

This is a courtesy edition of the newsletter, the 'official' version is at [sapaastewards.com - #50](http://sapaastewards.com - #50).



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## Notice of Annual General Meeting, Nov 30, 2024

Saturday, November 30, 2024 from 1000h to 1130h

Held Virtually, please sign in at 0945h to test your technology, RSVP: [2024 AGM Registration](#).

Summarized Agenda:

- Acceptance and Additions to Agenda
- Presentation: to be announced.
- Minutes of 2023 AGM and Business Arising from Previous Minutes
- Reports: President's (Hubert), Membership (Patsy), Financial Report (Myrna), Social Media Report (Frank), SAPAA Site Inspection Reports (Frank)
- Update on SAPAA Strategic Directions (Frank)
- Nomination and Election of Board Members (Hubert)
- Discussion of Future Initiatives and Questions from the Floor
- Adjournment

# Editorial

by Patsy Cotterill

Greetings to everyone: we hope you've been enjoying a fine Fall outdoors!

**Memberships.** Thank you to all of you who have renewed your memberships for the 2024-2025 membership year, ending September 30, 2025. We hope those who still intend to renew will do so. Your support assures us that SAPAA is still of value to stewards and encourages us to continue our exploration of ways for the Society to remain viable and sustainable.

**Payments.** An e-transfer is the preferred payment method as it saves volunteer time. Alternatively, cheques (for \$15) should be made payable to Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association and mailed to Membership Secretary at 7401-156 St. NW, Edmonton, AB T5R 1X4.

**Field Trips!** Several of us have been busy this fall visiting Natural Areas and filling in Site Inspection Forms as snapshot reports of what we found there. We have also been talking to Forestry and Parks Protected Areas staff about the forms. We are planning to finalize them next year with some tweaks to make them more relevant to government data collection, and easier to use and process.

**Feedback and Inspections.** We encourage stewards, volunteers, and members of the public to submit their own site inspection reports. We also appreciate feedback in any form, be it questions, comments, letters, blogs or photos, which if you agree can be published in the newsletter or on the website.

*Image Right: Manna demonstrates the height of 'tall lettuce' in the site, Tawatina NA, 2024-10-07, P. Cotterill.*

**SAPAA's Annual General Meeting** will take place virtually on Saturday, November 30, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m., and we invite everyone to attend. We are hoping to include a presentation from the government. The current board is willing to stand again, albeit with some shifting of positions, but of course we are very willing to entertain newcomers. We are in particular need of more directors. [Please RSVP.](#)

**Remembering.** In this newsletter we will be taking another quick trip down memory lane, looking at how SAPAA got started. It seems fitting given that Alison Dinwoodie has played such a huge role in it (see her memoir).

**Nature Strategy Survey.** If you have not already done so, please consider responding to the [Nature strategy engagement](#). It covers many areas of interest to SAPAA members.

**Clyde Fen.** On a final note: Kristyn Mayner, one of our members, is working with the stewards of [Clyde Fen Natural Area](#) to upgrade its status from PNT to OC. Kristyn is also director for Central Alberta for the [Alberta Native Plant Council](#) and a staff member of the government's Office of the Chief Scientist. She says that if the process succeeds, there will be lessons to be learnt from it.



## Remembering Alison Dinwoodie (1932-2024)

Alison Dinwoodie was a passionate outdoorswoman, a mountaineer, hiker and canoeist, who turned her love of the outdoors and the natural environment into a volunteer career of advocacy for conservation of Alberta's natural places including our organization, SAPAA.

If you knew Alison or want to read of a life well-lived, please visit her memorial post: [Alison Dinwoodie 1932-2024](#) (and included as an annex to this pdf version). A celebration of life is planned for November 14. If you wish to attend, please contact Elizabeth B. via [membership@sapaastewards.com](mailto:membership@sapaastewards.com).



**Founding member, Alison Dinwoodie, has been a driving force in SAPAA since Day One – photo by E. Beaubien**

# A Short Selected History of SAPAA

by Patsy Cotterill

To prepare for the future of SAPAA, an understanding of its past is important. Many individuals, such as Alison Dinwoodie, have contributed to the organization and the stewardship of Alberta's protected areas.

*The Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA for short, pronounced sap-ar) got its start with an inaugural meeting on May 15, 1999. Its stated purpose was to be an arms-length organization supporting the activities of stewards enrolled in the government's Volunteer Steward Program of 1986. Most of the stewards were of Natural Areas, the exception being a couple of stewards of ecological reserves and wildland parks.*

Continue reading.... [A Short Selected History of SAPAA](#) (or see annex below).

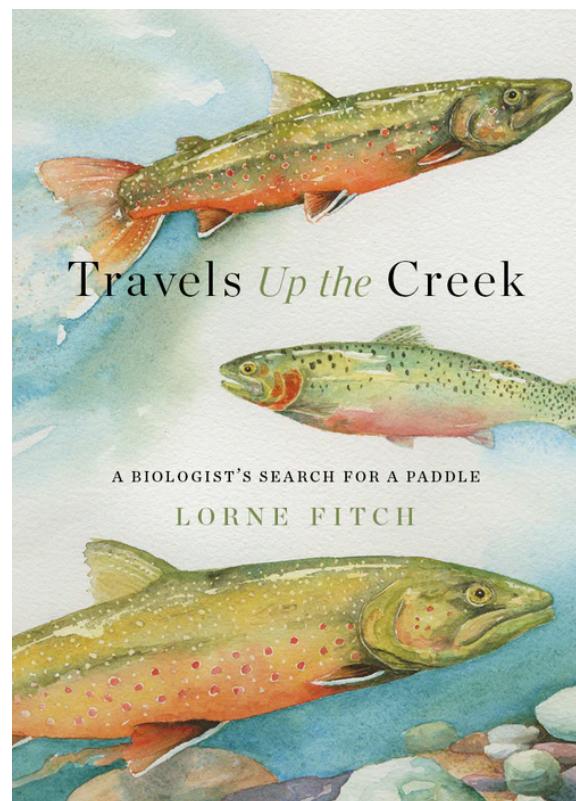
## Travels up the Creek... A New Lorne Fitch Book

Lorne Fitch has published his second collection of essays, following Streams of Consequence in 2023.

Travels up the Creek: A Biologist's Search for a Paddle is available for pre-order from [Rocky Mountain Books](#) at \$25.

Lorne is high among the small number of pre-eminent nature and conservation writers of Alberta. A retired fish and wildlife biologist living in Lethbridge, he writes on conservation issues for magazines such as the Alberta Wilderness Association's Wildlands Advocate and Nature Alberta as well as the Edmonton Journal.

He draws his inspiration not only from his own life experience but from well-known international environmental writers, including Canada's own Stan Rowe.



# Joint GoA - SAPAA Meeting

Three board members met with officials from the provincial government to discuss site inspections and other matters of mutual interest. This was the third such meeting this year with previous ones occurring on March 6 and June 7.

- Subject: Updated Inspection Reports and Related Issues
- Date & Attendees: Virtual meeting, October 17, 2024;
  - Government (GoA) personnel from various Branches of the Lands Operations Division of Forestry and Parks: Alexandra Miller-Tait, Chad Willms, Cara Gill.
  - SAPAA Board members: Hubert Taube, Frank Potter, Patsy Cotterill.

## Key Discussion Points

- Experiences to date with the SAPAA-operated Site Inspection tool.
- This tool was run as a proof of concept in 2023 and 2024.
- To date, more than 50 inspection reports have been submitted and a number converted into posts with the respective site webpage updated.
- GoA were positive and impressed with the reports and thanked SAPAA for their extensive work.
- GoA will consider how to communicate to Stewards not part of SAPAA.
- The importance of resources (time, talent, and treasure) to maintain a program.
- Future use of technology to support field applications and reducing the processing time to both submit and finalize an inspection report.

## Action Items

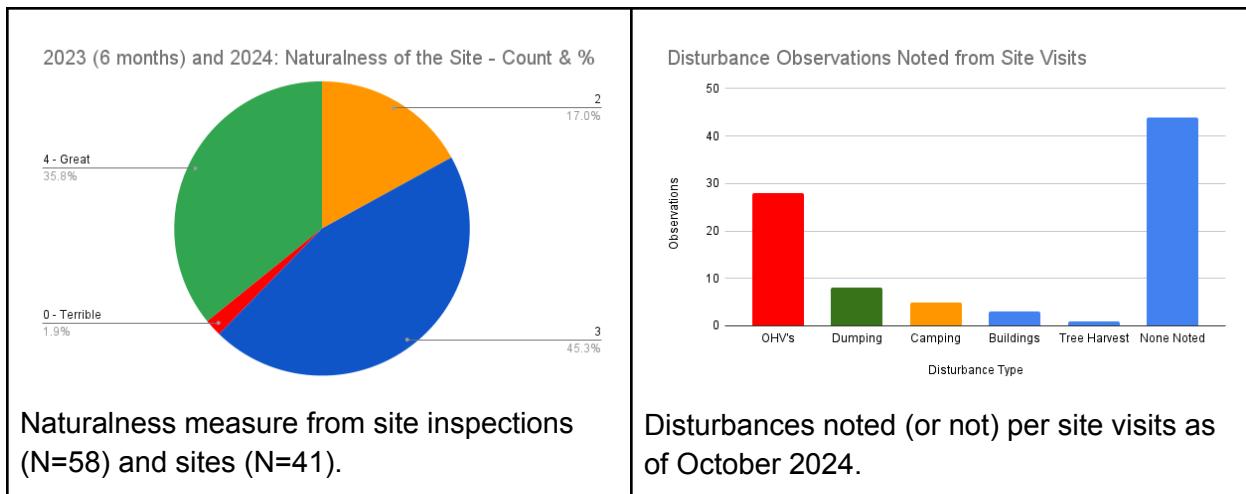
- GoA will provide suggestions to update the site inspection form or implicitly endorse the existing form and questions.
- GoA to provide contact to the Alberta Conservation Association and the Safety Program they had developed (completed).
- GoA and SAPAA will jointly monitor a submission to 310-LAND.

# Site Inspection Status

By Frank Potter

2024 was the second year of a SAPAA run site inspection process. Both last and this year were considered to be 'proof of concepts'. That is testing whether the right questions are being asked, how best to collect submissions, and how to communicate them. There are about 12 submissions 'in the hopper' as of writing and 58 received reports.

Noting this is a small sample size, the degree of naturalness and relatively low disturbance which has been observed through the submissions is both heartening and speaks to the important role for Stewards in protecting these areas. These terms are defined in 2024-Questions.



## Editorial Team, Links and Resources at a Glance:

Editorial team: Patsy Cotterill, Frank Potter, Hubert Taube.

- [List of Alberta's Protected Areas](#).
- [Connect & Read](#).
- [Online Steward Reporting form](#).
- [New and Renewal of SAPAA Membership](#).
- [SAPAA's FaceBook Group](#).
- [Land Reference Manual | Alberta Parks](#)

## Annex - Alison Dinwoodie 1932-2024

*For many years, Alison was the voice and face of SAPAA. A long time colleague and friend, Patsy Cotterill looks back at Alison's remarkable life and impact on Alberta's Natural Areas.*



**Founding member, Alison Dinwoodie, has been a driving force in SAPAA since Day One – photo by E. Beaubien**

Alison Dinwoodie was a passionate outdoorswoman, a mountaineer, hiker and canoeist, who turned her love of the outdoors and the natural environment into a volunteer career of advocacy for conservation of Alberta's natural places.

She came to Canada from her native Glasgow, Scotland in 1972 equipped with a PhD in biochemistry, to take up a position in the Department of Laboratory Medicine at the University of Alberta, where she worked until her retirement in 1994. A scholarship has been set up at the U of A in her name.

## Annex - Alison as a Steward of Whitehorse Wildland Park



*Alison in front of the Cardinal Divide Viewpoint, date unknown.*

Alison's particular love was of the North East slopes south of Cadomin and at the Cardinal Divide. She became a steward of the Cardinal Divide Natural Area, representing the Edmonton Chapter of the Alpine Club of Canada, in 1991, along with the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) as co-steward.

The Cardinal Divide Natural Area was subsumed in a larger protected area, the Whitehorse Wildland Park (WWP), in 1998, and Alison transferred her stewardship to that.

A major concern in that highly accessible montane and alpine area was all-terrain vehicle damage to fragile mountain slopes and creeks. Her interest in opposing this damage extended also to the Cardinal River Headwaters, partly outside the Whitehorse Wildland Park. For her frequent visits and diligent reporting to Alberta Parks she was given an Outstanding Steward Award under the government's Volunteer Steward Program.

### Cheviot Mine Hearings

When the hearings for Cardinal River Coal's open pit Cheviot Mine came along in 1996, Alison registered as an intervenor and used her mapping skills and detailed knowledge of the area to advocate for preservation of the most sensitive areas.

Alison was involved in 2015 when mine operations began closing down and she attended meetings to discuss reclamation plans. She was adamant that ATVs should be excluded from the west side of the Grave Flats Road, a natural boundary.

Alison's role has been continued by Kristen Andersen of the ANPC, works with other individuals and groups who monitor and protect the area.



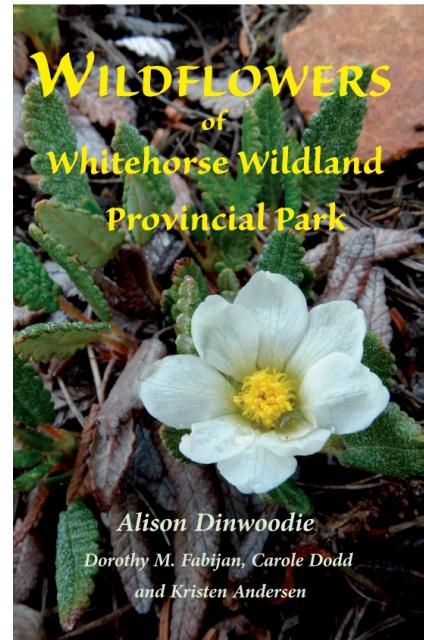
*Cardinal Divide, July 11, 2020, E. Beaubien.*

## Wildflowers of Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park

Spending so much time in the mountains, Alison naturally became interested in its fascinating and special plant life, which she set about recording with photographs, notes and sketches.

She conceived the idea of producing a guide book that would be of special help to amateur botanists. With the considerable input of local botanists, *Wildflowers of Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park* was published in 2020.

*Wildflowers of Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park* by Alison Dinwoodie.



## Alison, Stewardship, and SAPAA

As a steward, Alison was also involved in general stewardship matters elsewhere in the province. She was a leading proponent of a support organization to help stewards registered in the Volunteer Steward Program communicate their concerns to government, and when the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA) held its inaugural meeting in May, 1999, Alison was in the chair. She devoted countless hours to SAPAA business, serving variously as chairperson, president, recording secretary and director from 1999 to 2016.



East Ridge of the Cardinal Divide, Lorna Allen, date unknown.

## Thank You, Alison

Alison died on September 13, 2024. Unfortunately she was not able to visit her beloved Cardinal Divide in her last years, but her legacy is recognized and lives on with her successors. With no family in Canada, she was looked after by a group of devoted friends and staff of her care facility until the end. Her friends are organizing a celebration of life in November.

Thank you, Alison, for your devotion to conservation in Alberta!

## Patsy's Personal Reminiscence

I remember one occasion that demonstrated Alison's familiarity with mountains and climbing skills. We had been on a long hike along a trail above the valley north of the Cardinal Divide's East Ridge and were facing a long and difficult bush-whacking trek back.

Alison suggested we simply ascend the slope below the East Ridge and then climb the boulder-strewn cliff to the top of the ridge. I was skeptical of the suggestion. My acquaintance with the East Ridge had always been from the top, admiring the vast landscape to the north and west or climbing gingerly down to a narrow ledge to investigate tiny saxifrages. Yet Alison went on to confidently guide us over the boulders, beloved by hoary marmots, and up the final steep face. From the ridge top we faced a short, downhill walk to the Cardinal Divide parking lot and then to our cars.

## Annex - A Short Selected History of SAPAA

By Patsy Cotterill

*Long time member, Patsy Cotterill reflects on SAPAA's early days, people, and reasons for existence. This is also a way to honour Alison Dinwoodie 1932-2024 who passed away recently and was a driving force behind the organization for many years.*

STEWARDS OF ALBERTA'S PROTECTED AREAS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

No. 1 December 1999

### MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR NATURAL AREAS

A suggestion was made at the general meeting of SAPAA in Red Deer on 6 Nov 1999, that Stewards would be in a stronger position to protect their Natural Area if they had a Management Plan either already established, or in draft form. By having a Management Plan available at this time, it would demonstrate the viability and importance of the area and the Steward's commitment to its protection. It would also provide a solid foundation for any requirements under future regulations or legislation. When the new Natural Heritage Act comes into effect, all Areas will eventually have to have such a Plan.

*Banner of the inaugural edition of the SAPAA Newsletter, December 1999. The Natural Heritage Act was never actually passed.*

*As documents and memories are uncovered, this post may be updated accordingly. Comments with memories are appreciated as well as electronic copies of Stewardship related documents. Please send these to [webmaster@sapaastewards.com](mailto:webmaster@sapaastewards.com).*

## The History

The Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association (SAPAA for short, pronounced sap-ar) got its start with an inaugural meeting on May 15, 1999. Its stated purpose was to be an "arms-length organization supporting the activities of stewards enrolled in the government's Volunteer Steward Program of 1987." Most of the stewards were of Natural Areas, the exception being a couple of stewards of ecological reserves and wildland parks.

## Natural Areas

Natural Areas had been in existence since 1963 as areas of value for their natural environment, legislatively protected. Of varying size, they were intended to "bridge the gap" in Alberta's system of Protected Areas between "strictly protected areas [e.g., wilderness areas and ecological reserves] and those lands intensively developed for recreation [e.g., parks]." Natural Areas were primarily intended for recreational use by a local public, and while the government would be responsible for the land base (as for all public land), it was never intended that budget should be allocated for intensive management or the development of facilities on site.

Most Natural Areas were classified as having Recreation as their purpose, but two other categories with somewhat different intents were recognized: Education (sites for teaching and research) and Conservation (conserving important habitats, landscapes and species). Ecological protection, however, was always the sine qua non of all types of Natural Area.

Rather than management by government, with the expense that this would entail, the idea was to engage the public in management of these sites, and it was envisaged that this could be done in several ways: through land trusts, dispositions, volunteer stewardship, payment for services (e.g., garbage collection) and direct financial contributions.

## Volunteer Steward Program

Stewards of some sites had been in existence for several years before the official Volunteer Steward Program was formally announced in 1987. Thereafter, the stewards were to be the "eyes and ears" of the government, visiting their site and submitting a report on its status at least once a year.

In return, they were invited to an annual spring or fall conference with presentations and government updates, given all sorts of gear (some of us are still wearing the T-shirts and warm, fleece jackets that were handed out), and communicated with via newsletters.

Some stewards organized themselves into non-profit societies, allowing them more autonomy and self-sufficiency, and an ability to better manage, protect and promote their sites, although the government still retained responsibility for the land base and provided assistance. (This is still true today.)

## Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association

Even so, it was not all beer and skittles for volunteers. Most stewards joined because they were nature lovers and maintaining the ecological integrity of their site was their prime focus.

But the wide range of public uses that were allowable in Natural Areas – including hunting, camping, existing oil and gas installations and off-highway vehicle riding – could make protection difficult. The sandhill areas north of Edmonton were particularly problematic because their undulating topography and open forests, along with their relative proximity to settled areas, made them particularly attractive to OHV riders.

Down south, in the foothills and mountains, some Natural Areas were suffering from increased use. As well, some stewards found they had to defend their site from outside development. The Wagner Natural Area Society, for example, was formed in 1982 not as a steward but as an advocacy group protesting the development of an adjacent major highway. It is still fighting today to protect its hydrology from surrounding adjacent development.

For several years after the Volunteer Steward Program began, stewards talked about forming their own mutual support group. Given the overweening recreational mandate, and the flexibility built into the governance of Natural Areas, the government was in a difficult situation, trying to be all things to all people. Stewards thought that an organization like SAPAA might collectively be able to influence the government towards giving greater weight to ecological protection.

It was not until May 15, 1999 that SAPAA held its inaugural meeting, with some 30-people attending, including three staff members from the Volunteer Steward Program. Alison Dinwoodie, who had been a leading proponent of a support organization since early on, chaired the meeting.

The first general meeting was held on November 6, 1999 at the Red Deer and District Museum and Archives, with 24 people in attendance and Alison Dinwoodie in the chair. Seven motions were passed defining the new organization's objectives. The first three were as follows:

- Objective 1. Establish a network of volunteer stewards to exchange information and expertise, and to provide mutual assistance and support.
- Objective 2. Advocate for the preservation, protection and restoration of the ecological integrity of areas that represent Alberta's natural ecosystems.
- Objective 3. Identify issues of common concern, in order to deal with them more effectively and comprehensively.

The other objectives involved working with government and other organizations to resolve issues, being represented at meetings on issues of interest, increasing public awareness of protected areas, and supporting the knowledge and skills of stewards through conferences, workshops, seminars and publications.

The membership fee was set at \$15 (it hasn't changed today) and plans were made to develop a set of bylaws before the next meeting to be held in May. The first (interim) executive consisted of Alison Dinwoodie as chairperson, John Woitenko as vice-president, Beth Jenkins as recording secretary and Marilyn Shannon as treasurer and membership secretary.

In the discussion that followed a number of questions were posed for consideration, such as the future of the Volunteer Steward Program and SAPAA's role and relationship with government. These questions are still being asked today.

Despite its clear objectives, SAPAA had problems defining itself right from the start. Not all stewards joined SAPAA. Some welcomed the collegiality and solidarity, but others did not feel the need for it, and yet others were concerned that in advocating and criticizing the government they could be in conflict of interest. SAPAA was hampered in its efforts to recruit more stewards because for reasons of privacy the government did not make its list of registered stewards available.

## Demise of the Volunteer Steward Program

Fast forward 15 years or so, and the Volunteer Steward Program is shutting down, not with a bang but with a whimper. No new stewards are being recruited (to non-stewarded sites) and departing stewards are not being replaced. Annual reports submitted to government, as far as we know, are not being acknowledged as staff are assigned to other duties.

The last stewards' conference was held in Calgary on September 22-24, 2017. The newsletter had ceased circulation even before that. Tighter regulations regarding safety, and a fatal accident, made volunteers, the responsibility of the government while doing volunteer work at the government's request and hence considered employees eligible for insurance, suddenly a liability rather than an asset.

In the absence of a functioning Volunteer Stewardship Program, SAPAA's navel-gazing with respect to its role, its relevance and its relationship to government, intensified. Board members repeatedly canvassed themselves and the membership on whether SAPAA should fold, but a dedicated band of supporters urged it to keep going.

Some brief excitement was generated in 2021-2022 when the government commissioned the Miistikis Institute to survey stewards, with the idea of re-envisioning a stewards' program that might involve an enrichment of duties with citizen science. It came to nothing, and SAPAA never got access to the survey results.

## The Present

From the turn of the century to the present day, the status and future of Alberta's protected areas system has been the subject of constant political discussion, ideas, plans and policies for change.

There were the proposed Parks Act and the Natural Heritage Act, meant to rationalize existing legislation for the Protected Areas system, which did not come to fruition, the Regional Land Use Plans (seven proposed, only two completed and no subsequent follow-up with the public), and the divestment of a list of parks and natural areas, a proposal abandoned by the government after public outcry. The public has recently been surveyed on an update to the Plan for Parks, and on their opinions regarding a Nature Strategy for Alberta.

Practical measures have been implemented in response to demands for public recreation; for example, in the provincial parks camping was expanded by the provision of more sites suitable for RVs, and facilitated by means of a registration system.

However, environmental protection has not to our knowledge been obviously advanced, with the exception of greater protection for the Castle Wildland Provincial Park | Alberta Parks in 2016.

## Deaf, Blind, but Still Alive

The Volunteer Steward Program is defunct, but Natural Areas still exist and the government still has responsibility for them.

Stewards still exist, and SAPAA persists, and is still in communication with the government. SAPAA received a new-blood transfusion with the arrival of new board members whose organizational skills and tech savvy have resulted in a revamped and more sophisticated website, outreach to students and the development of a site inspection report form.

The latter is designed to give visitors an incentive to visit Natural Areas to report on their findings. SAPAA will receive and store the information but is working to make it useful to share with the government. Administratively, the SAPAA board is looking to improve the organization's efficiency and sustainability, possibly by a merger with a larger organization.

To use a metaphor: the road ahead for SAPAA lies shrouded in fog. On the other hand, those of us who are visiting and stewarding sites are experiencing an ongoing appreciation of our province's wonderful natural ecosystems and landscapes, well worth protecting.



*Carrying out the May Count of Plant Species in Flower on the Marl Pond Trail, Wagner Natural Area\_2022-05-29\_PCotterill*

Wagner is considered the “flagship” Natural Area. In existence as a protected area since 1975, and stewarded by the Wagner NA Society since 1982, it ticks all the boxes. Its rich fens are environmentally significant and support wildlife and a diversity of plant species including some rare ones, it has been used for teaching and research and, close to large centres of population, it is enjoyed by an ever-increasing number of members of the public.

Not all of the 248 protected areas can be a Wagner, but at a minimum, all deserve some form of stewardship.

# 2024 AGM Registration

Open to SAPAA Paid Members and those interested in the association.

Per Section 3 of the Bylaws, notice is given to current members of the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association of its Annual General Meeting. It will be held on November 30, 2024 from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. virtually. Pre-registration is required to confirm quorum and collect questions.

The meeting link will be sent to those who have registered on November 29. Registration closes 8:00 AM, November 30th. An Agenda will be provided in the October 2024 SAPAA Newsletter (pending).

For your records, you may print the confirmation page following hitting the 'Send' button..

You must be a paid-SAPAA member to vote and the AGM is open to all of those interested in the association. Download a Membership Form.



*Boundary sign, NE Corner along access road, Red Rock Coulee NA, 2024-10-16, P. Potter.*