

**Minutes of the SAPAA Annual General Meeting held on
Saturday, 30 November, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. by Zoom**

The meeting was hosted and recorded* by Frank Potter.

Present: Hubert Taube, Patsy Cotterill, Chris Smith, Frank Potter, Tony Blake Dave Ealey, Kristyn Mayner, Mary Binette, Manna Parseyan, Rick Watts, David Fielder, Madeline Mayes, Claudia Lipski, Myrna Peters, Kate Reeves, Deborah Donnelly.

Regrets: Tony Sneep

Meeting was called to order by President Hubert Taube at 10:01 a.m.

Hubert read the Indigenous Acknowledgement, recognizing that we are on Treaty 6 Territory, home of several Indigenous Nations, and that we owe a debt to these first inhabitants for the way they cared for the land.

The meeting opened with a slide presentation by Kristyn Mayer, from the Office of the Chief Scientist, Environment and Parks, entitled “An Overview of the Citizen Science Alberta Community of Practice.” Kristyn described the AB CitSci Community of Practice (founded 2014) as a collaborative group who shares ideas and information to enhance the design and delivery of citizen science projects. She reviewed the CitSci Community’s recent workshop held on October 30 in Edmonton, as well as the resources available on the Collaboration Hub, the organization’s new website. These include information on six principles of good practice, information resources (e.g. webinars), a directory of human resources, and a list of projects. Four focus areas are being developed by a committee that meets bi-weekly. One focus area is to ensure that the data generated are trustworthy and valuable enough to be useful to decision-makers. It was suggested that this initiative has relevance for SAPAA and that data may possibly be used to inform the government’s new Nature Strategy.

Question from Hubert: Where does the funding come from? Answer, the Office of the Chief Scientist funded the website and the recent workshop, but does not fund the day-to-day operation of the projects.

Question from Patsy: Would health and safety considerations get in the way of people doing projects, possibly intrusive ones, on Crown land. Answer: Permission from land owners does not seem to be an issue. Many of the projects involve monitoring, making observations.

Frank requested attendees post introductions in the Chat. He also asked for an answer to the question: Do you like snow... or not?

Business Meeting

1. Additions to the Agenda

Patsy requested a time slot after election of officers to recognize the long service to SAPAA of Hubert and others.

2. Acceptance of the Agenda

Frank moved, Myrna seconded, that the agenda be accepted as now presented. Carried.

3. Acceptance of the Minutes of the 2023 AGM.

Frank moved, David seconded, that the minutes be accepted as circulated. Carried.

4. Business Arising from the Minutes

Hubert noted that although Richard DeSmet had agreed to be a director at the meeting he had subsequently resigned, citing ill health.

5. President's Report

Recognition of Past SAPAA Members. Hubert began by remembering Pat Clayton, who died in October 2023. Pat was a moving force in Wagner Natural Area Society and a supporter of SAPAA throughout. Alison Dinwoodie died in September 2024. A Whitehorse Wildland Park steward and principal founder of SAPAA in 1999, Alison was very active on the SAPAA board until about five years ago.

Overview of SAPAA Activities. Hubert briefly reviewed the purpose and history of SAPAA and noted that the society was in transition from an organization devoted to serving government stewards to a future "independent organization with its own programs and procedures and membership recruitment," while continuing to cooperate with the government of Alberta (GoA). Under the theme of SAPAA reorganization Hubert noted that four options for SAPAA's future have been discussed over the last two years: disappear by default; actively be dissolved, re-envision as "SAPAA 2.0" or merge with another organization. The board is seeking membership ratification of a proposal to proceed with "2.0."

Meetings. Hubert reported that there were no official board meetings this year, these having been replaced by weekly virtual meetings attended mostly by an "unofficial committee" of Frank, Hubert and Patsy. Work has included finishing documentation of WAERNAHR sites and publishing them on the website, and development and revision of the site inspection report (SIR) form developed by Frank. The committee has had three meetings with the GoA Protected Areas team to discuss design and field use of the SIR form. Regarding the option of a possible merger and/or cooperation with a larger organization, the committee met virtually with Steph Weizenbach of Nature Alberta and with Brian Ilnicki of the Land Stewardship Centre.

Field Trips/Site Visits. Six group outings were organized and advertised and about 50 site visits were made by individuals, board and other members, resulting in SIRs for processing and editing. There have been no reports from outside "citizen scientists" yet and these need to be promoted.

Newsletters. Four were published in 2024, in April, July, October and November. They are available on the website.

Student Projects. Frank approached two university student groups to assist SAPAA as part of programs of community service. Three Sociology 291 students from the University of Alberta produced a 35-page comparative review of conservation/stewardship organizations, local, national and international, and made recommendations for changes in SAPAA practice on the basis of this information. (See Newsletter No. 50, July 2024 on the website for the full report.)

A second team, of computer technology students from the U of A, developed the prototype of a cell phone app to record SIRs in the field. Lessons were learned but it was decided not to pursue the app to development stage.

Hubert identified the following in an outlook for the future: increase membership; pursue use of social media; outreach to other naturalist/conservation groups; develop well-defined projects.

He thanked the board for their service. Frank recognized also the particular contributions made by Tony Blake and Madeline Mayes.

Comment: Patsy noted that another accomplishment was the sending off of letters to the Ministers of Environment and Protected Areas, and Forestry and Parks, to put SAPAA on the ministerial radar (See Newsletter # 50, July 2024

<https://sapaastewards.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/letter-to-ministers-2024-05-14.pdf>

6. Membership Report

Patsy reported that 18 members had renewed so far for the membership year October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025. This is down somewhat from peaks in recent years. Donations are also down.

7. Financial Report

Myrna presented the financial statement for the period October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024. The bank balance stood at \$3,332.16, thanks to income from the U of A (in connection with the students' projects) of \$1,750.00, as well as membership renewals and donations. Myrna moved, Tony seconded, that the financial report be accepted as presented. Carried.

8. Social Media Report <https://wordpress.com/post/sapaastewards.com/17279>

Frank shared the website screen to demonstrate how Google Analytics could be used to analyze usage data, e.g., SAPAA's search position (13), number of visits (up 50% year over year), number of views and visits, most visitors using the search engine, 50/50 usage of mobile device vs computer, locations of visitors by country, and PA sites most visited. He noted that Clyde Fen NA was very popular. There was a good number of newsletter downloads, and 70 Facebook members. Claudia expressed her appreciation of SAPAA's Facebook. Frank asked to be informed in cases where permission was needed to access Facebook.

9. SAPAA Site Inspection Report <https://wordpress.com/post/sapaastewards.com/17300>

Frank reported that the SIR form was in its second year but was still in the proof-of-concept stage and would likely remain in PoC in 2025. Frank has developed a training video on filling in the SIR form. Why the need for proof of concept? Because managing data is difficult and expensive, especially when you are dealing with 248 sites, and processing is still manual. The data generated are reported in the letters to the Ministers (April 2024; see newsletter # 50, July 2024). Frank observed that although the reason for visits is the generation of data, the trips are a lot of fun. He highlighted one of the measures assessed, that of naturalness.

Question from David F: Has SAPAA developed a priority list of sites to be visited? Answer: No, but it's a good idea to pursue in 2025. We need a map of what has been visited and what needs visiting.

Comment from Patsy: We need to know what these SIRs achieve. GoA has indicated that it is not entirely satisfied with the questions and the process of completing our forms. We need to be able to provide data that is valuable to GoA in order for them to respond and act. We also need to recruit site visitors.

10. Update on Strategic Directions

Frank reported that we had approached Nature Alberta regarding some sort of merger and their board had asked a number of questions, followed by both parties concluding that a merger would not work. As a small volunteer group we cannot match the resources and services the GoA provides; nevertheless we propose to continue with option 2.0 to try to maintain our niche with respect to Protected Areas and stewards. Sharing his screen of Newsletter # 52, <https://sapaastewards.com/news/sapaa-newsletter-no-52-november-2024/>

Frank reviewed the Principles of Option 2.0 as well as the 10 Priorities for action for this option. He is also interested in running a safety conference. In this connection also, he noted that he would like to

establish a pay wall, meaning that certain services would have to be paid for by non-members, thereby increasing value to membership.

Frank requested feedback on the Priorities.

Comment: Tony feels we are on the right track with them but that some of Nature Alberta's services could still be used, e.g., insurance, best practices. (There was clarification from Claudia that SAPAA is still a member of NA and is still receiving those services.)

Comment: Rick Watts (AB Mycological Society/Poplar Creek NA) asked if we have a clear set of objectives and deliverables. He would like to see us able to demonstrate trends over time. Answer, Frank: The priorities are an attempt to work towards objectives, but yes, we need to work on deliverables. He recommended Rick take a look at the Poplar Creek page on the website – his group “owns” the page.

Comment: Dave E. supports the priorities enthusiastically, only caveat that they may let the government off the hook. Monitoring of sites very important. Recruits are needed to carry out these objectives but the priorities may encourage volunteers by giving them something to do. Website is very worthwhile.

Comment Madeline M.: Likes the priorities, relates especially to the first five, but would move up the mini-conference objective as building relationships is very important.

Comment, Debborah D: AWA can help with communications by providing information to the AWA membership, and e.g., hosting a public talk on SAPAA and PAs.

Kristyn M: As a GoA employee, she is still learning how the government could best help SAPAA. As an ANPC member, she notes the ANPC is struggling with similar issues re volunteers, but suggests we copy the Edmonton and Area Land Trust's success with recruiting volunteers. Comment, Patsy: EALT are able to provide “hands-on” positive tasks for volunteers to do whereas SAPAA is limited to offering monitoring.

Frank moved, Dave E. seconded, that we adopt Option 2.0 going forward. Carried.

11. Election of the Board

Tony Blake, David Fielder and Madeline Mayes agreed to let their names stand as directors, and Chris Smith volunteered to remain as a director, and to continue to assist with technical matters.

The slate of board members was presented as follows: President: Frank Potter: Recording Secretary: Patsy Cotterill; Treasurer: Myrna Peters. Directors: Tony Blake, David Fielder, Madeline Mayes, Chris Smith and Hubert Taube. The board was elected by acclamation. Congratulations to all.!

Tribute to the service of SAPAA members:

Patsy thanked Hubert for all the work he has done for SAPAA since its inception ca. 2000. Today he is stepping down as president after eight years of presidency. He was elected president on 17th October 2015, and before that was vice-president since October 22, 2005. He has put in thousands of volunteer hours, including as steward of Northwest of Bruderheim Natural Area, with the goal of promoting and protecting Alberta's Parks and Protected Areas system and supporting stewards. He will be stepping back but not away.

Hubert has already noted the contributions of Alison Dinwoodie and Pat Clayton.

We are also sad to announce the resignations of Dr. Guy and Nonie Swinnerton, stewards of Hastings Lake Islands Natural Area. They regret that for medical reasons they are no longer capable of canoeing out to the Islands. Both have made significant contributions to the governance of SAPAA.

Tony also thanked Hubert for all his work through the years.

12. Discussion of Future Initiatives

Frank asked for questions from the floor.

Question from David F: Is GoA under any obligation to provide responses to volunteer/SAPAA requests for information? Answer, Frank: We are trying to maintain a good relationship with EPA staff. Answer, Hubert: No obligation. GoA staff themselves seem to lack clarity on their responsibilities, but they have met with SAPAA and responded to emails. Patsy: No, it would probably need a Volunteer Steward Program in place to create such an obligation. An earlier “culture of stewardship” has disappeared, but maybe stewardship responsibilities have moved on, to various organizations involved with volunteers and stewards.

Hubert thanked everyone for attending the meeting and thanked and congratulated Frank for taking on the presidency. Frank noted that he will be in touch with the new board soon about meetings.

13. Adjournment

Hubert moved, Frank seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. Carried.
Meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Submitted: Patsy Cotterill, Recording Secretary