



**"We're fools whether we dance or not,
so we might as well dance."**

Japanese Proverb

April 1st, 2012

Next **SAGE Meeting** April 5th at 7 p.m. at the Fish & Game Hut

SAGE Annual General Meeting at 7 p.m., June 7th at the Fish & Game Hut.

(Don't forget to renew your membership)

Seminar (May 28th) **Water Sustainability in Canada's West** by Lisa Maria Fox

Community Shared Agriculture - support locally grown food by purchasing a share at **Noble Gardens**.

OWC Nominations sought for Member-at-Large.

Federal Government to Gut the Fisheries Act

Without public consultation or scientific insight, the federal government is planning to make changes to the Fisheries Act, ostensibly to streamline large projects by avoiding environmental impact assessments and costly mitigation. The government sees the current Fisheries Act as being used beyond its 'intended conservation goals', and as an impediment to economic activity.

The Fisheries Act now states (Section 35) that 'no person shall carry on any work or undertaking that results in the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat.' The proposed legislation would say that 'no person shall carry

on any work, undertaking or activity, other than fishing, that results in an adverse effect on a fish of economic, cultural or ecological value.'

The burden of proof has now been shifted onto the 'value' of fish to be protected. (Don't all fish have value in a habitat?) In essence, habitat provisions have been removed from the Act.

The current habitat protection provisions under the Fisheries Act have prompted a majority of environmental assessments conducted by the federal government, and are a major irritant for corporations planning large projects that affect the envi-

ronment.

One project that would benefit from the weakening of the Fisheries Act would be the Northern Gateway Pipeline that will cross hundreds of rivers and streams as it delivers bitumen from the Alberta tarsands to the port at Kitimat.

With these changes, the federal government has abdicated its national and international obligation to protect waterways. A [letter](#) sent by Dr. David Schindler and endorsed by 625 scientists warns the Harper government about the dangers of weakening this important Act.

Harper On the Hunt for Arctic Oil & Gas

Prime Minister Harper recently returned from a five-day polar bear hunt. He said: "That was more fun than cutting climate science from the budget!" The mission, of course, was to make the arctic safe for mining, and for oil & gas exploitation.

The Federal Minister of Environment went on record to say that "we've worked diligently to eliminate arctic ice so to allow year-around access for mineral extraction - and it is good to see the Prime Minister has taken the lead in eliminating the dangerous bear population."

Statistics show that one of the main barriers to foreign investment in the arctic is the fear of polar bears and harp seals.



Scenic Drive North Begins Construction

The City of Lethbridge will begin construction on a long-term plan to link Scenic Drive North to Stafford Drive North to provide better traffic flow from the north to the south of the city.

The project will span two coulees: the first across the current road to the wastewater treatment plant, and the second from Staffordville to the grassland west of Stafford Drive North. Fill for the spans will be cut from the coulees around the western tip of Staffordville.

Last spring, SAGE was invited by the City to consult on the process. An assessment of the environmental effects of the project was promised: including drainage, slope stability, and biological inventories of native species and wildlife migration. Mitigation and reclamation measures (including a monitoring and evaluation strategy) were to be included in the planning.

The City and consultant, Stan-tec, have promised to send SAGE the completed report this summer.

Greensence Survey

Greensence (a Lethbridge environmental advocacy group) will conduct a survey of the candidates on local environmental issues. Greensence has conducted surveys for both federal and municipal elections in the past, using an independent panel to evaluate and rate the responses based on their understanding of the topic and the 'green-ness' of their position.

The survey for the upcoming provincial election include the following questions:

First, the bellwether question, 'Do

you agree with the supporting science that humans are the major contributor to current climate change?' with two follow up questions on a statement of urgency, and three immediate priorities to mitigate GHG emissions.

The second topic asks if their government would invest in the development of renewable energy technologies, and encourage sustainable practices through incentives (from perverse subsidies currently directed to the fossil fuel industry).

The third question asks if the govern-

ment would preserve the Castle Special Place by designating it as a Wildland Park.

The final topic was hydraulic fracturing. The survey asks if the government would encourage independent, scientific study on the impacts of hydraulic fracturing of tight and shale formations, and support a moratorium until there is a scientific consensus on its safety as it relates to water contamination, air pollution, and seismic concerns.

The results will be online April 2nd on www.greensence.ca. See which candidate has been given the green light.

Energy: Canada's *Raison D'Être* ... (for 'the people', of course)

It's a disturbing anti-democratic trend within current government to chill public discourse and dissent. Last month it was Minister Toews identifying environmentalists as a potential public threat; on the loose this month is Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver and Conservative Senators, like Doug Finley.

Normally, one might accept political rhetoric for what it is - posturing and

bluster. Recently, however, the Government of Canada and the Senate have launched an inquiry regarding the 'foreign money' donated to environmental groups. The concern is that this money is used to 'undermine Canada's economy' by threatening tar sands development and other energy and environmental exploitation.

"For some perverse reason, Tides and other multi-billion-dollar foreign

foundations see it as a more effective investment to adversely disrupt Canada's economy than to contribute to other more needy parts of the world," said [Finley](#).

It is interesting to observe the strategy of linking environmentalists (and environmentalism in general) with foreign influence and public security.

What's next - show trials for treason?

Interesting Links:

[Edelman's Trust Barometer](#) - Canadian NGO's rise to 72% trust in 2011, compared to 52% for government and 50% for business.

[South Saskatchewan RAC Report to Government](#) - participate in the [Online Workbook](#) until April 30th.

Thanks to all SAGE members who volunteered at the OWC display at the Home & Garden Show.

The SAGE members have been volunteering with the OWC for eight years to provide important messages about how residents in our watershed can minimize their impact on rivers through water wise lawn and garden practices. Ten SAGE members volunteered this year contributing a total of 30 hours. Displays focused on xeriscaping, and on prohibited and noxious weeds occurring along the Oldman River through Lethbridge

Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

A Leading Voice for a Healthy and Environmentally Sustainable Community.

Visit us at: <http://sage-environment.org/>

If you are interesting in getting involved, contact us at:

sage-communications@sage-environment.org

Environment & The Alberta Election

From the **Alberta New Democratic Party** platform:

"Support increased oil royalties, using some of the funds created to promote a green energy industry - preparing Alberta for the day when oil and gas reserves are depleted."

"Brian Mason and Alberta's NDP will ensure our scarce water resources are managed to balance the needs of our economy and population and with the need to maintain environmental stability."

"Alberta's water supply has shrunk by over 20 percent in the last century. Global warming threatens Alberta's future supply of water."

"The current Water For Life policy is silent in terms of management and only states that a hierarchy must be put in place, but does not mandate a timeline or action."

"A comprehensive environmental review of our aquatic ecosystems still has not been done to ensure that current and future water allocations do not threaten the ecosystem."

"Support a comprehensive water survey that documents total water availability in Alberta. Implement a comprehensive wetlands protection plan. Mandate commercial, industrial, agricultural and residential water conservation best practices."

From the **EverGreen Party of Alberta** platform:

"All the Earth's ecosystems are interrelated and all species of animals and plants must co-exist. The future of all life on the planet is endangered by our disregard for the health of the environment. We must preserve the Earth's natural balance to sustain our own well-being."

"At a time when other countries, territories and municipalities are committing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Alberta has failed to take a proactive approach. While there is still time to avoid and address the increasingly catastrophic damage, it is vital that our province addresses climate change, not only for future generations, but also to protect our ecosystem and ensuring the economic feasibility of our transition to a low-carbon economy."

"We will invest in a province-wide, localized, green energy production and green retrofit program that will create thousands of new, quality, well paying jobs."

"We will support the research and development of energy-efficient homes, businesses and government buildings. We will promote energy conservation. We will increase the energy efficiency standards of buildings, transportation and appliances."

"We will encourage conservation and reduction of water usage, and prevent the sale or export of water. We will support a long-term resources management program, and protect and preserve land necessary for the survival of the diversity of plants and animals."

"We will honour and pursue the goals laid out in the Kyoto protocol and encourage the pursuit of a new international agreement. We will evaluate, set and enforce emissions reductions standards, and sustain a financial model that supports the transition to renewable green energy."

"We will ensure regular affordable mass transit throughout Alberta, with links to established transit within cities, which will reduce the costs of roads and highways. We will support development and creation of an Edmonton-Calgary high speed rail line. We will support municipal development of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure."

"We will oppose the development of nuclear power generation in Alberta."

Environment & The Alberta Election

From the **Alberta Liberal Party** platform:

"It's long past time to expand Alberta's carbon levy program to force real environmental improvements. Phased in over four years, Alberta will move from levying on intensity emissions (emissions relative to economic output) to actual emissions (what is actually released into our environment)."

"Carbon levy funds will be reinvested in the environment - by returning 50% of the levy to companies which make improvements that reduce their emissions, and by investing 50% in green transportation such as LRT and other public transportation projects, so that real reductions in emissions can be achieved."

"The current system in Alberta of industry monitoring industry is completely ineffective. Alberta Liberals will introduce independent monitoring."

From the **Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta**:

"Sustaining the quality of our air, water, soil, wildlife, and natural environment is important to Albertans. We must ensure that our activities, growth and development take place in an environmentally sensitive manner for the benefit of current and future generations."

From the **Wildrose Alliance Party** platform:

"The discussion surrounding global warming has become highly emotional. There is obviously still healthy scientific debate as to the extent manmade emissions of CO2 are affecting global temperatures – and this debate will likely carry on for many years."

"As a province we must strike the delicate balance between promoting out of precaution a practical reduction of CO2 emissions while ignoring the environmental extremists that would have us needlessly overreact to the severe detriment of our economy."

"Cancel the PC Government's wasteful and expensive \$2 billion Carbon Capture and Storage initiative, and instead focus funding on improving and expanding mass transit and commuter rail."

"Expand the use of clean burning Alberta natural gas and propane for industrial and residential electricity production and transportation."

"Review and reform our water licensing system to ensure that existing licenses are fully utilized while respecting the principle of first in time, first in right. In cooperation with an effective on and off-stream fresh water storage plan, existing water licenses should be more than enough to address Alberta's growth pres-

ures for decades."

"Support the federal ban on bulk water exports to the United States from Canada."

(All information was accessed from party websites on March 26, 2012)



Debt: The First 5,000 Years (2011)

David Graeber, author of *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, is currently a Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of London. Over the last decade, he has been making an impact in social and political activism, both as a participant and by providing an academic foundation for consensus-based grassroots organizing like the latest Occupy movement.

To preface this book, Graeber is offering a fresh perspective on the connections between currency, power, society and our interaction with (and within) the natural world. *Debt: The First 5000 Years* is a loping inquiry into credit, currency, and our modern civilization. Unlike some books of this breadth, this one consistently builds on its anthropological theme - beginning with a thesis on money: "the value of a unit of currency is not the measure of the value of an object, but the measure of one's trust in other human beings" (p.47). In other words, money-as-credit has no intrinsic value, it is a social construct sustained by a shared community of people - this is opposed to money-as-commodity in a society of calculating maximizers of their own self-interest.

Graeber dismantles the argument articulated by Adam Smith that money was created as a means of smoothing out market relations - so people could sell one day and buy another, as opposed to bartering relationships in which the buyer and seller participate in a mutual exchange sharing both time and space. Graeber's argument, as supported by ample anthropological evidence, is that there was no market (or state) prior to money.

To condense his argument a bit, Graeber suggests that it is the expansionist state/empire that created money to pay their army, and that markets were established to feed the foreign armies. Before this, exchange within a community of people

was based on credit relations, but more commonly based on communal reciprocity. A foreigner entering such a community would not be credit-worthy and, therefore, had to carry something of value (like precious metals in the form of money). The market developed as the impersonal means of feeding an army that does not enjoy community trust. In other words, money-credit for stateless (communal) societies is replaced by money-commodity for expanding states. As such, commercial transactions are premised on separateness (foreignness).

From the impersonal relationships garnered by money, comes economic calculation of value and the objectification of people: "there is every reason to believe that slavery, with its unique ability to rip human beings from their contexts, to turn them into abstractions, played a key role in the rise of markets everywhere" (165). Later, Graeber links money with consumerism: "We might say, then, that money introduced a democratization of desire. Insofar as everyone wanted money, everyone, high and low, was pursuing the same promiscuous substance" (p.190).

Graeber traces Eurasian history as a broad alternation between periods of credit/debt (communal life) and periods dominated by currency in the form of precious metals (periods of generalized violence, war, and state expansion): "A debt is, by definition, a record, as well as a relation of trust. Someone accepting gold or silver in exchange for merchandise, on the other hand, need trust nothing more than the accuracy of the scales, the quality of the metal, and the likelihood that someone else will be willing to accept it" (p.213).

The Age of Exploration "begins around 1450 with a turn away from virtual currencies and credit economies and back to gold and silver ... the return to bullion was accompanied by the return of a

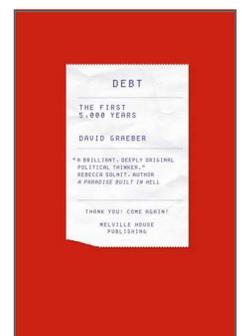
whole host of other conditions that, during the Middle Ages, had been largely suppressed or kept at bay: vast empires and professional armies, massive predatory warfare, untrammled usury and debt peonage, but also materialist philosophies, and new burst of scientific and philosophical creativity - even the return of chattel slavery" (p.308).

Moving to modern times, Graeber rejects the story of the origins of capitalism as "the story of the gradual destruction of traditional communities by the impersonal power of the market." It is, rather, "the story of how an economy of credit was converted into an economy of interest; of the gradual transformation of moral networks by the intrusion of the impersonal - and often vindictive - power of the state" (p.332).

Debt: The First 5000 Years challenges many of the common myths of debt, currency and the emergence of a state-market economy. Graeber contrasts two conditions for societies: the stateless society premised on credit and trust within communities that offer stability in the absence of economic growth; and the expansionist-state society premised on domination, objectification and growth in the form of money-interest. Though the latter society has provided technological advances and growth in productivity, Graeber suggests a societal and ecological limit to such trends.

As a conclusion he asks if global state/economic expansion has ended, and if the world is entering (by necessity) a new stage of credit, trust, and a sustainable relationship with the natural world.

For something a little different, this is a readable and interesting book.





A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

5 March 2012

Hon. Evan Berger
Minister, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (AARD)
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Berger:

Regulations under *Agricultural Operations Practices Act (AOPA)*, legislation dealing with livestock operations and manure management, will expire in 2014. It is our understanding that AARD is considering what changes may be needed to the regulations as well as to the *Act* itself. We are writing to encourage you to undertake a full review of *AOPA*. We also are providing suggestions for improvements we would like you to consider.

Environmental impacts of confined feeding operations has been an issue of concern for the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE) since the mid 1990s when we first became aware that our region was in the process of developing the highest concentrations of feedlots in North America and that unacceptable levels of contamination of air and water were occurring. In 2002, when the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) assumed responsibility for regulating confined feeding operations under *AOPA*, we had high expectations of improvement in prevention and mitigation of environmental contamination. Some gains have been made, however there is still need for improvement in regulation of confined feeding operations.

According to the Oldman *State of the Watershed Report (2010)*, there are over 500 confined feeding operations in the Oldman Watershed and the large majority of these are in the lower prairie portions of the watershed. Irrigated portions of the County of Lethbridge have the highest density of feedlots, pig barns, and poultry facilities. Water quality in the prairie subbasins of the Oldman Watershed is determined to be of poor to fair quality due to excess nitrogen, phosphorus, suspended solids and fecal coliforms. Our region also has a very high rate of water-borne enteric pathogens. There is little doubt that livestock operations are contributing to degradation of water quality and to human health problems. Air quality is also degraded due to odour and dust, particularly in areas of high concentration of confined feeding operations.

Key suggestions for improving the legislation that regulates livestock operations follow.

- Revise the purpose statement of *AOPA* to include a public interest mandate, with less focus on promoting growth of the livestock industry. There are many examples where growth of livestock operations has superseded or compromised human health and environmental considerations. This is not sustainable.

- Expand the definition of “affected person” or “directly affected party” under *AOPA* to include not only neighbours of the confined feeding operation, but also any person or group who has a legitimate interest, representation of which is necessary for a fair decision. This is particularly relevant to consideration of cumulative effects.
- Include a requirement to assess cumulative environmental effects in decisions about approval or expansion of confined feeding operations.
- Change *AOPA* to require that all confined feeding operations, including those constructed before 2002 when *AOPA* was first introduced, are required to meet *AOPA* requirements within a set time frame. Decommission operations that fail to meet requirements within the established time frame.
- Provide more clarity to the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), who is responsible for approval and compliance of livestock operations under *AOPA*. This includes ensuring that measures to protect the environment are required and not discretionary.
- Require that manure application be limited not only by nitrate-nitrogen concentration but also by phosphorus concentration and salinity to control accumulation of phosphorous and salts in soil and runoff into surface water. There is ample scientific information to support this change.
- Improve requirements for operators to monitor effects of operations on water (surface and groundwater), air and soil and require that monitoring data collected under *AOPA* is independently verified and is public information. Operation-specific monitoring would complement improved monitoring by government to determine regional effects on air and water quality.
- Change *AOPA* to allow NRCB to issue fines and administrative penalties. This would allow more effective and timely enforcement action against violators of *AOPA*. Currently prosecutions done through the courts take months if not years and fines are not sufficient disincentive to ‘bad’ operators.
- Provide more effective requirements and tools under *AOPA* to suspend and decommission operations that are inappropriately sited or that fail to comply with enforcement orders.

We encourage you to undertake a full review of *AOPA* and would appreciate serious consideration of our suggestions for improving the legislation. Please keep us informed of your decisions and opportunities for input.

Yours sincerely



Braum Barber
Chair

Cc Hon. Diana McQueen, Minister, Alberta Environment and Water
 Hon. Fred Horne, Minister, Alberta Health and Wellness
 Hon. Frank Oberle, Minister, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
 Vern Hartwell, Chair, Natural Resources Conservation Board
 Peter Woloshyn, Chief Executive Officer, NRCB
 Terry Kerkhoff, Chair, Oldman Watershed Council



A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

March 7, 2012

To: Premier Alison Redford, Government of Alberta
From: Braum Barber, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
Re: Logging in the Castle Special Place

The Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE) would like to thank the Government of Alberta for the thoughtful response from Hon. Frank Oberle, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development dated December 16, 2011 to our letter of November 26th.

We appreciate the timber harvest expertise that has been invested in the creation of the C5 Forest Management Plan, and understand that the Government of Alberta plans to continue to use this document to govern decision-making. SAGE would, however, encourage the Government of Alberta to revisit the C5 Forest Management Plan to assess how well it addresses non-timber values such as watershed protection, biodiversity conservation (fish, wildlife and plant species that are at risk or may be at risk), protection of historical resources, recreation, and tourism opportunities. The values Albertans hold for the southern Eastern Slopes need to be considered.

SAGE continues to be concerned for the ecosystem health in the headwaters of the Oldman River Basin, and particularly in the Castle Special Place. The quantity and quality of water in our basin is affected by activities in the upper watershed. We understand that the Government of Alberta is committed to monitor water quantity and quality and the health of aquatic ecosystems, and understands the importance of water and healthy aquatic ecosystems for the well-being of southern Alberta - a region where current allocation already exceeds supply in some years, and where the lower reaches of the river are already stressed. Any deterioration of water quality and quantity and aquatic ecosystem health due to the cumulative

effects of exploiting the headwaters, including the Castle Special Place, may precipitate significant social and economic impacts in southern Alberta.

We also are concerned about the predictions in the C5 Forest Management Plan for the efficacy of silvaculture (and the benefits to future ecology of the forest). The Prairie Adaption Research Collaborative (PARC) has suggested in their research: "In the southern forest-grassland transition zone, warming and drying are likely to result in progressive stages of dieback, with losses accelerated by fires and insect attacks. The earliest consequences of climate warming are likely to occur in Alberta and western Saskatchewan. Drought-prone spruce will be lost first, followed by pines and then aspen, to be replaced by some form of prairie grassland." (*Vulnerability of Canada's Tree Species to Climate Change and Management Options for Adaptation: An Overview for Policy Makers and Practitioners*, 2009, p.18). In other words, forests that are exploited today using the large block-cuts planned for the Castle may not re-grow into similar mature or old growth stands again.

Due to the importance of the Castle Special Place as a centre for recreation for Lethbridge and the region, the important environmental services the region provides, and its significant ecological value, SAGE continues to encourage the Government of Alberta to designate the Castle Special Place as a Wildland Park as a testament to a provincial vision of sustainability.

We look forward to your thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Braum Barber', written in a cursive style.

Braum Barber
SAGE

cc. Minister Dianna McQueen, Environment & Water
Minister Frank Oberle, Sustainable Resource Development
Hon. Greg Weadick, MLA Lethbridge-West
Hon. Bridget Pastoor, MLA Lethbridge-East
Mayor Rajko Dodic, Lethbridge