



NEWSLETTER January 2007

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A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community.

Announcements

Next SAGE Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 4 Jan 2007

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

This is a regular Board meeting, but all members are welcome. Help SAGE establish its priorities for the new year. Refreshments provided.

Water Week

22-26 January; University of Lethbridge

Lethbridge Public Interest Research Group and Canada World Youth are organizing sessions on water privatization, water scarcity and water quality. SAGE is planning to have a display at the trade show in the Atrium on 24 Jan. For more information contact Sheila Rogers by email pirg@uleth.ca or phone 332.5243.

Oldman Watershed Council Membership

Renewal Deadline: 30 Jan 2007

Annual membership is free and open to all who live or work within the basin. To become a member or renew please phone 381.5801, email leda@oldmanbasin.org or visit www.oldmanbasin.org.

Oldman Watershed Council AGM

15 Mar 2007; Lethbridge Lodge

Mark your calendar and check www.oldmanbasin.org for more details as plans firm up.

Trails to Sustainability: A national environmental education conference

Thursday 24 May to Sunday 27 May, 2007

Delta Lodge at Kananaskis, Alberta

This exciting conference is designed for ALL teachers and educators, whether you teach in a school or elsewhere. Visit www.trailstosustainability.ca.

Emerald Awards Nominations

Deadline: 28 Feb 2007

Recognize and celebrate environmental excellence by nominating someone you know. For more details visit www.emerald.foundation.ca or call 1.800.219.8329.

SAGE News

SAGE Meets Three Alberta Deputy Ministers – On Nov 14, Cheryl Bradley attended a meeting with Deputy Ministers for the provincial departments of Energy, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development as well as the Chair of the Alberta Energy Utilities Board. The meeting, held in Edmonton, was organized by the Alberta Environmental Network and involved representatives from 20 organizations.

Three key areas identified as needing work are environmental vision, integration among departments responsible for environment, and legislative/regulatory reform regarding public interest in awarding mineral leases. All parties expressed an interest in keeping the dialogue going and working together.

Issues and Updates

New Provincial Priorities for Environment – New Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach has sent 'mandate letters', dated 15 Dec 2007, to all new Cabinet ministers specifying priorities for their individual departments (see <http://premier.alberta.ca/team>). Six ministers have been given priority mandates related to environment. Here is a list.

New Environment Minister Rob Renner (MLA, Medicine Hat) has three specific priorities:

- Update Alberta's Climate Change Plan.
- Renew and resource the Water for Life Strategy.
- Develop a new environment and resource management regulatory framework to enable sustainable development by addressing the cumulative effects of development on the environment.

Dr. Ted Morton (MLA Foothills-Rocky View), new Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, is directed to focus on the following:

- Complete the Land Use Framework to address conflicts over competing use of land and provide a vision for an integrated sustainable land use approach that balances economic, environmental and social concerns.

- Implement an aggressive strategy to protect the health of Alberta's forests.

- Develop a Biodiversity Strategy to conserve biological diversity and enable sound management on Alberta's natural resources on a sustainable basis.

Minister of Energy, Mel Knight (MLA Grande Prairie) is charged with the following:

- Develop a comprehensive energy strategy for the development of Alberta's renewable and non-renewable energy sources and for conservation of energy use.

Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, Hector Gourdeau (MLA Dunvegan) is to:

- Develop a plan for provincial parks and recreation areas to accommodate population growth and improve quality of life opportunities.

Agriculture and Food Minister George Groeneveld (MLA Highwood) has been directed to:

- Lead the establishment of a new Institute for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment to identify market-based solutions to increase environmentally sound practices in the renewable resource sectors.

Minister of Municipal Affairs Ray Danyluk (MLA Lac La Biche-St. Paul) is given a mandate to:

- Consult with municipal governments on regional planning issues and a dispute resolution mechanism.

Many of these priorities sound positive for Alberta's environment; however it will be interesting to see if Alberta's new leadership walks the talk. An organization called Conservation Voters of Alberta reviewed the environmental platforms of the PC leadership candidates prior to the early December elections. Jim Dinning and Dave Hancock both had developed detailed environmental platforms which suggested they were knowledgeable about environmental problems and had given considerable thought to solutions. The positions of Ted Morton and Ed Stelmach on the environment were described as dismal.

Montana Protects Rocky Mountain Front – The US Senate passed a bill on Dec 8 which will protect Montana's Rocky Mountain Front from new oil and gas drilling permits (see www.baucus.senate.gov). Montana Senator Max Baucus used his position on the Senate Finance Committee to ensure passage of a bill that will make permanent a 1997 moratorium on oil and gas leases in the 365,000 acres of public land south of Glacier National Park and make it easier to retire existing leases. President Bush signed the bill on Dec 21.

The outright ban on new leases means a coalition of non-profit groups can purchase existing leases from oil and gas companies and retire them without fear that government will reissue them in future. Two energy companies that controlled all of the leases have agreed to relinquish their interest to the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front.

Senator Baucus, who hikes in the Front, states "Thirty years from now, our kids and grandchildren will thank us." Many Albertans would welcome such champions for protecting our Eastern Slopes and Foothills among our elected representatives.

Pesticide Use by Canadians Slow to Change – In 2006 almost 3 in 10 households in Canada (29%) applied pesticides to their lawn or garden. This figure is down only slightly from the 31% that reported doing so in 1994. Of these pesticide users, over half (52%) applied them as part of a regular maintenance schedule. The rest applied pesticides only when problems arose. This is a preliminary finding of a spring 2006 survey of 30,000 households by Statistics Canada.

Since 1994, when the first Households and the Environment Survey measured the environmental practices and behaviours of Canadians, over 70 municipalities have passed bylaws banning cosmetic use of pesticides. Others, including Lethbridge, have implemented education programs towards reduction in pesticide use. Yet behaviour is slow to change. Recent research is finding that a mix of bylaws and education, including clear demonstration of alternative behaviours and products, is needed.

Global Warming Denial No Longer Acceptable – A recent CBC Fifth Estate program, *The Denial Machine*, documents a well-funded public relations campaign to spread denial and doubt about global warming and its human causes. Perpetrators include the Bush administration and scientists funded by large petroleum corporations, including Exxon. Some of the scientists had also worked for the tobacco industry to deny links between smoking and cancer. In Canada, Calgary-based Friends of Science, with links to Conservative political interests and the oil and gas industry, was a conduit for promoting the perception of scientific dissent about global warming.

As Al Gore points out in *An Inconvenient Truth*, for about 40 years scientists have known that the carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration in Earth's atmosphere is rising due to human activity. CO₂ level is now way above anything measured in the prior 650,000-year record from Antarctic ice cores. Correlation between rising CO₂ concentration and rising temperature is also proven. In our lifetimes we are experiencing the dire consequences of a relatively rapid increase in global temperature due to our activities.

Recent political developments suggest that denial of global warming or inaction on greenhouse gas reduction is not acceptable to Canadians. Stephane Dion assumed leadership of the federal Liberal Party with an environmental platform focused on taking tough action to deal with global warming. The Conservative government led by Stephen Harper has been blindsided with public rage over shameful withdrawal of support for the Kyoto Protocol and a Clean Air Act that fails to address carbon emissions.

Albertans must face the harsh truth that our economic fortune is the planet's undoing. To reduce our reliance on fossil fuels we need collective resolve for meaningful action in our homes, workplaces and communities. And we need elected representatives willing to demonstrate principled leadership in reducing carbon emissions if our province and nation are to become part of the solution rather than the problem.