

Southern Alberta Environmental Group

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NEWSLETTER

March, 2004

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Announcements

SAEG Business Meeting

7:30 pm, Thursday, 8 April 2004

Fish & Game Hut, 9th Ave. and 10th St. S.

Everyone welcome.

SAEG Earth Day Celebration

WORLD OF THE TRUMPETER SWAN

7:00 pm, Thursday, 22 April, Lethbridge Public Library

This sophisticated 2-projector show will follow a Trumpeter family from its wintering grounds in Yellowstone to the eastern slopes Alberta breeding grounds in spring and back again in late autumn. Through slides and story-telling, Robin and Marian White will share the folklore and ecology of these magnificent birds, at risk in Alberta. This is a great way to celebrate spring and Earth Day. Please plan to join us for this free presentation co-sponsored by Lethbridge Public Library. Refreshments provided.

Confronting Water Scarcity: Challenges and Choices

July 13-16, University of Lethbridge

Keynote speakers are Sandra Postel, director of the Global Water Policy Project, Peter Block, a specialist in managing change within organizations, and Thomas Homer-Dixon, director of the Centre for the Study of Peace and Conflict. Sessions will include scientific, practical and hands-on information about water use, water health and governance. For more information visit <http://www.confronting-water-scarcity.ca> or call (403)329-2244.

Notes and Updates

SAEG Volunteer Highlights - •Bill Brown is representing SAEG on the organizing committee for the Confronting Water Scarcity conference in July. •Ken Revak has generously offered to maintain SAEG membership and mailing lists. •Laurie Goater (nee Gom) has volunteered to represent SAEG on the species recovery team for the endangered western silvery minnow. In Canada, this species is found only in the Milk River of Alberta. •Debby Gregorash, Jacqueline Short and Cheryl Bradley have prepared a concise and attractive display as well as an informative brochure on the health of rivers in the Oldman River Basin. Jacqueline is a student in the service learning

program at Lethbridge Community College. The display and brochure were available at the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative meeting on March 2nd. Anyone interested in using the display and brochures please contact Debby at 345-3344. •Debby Gregorash and Sylvia Campbell have nominated Cheryl Bradley for a 2004 Emerald Award in the category of individual commitment to protecting the environment through personal initiative.

Partnering for our Future! Award Winners – Two awards were presented at the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative (ORBWQI) on March 2nd. The urban award winner is Pratt and Whitney Canada who constructed a water treatment system within their Lethbridge facility and test water to ensure it meets water quality guidelines before releasing it to the City's sanitary sewer. The rural award winner is the Beaver Creek Watershed Group, an association of landowners who have a goal to improve riparian health and water quality in their home watershed and are implementing a three-year plan to accomplish it. Awards were presented by Andy Russell well-known wilderness guide and author of *The Life of a River* a book which contemplates his connection to the Oldman River and is available in book stores.

Puzzling Water Quality Finding – Wendall Koning, water quality specialist with Alberta Environment, reported to the ORBWQI workshop that high levels of *Cryptosporidium parvum*, an intestinal parasite, have been detected in the Oldman River above Lethbridge's water treatment plant and that levels increase as flows decrease suggesting a point source. Fortunately the strain does not affect humans and is not from a human or livestock source. Further study is underway to determine the mammalian source of the microorganism.

Improving Urban Stormwater Quality: Educating Residents – At the March 2nd ORBWQI workshop, Cheryl Bradley provided a report on activities of the group working to improve urban stormwater quality through a public education program. Group members include the ORBWQI coordinator and representatives from SAEG, City of Lethbridge, Alberta Environment and Fisheries and Oceans.

Stormwater flows untreated to the Oldman River. The first objective of the education program is to heighten awareness among urban residents about how the urban stormwater system functions and about how activities such as inappropriate use of pesticides and fertilizers, overwatering of lawns and gardens and improper disposal of hazardous substances can contribute to stormwater contamination. Positive attitudes will be fostered towards

changing undesirable practice and models of desirable practices provided. The Yellow Fish Road program, Toxic Round-up, healthy lawn programs and xeriscaping demonstration sites are examples of implementation tools.

Next steps are to conduct a survey of current knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of Lethbridge residents. Survey results will be used to design the education program and as a benchmark for tracking changes over time.

Improving Urban Stormwater Quality: Technical Options – Adam MacDonald of the City of Lethbridge provided participants in the March 2nd ORBWQI workshop with some options available to the City's Infrastructure Services for improving stormwater quality. For example, more frequent street sweeping, reduced sand and salt application, and changes in structural design of construction and snow collection sites can reduce sediment and salt in stormwater. More frequent cleaning of stormwater drains and placing filters in those that receive a high amount of sediment may have significant beneficial impact. Another beneficial management practice is incorporating stormwater ponds into the design of new subdivisions to trap runoff, to allow settling of sediment and to encourage incorporation by aquatic plants of nutrients in runoff.

The New Regime in Regulating Confined Feeding Operations - Since January 2002, when it assumed responsibility for regulation of livestock developments and manure management in Alberta, the Natural Resources Conservation Board has received 100 applications in the Lethbridge Region alone. Five have been denied, 66 have been approved, and decisions are pending on the rest.

In its first year, NRCB received 241 complaints involving 147 operations in the Lethbridge Region. Province wide there were 981 complaints related to 431 separate operations. Most complaints were regarding odour and potential water impacts. Province-wide, 36 enforcement orders were issued during the first year of operation. For regular updates on NRCB actions with regard to regulating confined animal feeding operations visit their website at www.nrcb.gov.ab.ca.

•The first large hog operation approved by NRCB, a controversial project near Lomond in the County of Vulcan, recently has been issued an enforcement order for failing to comply with 16 of 31 conditions attached to its approval. The company began populating and operating its hog barns prior to completing construction of adequate manure storage facilities. NRCB has ordered that the hogs be removed. The operation is owned by Goldcrest Farms Inc. and managed by Elite Swine, a subsidiary of Maple Leaf Foods.

•Paragon, a problematical livestock truck wash northwest of Lethbridge, was the subject of three NRCB enforcement orders in 2002-2003 regarding unauthorized release of liquid manure and failure to adhere to an approved manure management plan. In December 2003, NRCB required Paragon to complete a comprehensive nutrient management and operating plans and to submit monthly progress reports to the regional Director of approvals.

Jerry Beusekom, Paragon's owner, recently was found guilty of violating the Public Health Act and ordered to pay \$1,100 in fines. In early 2002, the operator bypassed a water meter and continued to wash livestock trailers despite a closure ordered by Chinook Health Region while a bigger storage lagoon was constructed.

Large Scale Conservation on the Northern Plains - On February 27, in conjunction with the 7th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Calgary, the Northern Plains Conservation Network (NPCN), a new network of 16 conservation groups from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Nebraska, identified 10 locations in the Northern Great Plains with opportunities for large-scale conservation. Two of the important areas identified for conservation are in Canada: Sage Creek in southern Alberta and the Bitter Creek region of Saskatchewan (including Grasslands National Park) and neighboring Montana. NPCN believes that the role of wildlife conservation in the economy and culture of the plains is growing and has great potential to benefit rural communities. More information can be obtained by visiting <http://npcn.net/>.

A Case for Regional Planning – A thesis recently completed by Richard Barss, a student in Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, concludes that regional planning is necessary to address the environmental consequences of land use. The author characterizes Cardston County's process in approving the Garner subdivision at the gate of Waterton Lakes National Park as a "laissez-faire approach to development" and an example of "independent sectoral decision making with minimal regard for the consequences to others and contributing to incremental growth that over time fundamentally alters the landscape".

Update on Appeal of Alberta Environment Decision re Water Licence – SAEG is preparing for a preliminary meeting before the Alberta Environmental Appeals Board (the Board) on March 31 in Lethbridge regarding its appeal of an amendment to a water licence granted by Alberta Environment. The amendment, granted on October 30, 2003 allows the St. Mary River Irrigation District to allocate 12,000 acre feet of water, saved through publicly funded efficiency improvements, for uses other than irrigation.

SAEG is concerned with the precedent of allowing a private irrigation board to make decisions about how a scarce public resource will be allocated. As well, the amendment avoids the use of allocation transfers authorized by government which can implement conservation holdbacks, up to 10% of the transferred volume, to benefit stressed rivers.

Over the last month SAEG has made presentations in the community regarding the stressed state of the St. Mary, Belly and Waterton Rivers. These rivers flow at minimum flows, which are just 10% of mean flows, most of the time due to large diversions for irrigation agriculture. The aquatic environment has been assessed as heavily impacted and degraded. Fish and cottonwoods are in decline and water quality adversely affected. A backgrounder on the southern tributaries of the Oldman River has been prepared and can be obtained by contacting Cheryl Bradley at (403)328-1245 or at cebradley@shaw.ca.

At the March 31 meeting, parties to the appeal will make arguments regarding SAEG's status as 'directly affected'. If the Board determines that SAEG has standing, the matter will proceed to a hearing. Donations to assist with the appeal can be sent to SAEG, Box 383, Lethbridge AB T1J 3Y7. Cheques should be made out to Trout Unlimited Canada, River Health Fund. Charitable tax receipts will be issued.