooperation and communication with other Stewards is clearly missed. *This is, of course, a gap that SAPAA is trying to fill.*
- The report clearly states that its mandate was not to draw any conclusions and no future directions for the program are indicated.

In a subsequent conversation (on the day of the survey release) with Kevin Wirtanen I learned that the survey was one of a number of steps being taken to evaluate conservation initiatives in the Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). Kevin mentioned that his group is now mainly concerned with “people management”, principally running the operations of the parks system, esp. the Provincial Parks. Consequently, they are now only peripherally concerned with conservation issues.

The survey results will be one piece in the overall activities of the AEP to develop future conservation approaches. The Office of the Chief Scientist will be the central agency to deal with this by gathering input from various environmental officials, dispersed throughout the Department. *So, the future of the stewardship program is somewhat uncertain making SAAPA’s activities all the more important.* A report by the Office of the Scientist Chief can be expected by the end of the year.

Kevin also provided information on the current staff of the Parks Operations Division:

Shane Schreiber	Assistant Deputy Minister
Darren Tansowny	Executive Director, Regional Operations Branch (taking over from Amy Nugent)
Krista Berezowski	Executive Director, Visitor Experience & Business Supports Branch
Tracy Draper	Acting Executive Director, Planning & Strategic Initiatives (temporarily taking over from Scott Jones)

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### Caring for Trails by Derek Ryder



Clean-up crew out on the Baldy Pass Trail.  
September 2021

I’ve honestly lost track of the number of trails I’ve helped build or maintain in Kananaskis over the last decade. If you have skied, hiked or biked on any official trail in K-Country, either myself or other volunteers from the Friends of Kananaskis have probably worked on it.

It’s always rewarding. Of the five million visitors who came to K-Country last year, some three million of them put their boots onto a trail. Trails are the way people experience the wonder that is Kananaskis. Folks ask me what I do out there. The simple answer is that I help create accessibility to wonder.

I volunteer through the Friends, an organization celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. The Friends was created to enable people who care about K-Country to have a way to give back to the parks they love. While the Friends has done that in many ways, the core has always been trail care – building and maintaining trails in partnership with Alberta Environment and Parks. It’s been my pleasure to be a trail care volunteer for 12 years, a volunteer crew leader for eight, and on the Friends board of directors for nine.

Every trail-care day is different. I remember the work we did after the great flood of 2013. Practically no trails were left undamaged. On one day I spent with an Alberta Parks trail crew and our team of five volunteers, all we did was pull apart a massive log jam in Heart Creek. Underneath it was a bridge we were trying to salvage. We unearthed one end of it, but it took a second day and a second crew to get it out. I remember another day when we worked on a reroute of the Jewel Pass trail, building a rock wall to support

a new path around a flood-damaged section. The new route went right by a waterfall no one knew about. That waterfall is now a feature of that trail.

While I can't remember all the days I've worked, I can take you to every spot on every trail I've worked on. Every other Friends volunteer can probably take you to theirs, too. I can point out every bench-cut I've done, every section I've helped rock-armour, every place I spread duff or helped remove "trail hair" (tiny roots) using garden hand shears. Everyone is incredibly proud of the work they've done.

Well-designed and built trails are resilient. Still, it's amazing to me how much damage people can do to trails. The adage "Take only pictures, leave only footprints" is a bit misleading; sometimes, leaving footprints is too much. Some folks, who think there's an "easier" way, create problems when they take their footprints off the designated trails. Shortcutting switchbacks is another endless problem. Mud puddles? Just walk through them. You and your boots can be cleaned. But when you go around them you create trail widening and braiding. That's much harder to fix than a mud puddle. Whenever possible, stay on the trail.

The Friends is a hand-tool organization. We use low-tech equipment such as pulaskis: a wildfire-fighting tool that has an axe head on one side and a sharp hoe on the other. For decades it was the main trail-building tool, but today we have other great tools as well. My personal favourite is a Rogue Hoe, which is specifically made for trail work. Another one we use is a McLeod: a cross between a hoe and a huge rake. As a crew leader, I teach volunteers how to use these unique tools, and ensure the work is carried out safely. You don't need to know anything about trail building the first time you volunteer with the Friends.

Everyone knows our parks are being loved to death. The evidence of five million visitors to K-Country is everywhere. It gives me a tremendous sense of satisfaction to do my part to mitigate that. Along the way, I help create other people's wonder. That is off the charts cool.

*Derek Ryder is co-chair and director of communications with Friends of Kananaskis ([kananaskis.org](http://kananaskis.org)).*

*Reprinted from Alberta Views, September 2021, with kind permission of the author and Friends of Kananaskis Country.*

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## **Plateau Mountain** by Patsy Cotterill

On June 23rd this year four of us hiked Plateau Mountain in Southern Kananaskis. On the four km trail to the summit from the upper gate where we parked our cars we stopped often to admire the snow-patched ranges of mountains to the west; at the eastern perimeter where we had lunch we gazed out over an eastern panorama of foothills and plains. We were in time to catch many of the alpine plants at their best, resplendent, ground-hugging displays of white, yellow, and intense purple-blue, faithfully observing their nuances of habitat and altitude: stony tundra, wet hollows and seeps, rolling meadows and krummholz, right down to forests of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir, sprinkled with white-bark pine and subalpine larch. Apart from plant watching, we spotted birds such as white-throated sparrows, American robins and Clark's nutcrackers, and pored over fossiliferous rocks.

Although Plateau Mountain is popular with naturalists, hikers and even cyclists who can navigate the wide trail to a former gas wellsite, we had the mountain to ourselves. We camped in the lodgepole pine forest at Cataract Creek Provincial Recreation Area, a place so full of vacant campsites that I worried it might come under the government's axe. Unfortunately, our stay was foreshortened by a thunderstorm and continuing heavy rain. However, so enamoured were we of the area that three of us made the trip again, in late July, encountering a whole new suite of flowers. But that's a story for another day. Although the government had recently brought in its new parking fees, making the trips more expensive, we felt ourselves privileged to have access to such a beautiful area.

### **Some facts about Plateau Mountain:**

Plateau Mountain is located in the easternmost Front Ranges west of Nanton. It is a long, flat, north-south lying mountain with a broad, smooth, treeless surface, varying in elevation from 2438 to 2499 m north to



south. Technically, “the plateau is an elongated anticlinal dome of limestone capped by a very hard, resistant quartz sandstone.” It is a nunatak, that is, it was unglaciated during Pleistocene time. It is well known for its patterned ground, which is “a surface configuration of ... large pieces of rock in polygonal or circular patterns, with finer materials in the centres.” Patterned ground is characteristic of the harsh climates of arctic and subarctic conditions but at Plateau Mountain it is considered to be “fossilized” in the sense that it is not changing or developing under present climatic conditions. The geometrical network of patterned ground is thought to involve cracking of the ground due to deep cooling. (Information from: Beaty, Chester B. & G.S. Young. 1975. *Landscapes of Southern Alberta. A Regional Geomorphology*. University of Lethbridge Press.)

Plateau Mountain now lies within a 2,323-hectare provincial Ecological Reserve, in the Rocky Mountains Natural Region, Alpine and Subalpine Subregions of Alberta. It is administered under the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, and Heritage Rangelands Act.

### Plateau Mountain Landscapes



L: Sorted stone circles near the summit. (PC). Middle: Colombian ground squirrel tunnels. They were out and about but not brave enough to let us take their pictures. (PC). R: View from the summit, looking east. (MP)

### Plants of the alpine tundra on Plateau Mountain.



From left to right: Drummond's anemone (*Anemone drummondii*) (MP); American smelowskia (*Smelowskia americana*) (MP); Creeping sibbaldia (*Sibbaldia procumbens*) (PC); Eschscholtz's buttercup, *Ranunculus eschscholtzii* (MP).





From left to right: Snow cinquefoil (*Potentilla nivea*) (PC); Hooker's mountain avens (*Dryas hookeriana*) (PC); Bent-flowered milk-vetch (*Astragalus vexilliflexus*) (MP); Dunhead sedge (*Carex phaeocephala*) (MP).

Plants of the lower slopes and seepage areas of Plateau Mountain.



From left to right: Lemmon's rockcress (*Boechera lemmonii*) (PC); Showy Jacob's-ladder (*Polemonium pulcherrimum*) (MP); Slim-pod shootingstar (*Primula conjugens*) (MP); Sitka valerian (*Valeriana sitchensis*) (MP).

Photos: PC = Patsy Cotterill; MP = Manna Parseyan

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**Site Visits to Lily Lake Natural Area** by Hubert Taube. Photos by author.

One of my projects is to visit and explore many of the quarter section size Natural Areas that exist close to Edmonton, within about one hour's drive. Lily Lake NA is at the upper end of this category being comprised of three quarter sections excluding the portion that is part of the lake proper.

The NA is located about 9 km northwest of the community of Darwell in Lake St. Anne County. It is also close (~ 1.5 km to the west) to the newly established Lu Carbyn Nature Sanctuary, a property managed by the Edmonton and Area Land Trust (EALT). Thus there is great potential for further strengthening the ecological connectivity between the sites.

The following site description of the site is extracted from our SAPAA website (Protected Areas Information):

"Lily Lake Natural Area has rolling topography with numerous wet depressions; mixed forests of aspen-balsam poplar-white spruce; willow shrublands; black spruce & tamarack/Labrador tea-dwarf birch wetlands.



This site lies in the Boreal Forest Natural Region, Dry Mixedwood Sub-region. The Dry Mixedwood Sub-region is the only Boreal Forest sub-region that does not have excellent representation within Alberta's parks and protected areas network. There are still significant shortfalls in the glacial lakebed, ground moraine, sandplain and sand dune natural history themes. Listed in "Other Natural Areas" (Alberta Parks web site, 2012)."

As of December 2011, the site had government appointed Steward(s), but they are not SAPAA members and we have no contact with them.

The easiest access is from the north boundary, i.e. by way of Township Rd 550. Road access may also be possible from the southwest via Range Road 53, but I have not explored that possibility yet.

The Natural Area has essentially no interior trails; so land disturbance exists only at the boundaries and to a minor extent along the shorelines of the lake.

I visited the area twice this past year, at the end of winter (March 01) and at the end of summer (September 26). The following set of pictures are of those that left the greatest impressions on me. From the state of vegetation it should be clear whether they were taken in winter (March) or summer (September).



Left and middle: NE corner with traditional NA boundary signal. It is the only sign at the site. Also note the extensive rows of sapsucker excavations above the sign. Right: Animal tracks in fresh snow.



Extensive black spruce/labrador tea vegetation in winter, and in summer.





Left: Old track near shoreline.

Right: True to its name Lily Lake is almost totally covered by pond lilies.



Left: North shore of lake, looking east, in summer.

Right: Birch covered promontory near centre of the NA on eastern shoreline, winter.



Extensive patches of two species of club moss:

ground pine, *Dendrolycopodium dendroideum*, on the left, and stiff clubmoss, *Spinulum annotinum*, on the right.



Historical school marker near the NE corner of the NA; nature reclaiming remnants of old school building structure.



## Genesee Natural Area

After reports of a cougar sighting in the area last year, naturalist and photographer **Gerald Romanchuk** set up five webcams in Genesee, and sure enough, footage showed a cougar roaming through! The videos that relate to the wildlife observations at Genesee come with the caption "Moose Movie" and five others with "Trail Cam ..." can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/user13493548>. Gerald has been monitoring the wildlife by way of his webcams ever since, and has come up with some astonishing footage, which he generously shares with members of the Edmonton Nature Club. See some of the examples below.

Gerald has also reported that he and partner Colleen Raymond have seen the ground littered with shotgun shells. On a return visit, the shells had been picked up. However, there was a new pile of rifle shells. On his

latest cam check, a hunter had found two of the cams. Gerald noted: "He was carrying a rifle, 22 I think. He walked up to one cam and gave a thumbs up."

*From the SAPAA website: Genesee Natural Area (1.79 km<sup>2</sup>) protects a site along the North Saskatchewan River that contains some of the world's best-preserved Late Upper Cretaceous plant fossils. It is a moderately rolling upland incised by two creeks. The vegetation is aspen-dominated forest with white spruce, balsam poplar & paper birch over a dense understory. This is a key wildlife area for white-tailed deer, mule deer & moose. (Alberta Parks web site, 2012).*

*This site lies in the Boreal Forest Natural Region, Dry Mixedwood Sub-region. The Dry Mixedwood Sub-region is the only Boreal Forest sub-region that does not have excellent representation within Alberta's parks and protected areas network.*

Some vignettes snaffled from wildlife web cams set up at Genesee NA:  
moose, skunk, coyote, pileated woodpecker, mule deer, cougar, ...



...white-tail deer, elk, American marten.

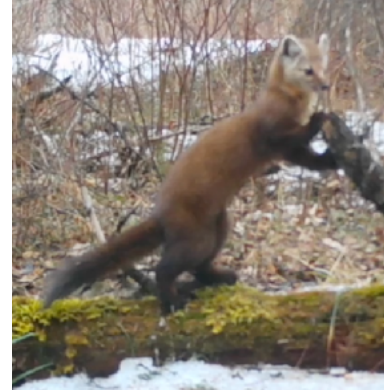


Photo of ground littered with shotgun shells.

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### **The Big Lake Environment Support Society**

The BLESS newsletter for the third quarter of 2021 has been posted at <http://bless.ab.ca/Newsletter/September2021.pdf>

This edition has articles about our recent celebration of World Migratory Bird Day and the BLESS 30th Anniversary event as well as information on Alberta Parks activities and initiatives at Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park and more.

As always, the BLESS board of directors is interested in your comments and feedback. Questions or comments can be sent to [info@bless.ab.ca](mailto:info@bless.ab.ca).

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### **Website Renewal Project**

A "SAPAA Web Project" subcommittee has been active since the end of April to transform our website. The subcommittee is led by Frank Potter with participation of Kristyn Mayner, Chris Smith, Linda Kershaw,



Patsy Cotterill and Hubert Taube. Frostbyte Consulting (largely responsible for the design of the “DefendAlbertaParks” ) was at one time also involved in the project.

The principal goal of the redesign is to allow for dynamic interactions between the Board, SAPAA members and the general public in addition to the current static content.

Initially it is largely a “lift & shift” operation with transfer of all the existing material to the new platform.

The site is already accessible for your preview: <https://sapaa876223321.wordpress.com/>

Feel free to have a look at it and send us your comments to our newsletter email address: [sapaastewards21@gmail.com](mailto:sapaastewards21@gmail.com)

We plan to discontinue the old site by the end of October and continue building the new site after that, in line with it being in a continual state of progress.

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### **Mission Statement:**

SAPAA is a group of volunteer stewards whose objectives are:

- To provide a forum for stewards to share information and provide assistance to Protected Areas.
- To promote the preservation, protection and restoration of ecological integrity in Alberta’s Protected Areas.
- To promote the use of Protected Areas for non-intrusive educational, research and recreational activities.
- To ensure that stewards’ concerns are heard by government and by the public, particularly with regard to legislation and management policies for Protected Areas.



American white pelicans at Edgar T. Jones Natural Area