

SAPAA Newsletter No. 56, November 2025

The SAPAA 2.0 update outlines five priorities for 2026, highlighting volunteer roles and an article from the Government of Alberta (GoA). SAPAA faces challenges including public awareness and volunteer recruitment amid discussions of its future. This Newsletter can be downloaded in pdf [pending].



Milk River NA, Lands Operations Division, Alberta Forestry and Parks., 2025.

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Editorial – SAPAA, Where to From Here?

by Frank Potter, President SAPAA

Half a Term. The President role is elected for two-years, and I am halfway through it. I am fortunate to be able to build on the legacy of the former and current board members.

Four Challenges. This AGM edition of the newsletter discusses four topics. Firstly, an outline of the four challenges SAPAA faces. Next, what the organization has done and what it is proposing to do to address the challenges over the next two years.

Your Role. The fourth topic is what role you can play in all of this? There are interesting projects coming up in 2026 in which you can use existing or learn new skills. If you want to contribute more, consider joining the board.

The GoA Role. Rounding out this edition is an article from the Government of Alberta (GoA); Lands Operations Division, Alberta Forestry and Parks.

President's Report. Looking back, please find linked the [2025 President's AGM Report](#). SAPAA accomplished quite a few things. Read on for what we will do in 2026! The [2025 Web and Social Media Report](#) is also available.

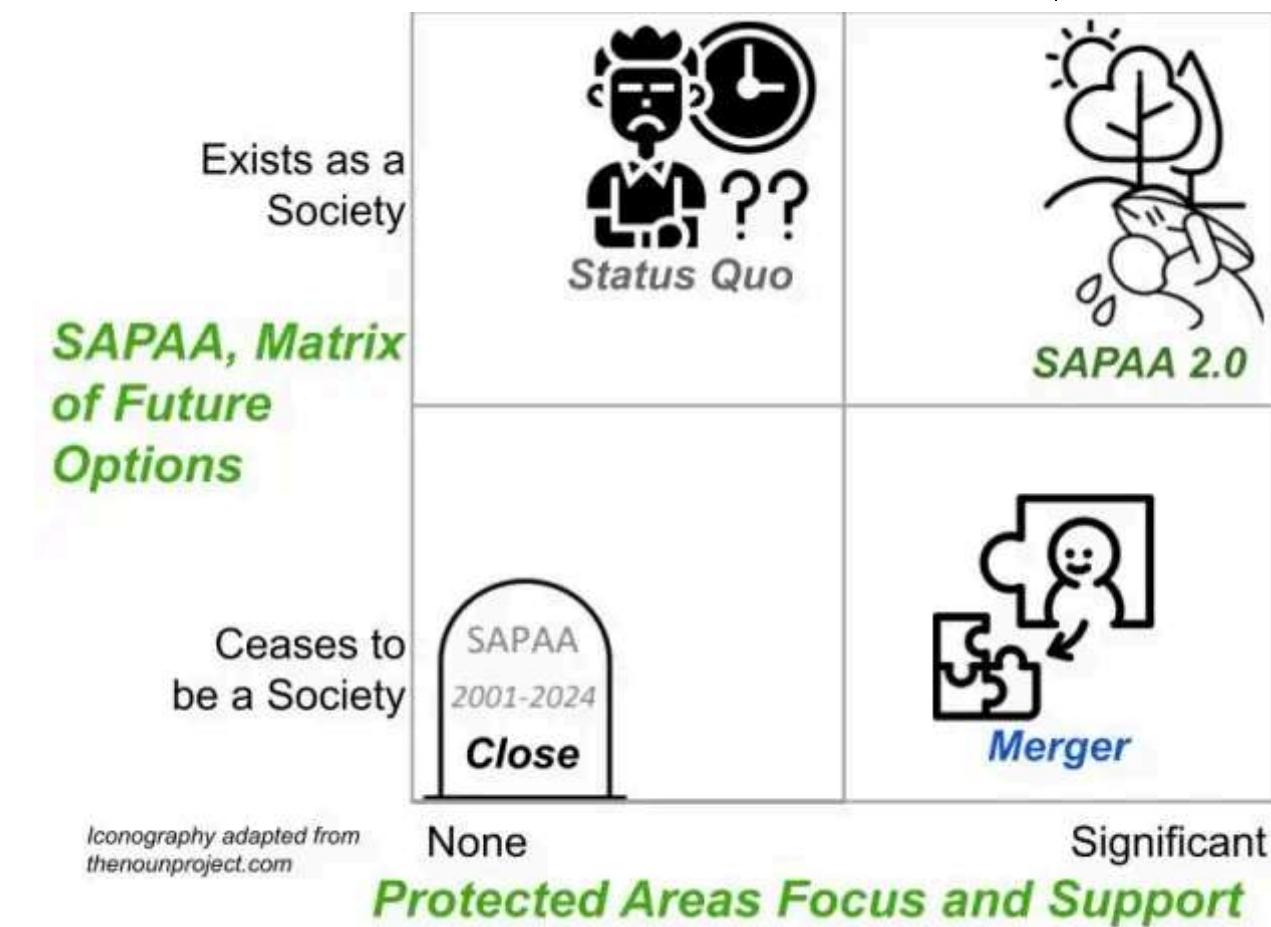
First the Context – an Unique Protected Area System

As far as one can tell, Alberta's protected areas covered by the [Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands \(WAERNAHR\) Act](#) are unique to the province. The legacy government volunteer stewardship program was also unique. Campground hosts are common but asking citizens to check in and report on a natural area is not.

While Crown Land is abundant in Alberta, these sites conserve unique plant, geological, or cultural treasures and provide critical stepping stones for flora and fauna. Those close to urban areas (e.g. [J.J. Collett Natural Area](#), [Wagner](#), etc.) help to introduce and educate the public about nature. In other words, they are bite sized, accessible, and worth protecting.

SAPAA's History and its Existential Crisis

At the last AGM, SAPAA was faced four possible futures: close its doors, merge with another organization, continue to exist but without a clear purpose, or take on some of the functions of the legacy government program through SAPAA volunteers. This last option was labeled SAPAA 2.0 and what the board has investigated over the past year.



SAPAA Matrix of Future Options: Status Quo, SAPAA 2.0, Close, or Merger with Another Organization.

SAPAA 2.0 – Too Big, Too Soon, and the Future

A merger was quickly set aside as other nonprofits are facing similar struggles. Closure is a last resort, and the status quo is simply the waiting room outside of closure – thus the interest in SAPAA 2.0.

In 2025, SAPAA investigated this option with a particular focus on asking, how much effort would it take to field SAPAA volunteers to conduct site inspections that is compliant with safety legislation. The answer is no less than \$25,000 per year for the bare bones' variation and north of \$75,000 for a full complement of volunteers [1].

SAPAA also investigated the grant landscape for operational funding to pay for this and found it wanting. The conclusion is that SAPAA 2.0 is too big to undertake in the near future. However, that does not mean that we cannot start to chip away at it. Before getting to work, we need to talk about our challenges.

1. This analysis was done by Grant MacEwan University [Student Project](#) in the summer of 2025. \$25,000 was to field 3 volunteers but also include the fixed costs needed to safely field a larger complement. \$75,000 was based on fielding 15 individuals. In both cases, an honorarium would be paid to defray travel and incidental costs to the

volunteer. Technology would eliminate much of the manual processes around managing reports submitted. Other costs include training and potentially contracting out some of the functions to offset a lack of volunteers.

SAPAA 2.0 – Four Challenges

Three of the four challenges listed below are germane to every nonprofit in Canada (see [Statistics Canada | Volunteer Vibe](#)). SAPAA has the additional challenge of government interest. So, without further adieu, introducing SAPAA's challenge quartet:

- 1. Public Awareness.** Is the average citizen aware of the protected areas and considers the sites to be important?
- 2. Government Interest.** The protected areas are Crown Land which the provincial government is the custodian. In this role, how interested (or indifferent) is the province as reflected in public policy and resources.
- 3. Volunteers and Resources.** The 262 protected areas administered under the WAERNAHR Act are more of an abstraction on a map. This makes recruiting volunteers challenging. Are individuals willing to take on leadership, site inspection, marketing, and other volunteer functions? What other resources are available to SAPAA (e.g. students, grants, partnerships, funding, etc.)?
- 4. Processes and Technology.** The tools to manage the other three challenges. This has been SAPAA's focus and we have been reasonably successful creating a website, a database of past inspections, and doing things like integrating [iNaturalist.ca](#).

A Quintet of Priorities that Will Play with the Challenge Quartet

The following five priorities address one or more of the above challenges. Included with each priority are the expected Time, Talent, and Treasure to achieve them. Some of the Priorities are encores from the [Ten 2024-25 Priorities](#) while others are new.

- 1. Operations.** Sustaining current operations, supporting new projects and activities, and giving our volunteers a best in class experience. Inform the public and the Minister(s) about the state of the protected areas.
- 2. Site Inspections.** Develop and refine the site inspection process. Align questions with GoA priorities, continue Ministerial reporting, and increase inspection submissions.
- 3. GoA Relations.** Maintain a productive working relationship with Ministries and the Minister(s) of the day. Engage at the political level and in particular with rural MLAs. Support legacy government Stewards.
- 4. Cultivate Peer Relationships.** Make better use of the resources provided to SAPAA by [Nature Alberta](#). Develop Site Inspection capacity by partnering with interested environmental, recreational, and educational organizations.
- 5. Stewardship Best Practices.** Identify and communicate best practices to members and peer organizations. Topics include administration, safety, science, and technology. Best practices come from Alberta, across Canada, and globally.

Want to Help the Quintet of Priorities?

Now it comes time to ask for your help by contributing time, talent, or treasure. Starting with the last item, Treasure. Consider donating to SAPAA. Unfortunately, we can not issue a tax receipt, but funding can be used to hire summer students or pay for technology. If SAPAA does apply for grants, cash donations are an excellent way to show community support for the organization.

If you have more time, hidden talents, or a desire to learn new things, read on for volunteer opportunities. Please note that these are roles and not people. Someone may only take on one role or may do multiple roles.

Volunteer Roles – Operational

- ▶ Inspection Report Storyteller
- ▶ Funding Helper
- ▶ Maven of WAERNAHR iNaturalist.ca
- ▶ Peer Organization Communications Helper

Volunteer Roles – Project Based

- ▶ Community of Practice Subject Matter Expert
- ▶ Community of Practice Production Assistant
- ▶ Field Trip Leader

Success and Progress in Managing Alberta's Protected Areas

by Lands Operations Division, Alberta Forestry and Parks.

[Alberta Forestry and Parks](#) is playing catch up in remediating sites that have fallen into disrepair or abuse. Efforts included trail management plans, infrastructure upgrades, and improved signage at various natural areas. 5 Natural Areas (out of 138) have benefitted to ensure visitor safety and ecological protection.

Read the full report provided by the [Ministry](#) and stay tuned for further remediation efforts in 2026.

Membership

Annual membership renewal remains at \$15 per individual, family or group steward and includes a \$5 insurance fee the society pays to Nature Alberta.

E-transfers are preferred (treasurer@sapaastewards.com) but if payment is made by cheque, it should be made payable to **Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association** (in full, the bank is persnickety) to c/o Patsy Cotterill, Membership Secretary, contact for mailing address.

The membership year runs from October 1 to September 30. If you have changes to make to your information or wish to provide additional information, please provide updates by completing a [Membership Form](#).

Thank you.

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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](#).
- This Newsletter can be downloaded in pdf.