



## NEWSLETTER November 2006

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A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community.

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### *Announcements*

#### **Next SAGE Meeting**

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 2 Nov 2006

Fish & Game Hut 9<sup>th</sup> Ave & 10 St. S., Lethbridge

This is a regular Board meeting, but all members are welcome. A key item on the agenda will be a brief presentation by Ann Baran and discussion on the progress of the provincial project to address air emissions from confined feeding operations.

Everyone welcome. Refreshments provided.

#### **Lethbridge Parks and Pathways Master Plans Public Open House**

4:00 – 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, 1 Nov 2006

Main Foyer, City Hall

#### **Southern Foothills Study Public Meetings**

7:00 -9:30 pm; Nov 2, Chain Lakes MD Building;

Nov 7, Community Centre, Claresholm;

Nov 8, Heritage Inn, Pincher Creek

There will be a presentation and discussion on a study of cumulative land use trends within the headwaters of the Oldman River. The study is proposed to provide a basis for proper land use planning which will avoid loss of critically important ecological services such as clean water and wildlife and encourage sustainable economic activities. A business as usual scenario could severely diminish one of the province's most critical watersheds by 2050. The \$70,000 study was funded entirely by Alberta citizens, landowners, conservationists and three municipalities.

### *SAGE News*

**SAGE Advises on Renewable Energy Policy** - SAGE President Kelsey Prenevost has been selected as a representative of the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) on the Renewable and Alternative Energy Project Team of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA). Kelsey joins other AEN members, Martha

Kostuch (Prairie Acid Rain Coalition), Brian Mitchell (Mewassin Community Action Council) and Jesse Row (Pembina Institute). Several industry and government stakeholders are also on the Project Team.

The CASA Renewable and Alternative Energy Project Team will work with the Government of Alberta on a policy framework to encourage the development of renewable and alternative electrical energy in Alberta. The Team will assess progress towards the 2008 target to increase renewable and alternative energy in Alberta by 3.5%.

Locally, Klaus Jericho is representing SAGE on the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership Advisory Committee. The committee is a joint initiative of Economic Development Lethbridge, SouthGrow Economic Initiative and Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance. Goals are to review information on bio-, wind and solar energy, identify barriers to development, and make recommendations on strategies to promote growth of the alternative energy sector in southern Alberta.

**SAGE Participates in Irrigation Forum** – On 18 Oct SAGE member Cheryl Bradley participated in a CBC Wild Rose Country panel discussing irrigation in southern Alberta. The session was held at the University of Lethbridge.

Cheryl acknowledged our irrigation system is an engineering marvel but expressed concern that large diversions, 90% for irrigation, were putting the health of our rivers at risk. She suggested mechanisms for restoring health including allowing conservation interests to obtain licences through transfers, managing dams to benefit the aquatic environment, and returning some of the water saved through efficiency improvements to the river.

This discussion and several other interesting programs on water in the Blueprint Alberta:H2O series can be heard at [www.cbc.ca/blueprintalberta/archives](http://www.cbc.ca/blueprintalberta/archives).

**SAGE Involvement in CASA CFO Emissions Team** - Ann Baran represents SAGE on the CASA CFO Air Quality Project Team. The Team is in an information gathering phase. There are subgroups compiling information on emissions, health effects, legislation in

other jurisdictions around the world, and management mechanisms available for controlling emissions. Ann is participating in the management mechanisms subgroup. Points of contention among stakeholders are whether or not to include odour in the Team's work and which management mechanisms to consider. A session was held in mid October to help build relationships and trust among participants.

At the 2 Nov SAGE meeting, Ann will review progress so far, describe some key issues that she is currently facing, and seek suggestions from SAGE members on how to address these issues. She also will report on the CASA Nitrogen Symposium which she attended in late September.

## *Issues and Updates*

**Value of Parks to Neighboring Communities** – A well-attended forum on 17 Oct in Pincher Creek provided substantial grist for debates about the merits of a Castle wildland park. Scott Jones, planner with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, pointed out that each year there is \$1.3 billion in expenditures by visitors to Alberta's Parks. Total economic activity generated is \$2.7 billion annually. In addition parks provide ecological services (protect biodiversity, contribute to clean air and water) which many consider invaluable. In a recent survey, 99% of Albertans say protecting natural resources, such as parks is important to overall quality of life and 93% take time to enjoy and explore Alberta's natural heritage. Currently only 4.2% of Alberta is designated as provincial protected areas, over 500 sites, and another 8.3% is under federal protection (mostly the mountain parks and Wood Buffalo National Park).

Jim Johnson, economist with Pacific Analysts Inc., noted that communities who treat their landscape and environment well are more likely to prosper than those that do not. Today, a prosperous future for small communities relies on attracting a well-educated and wealthy workforce who come to live there full time rather than just for weekends or holidays. These individuals will choose to live in a community that has implemented sound land use planning and protection of recreational landscapes over one that has not. A park is a planning tool that shows respect for the landscape.

Steve Duerr of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce noted that the beauty of the area around Pincher Creek compares to that of the area around Jackson Hole in Wyoming. Protecting that beauty through designation of Yellowstone National Park in 1895 and Grand Teton National Park in 1945 is why communities in the area are so prosperous today. "It is a multi-billion dollar view". An elderly rancher and former Senator, who tried to stop park designation in the 1940s because it would affect his use of the land, admits today that he was wrong. In hindsight, designating the park was in the public interest and this was of much higher value for future generations than

accommodating the private interests of a few short-sighted, traditional land users at the time.

**Industrial Activity in Alberta's Protected Areas** – As incredible as it sounds, industrial activity occurs in areas that many of us assume are protected from such activity – our provincial parks, ecological reserves, natural areas and even national wildlife areas. The extent to which the exploration and development of minerals, including petroleum and natural gas, is occurring in the provincial protected areas network and how much more could occur is unknown even by the agency responsible for managing the network, Alberta Community Development. Controversy surrounding proposals for major energy projects in two internationally significant landscapes, the Rumsey Natural Area and the Suffield National Wildlife Area, has heightened public awareness of this contradiction in land use intent.

In a province that is rolling in energy resource revenues one would think it possible to refrain from extracting minerals in areas of high ecological value. However, Alberta Energy, the government department responsible for administering industry dispositions and collecting the revenue from royalties, bonus payments, bid payments and rents - \$14 billion in the past fiscal year - is greedy and powerful. And there is plenty of industry support. Mineral rights are even sold under lands where no surface access will be allowed.

In the best of all possible worlds, perhaps mineral extraction could occur while maintaining ecological integrity if the footprint was minimal. But in the real world the footprint of industrial activity is not restricted to a few well sites. Density ranges from one well per pool per section for conventional gas to 16 wells per section for shallow gas and coalbed methane to 70 wells per section for oil in CFB Suffield's 'little Kuwait'. Along with wellsites come pipelines, compressor stations, access roads and all the traffic, on-road and off-road. Cumulative effects, such as invasion of non-native species, can extend far beyond the actual disturbance and over several decades.

Theoretically perhaps industrial activity could occur while maintaining ecological integrity if the natural ecosystem was resilient to it. The reality is that the large majority of protected areas are small remnants of native habitat with already show signs of stress. Some species, such as woodland caribou and rough fescue, do not tolerate disturbance at all. There has yet to be successful demonstration of restoration of a gas field to its native condition, including restoring the full composition and abundance of native species and biological communities and full ecological function. Climate change is expected to further challenge the resiliency of natural ecosystems. Fragmentation from industrial activity just compounds the problem.

Although industry may commit to minimize their footprint and to restore ecosystems, the reality is that there is not the organizational and financial capacity within industry and government to honor the promises. This reality has yet to be addressed though policy and regulation that works for, rather than against, protected

areas. Hopefully the political commitment to protect Alberta's ecological gems comes before it's too late.