



“The best way to save the environment is to save the environmentalist.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

May 2013

SAGE May 2nd at 7 p.m. at the Fish & Game Hut. Presentation by Valorie Allen on her book ... Everyone Welcome!

SAGE AGM June 6th.

Walk the Headwaters. SAGE has volunteered for Sunday, July 24th to walk from Coaldale to Lethbridge. If you would like to participate, tell us.

6th Annual Coulee Cleanup, May 3 and May 10 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Contact the [Helen Schuler Nature Centre](#) for more information.

Pathway 2 Sustainability Conference, May 29-31, Calgary. www.pathways2sustainability.ca/

Minister Oliver's Pants on Fire

According to a [CBC article](#), Minister Joe Oliver recently responded to James Hansen's opinion in the New York Times.

James Hansen (a world-renowned climate scientist) has made it clear that we have already exceeded safe levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and that the combustion of fossil fuel must be drastically reduced to avoid runaway global warming and climate change. He argues that we must stop burning coal (mainly used to generate electricity) and that we must stop exploiting non-conventional oil and gas reserves. In other words, we must use the remaining conventional oil and gas to make a transition to a fossil-free civilization.

Minister Oliver doesn't like that type of talk, because it challenges the government's decisions to promote and subsidize the extraction of bitumen in northern Alberta. The honorable minister has recently reproached James Hansen for being a wolf-crier and radical exaggerator. Oliver says that "it doesn't advance a debate when people make exaggerated comments that are not rooted in the facts." Keep in mind that this is a politician instructing a renowned scientist about facts.

What does Minister Oliver then say? He first trots out the 'ethical oil' argument that the tar sands represent an energy source from a country that is more stable and has a better

human rights record than other petroleum states in the world. This does not consider, of course, ethics of mining [715 km²](#) of Alberta's boreal forest, using [4 barrels of water](#) for each barrel of oil produced, [contaminating](#) the Athabasca River, and [affecting the health](#) of downstream (and downwind) communities and ecosystems.

Then the Minister asserts that the tar sands represent only 1/1000 of global emissions. Exaggerating the facts, perhaps? From well-to-wheel oil derived from bitumen creates 4 times more emissions than conventional oil. The tar sands contribute over [1/3 of Alberta's emissions](#), and 7% of the national emissions. At 1.5 million barrels each day, the tar sands contributes about 25% of U.S. emissions from oil consumption (and roughly 4% of global emissions from oil).

Minister Oliver implies that if we don't produce it, someone else will - the assumption being, of course, that we will continue to idle our 4x4s at a drive-thru waiting for a coffee. And it is precisely this business-as-usual that James Hansen is arguing against. It's not the choice about who's oil to burn; it is the choice of burning it or not: to stabilize the climate or gamble with our children's future.

Notice of SAGE AGM

The Annual General Meeting for SAGE is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, June 6th at the Fish & Game Hut on 9th Avenue South on the south end of the Kinsmen Park.

You may renew your membership at that time, or online using PayPal. If you are interested in being a Director, please come to the AGM: Everyone is welcome.

We are also interested in project ideas or environmental initiatives that SAGE might be able to complete over the next year.

Valorie Allen on Population

Valorie Allen will be speaking at SAGE on May 2nd about her 2010 book *Growing Pains: A planet in distress*.

From the book description: "Each day we share the earth and its resources with a quarter million more people than the day before. Our population is increasing by three people per second, with a growth rate of more than 80 million each year. Today's grand total is about 6.5 billion and is expected to reach between 8 and 11 billion by 2050. In *Growing Pains*, author Valorie Allen addresses this stunning population

growth and its negative impact on the environment."

Valorie aims to demystify the conversation around population, and she proposes some practical solutions to the 'growing pains' caused by overpopulation.

For more information, visit Valorie's website at www.populationinsync.net/ (and watch the population grow in real time). You may also be interested in a partial interview on YouTube www.youtube.com/.

See you on May 2nd at 7p.m.

Kiosk of the ABSuRD

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., written July 2011)

The Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition (CCWC) and not Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (aka ABSuRD) wants to build an information kiosk on the banks of the West Castle River. "Kiosk"- noun, a small open-fronted hut from which information is dispensed. Stop yawning and keep reading children, there's more to this one than meets the eye. You might conclude from this tale that the authorities think the CCWC wants to use depleted uranium as a construction medium. Or perhaps they think this is a nefarious plot to secretly dispose of toxic waste (more on the real toxic properties of this situation and waste of time later).

Maybe the word "kiosk" is too Bolshevik for this right-leaning government. Of course it could be the descriptor "information", always anathema to this administra-

tion, which has set off the alarm bells. This kiosk would provide information about the Westcastle Wetlands Ecological Reserve and the Castle Special Management Area. It sounds like just the salacious stuff that you wouldn't want women and children and especially the uninformed public exposed to. Admittedly, to bureaucratic sensibilities this sounds pretty fishy.

This little drama, of applying for approval to build a kiosk has played itself out in government offices in Blairmore and Edmonton for three years. That's right, three years! There are several environmental impact assessments for major developments that have been completed in less time. It would seem the CCWC is no closer to hammering together a kiosk than when the idea was hatched.

Never did I think I would find myself mouthing approval for the government's current resource management re-engineering, which reads more closely in the fine print, as "get out of the way of business", or giving the business to many of our cherished treasures like wildlife, clean water and space. But I've come around, seen the light even as it is a locomotive bearing down on us. I'm behind this simplification of the rules, snipping away at the entanglements of red tape and speeding up the process to get kiosks built more quickly. Especially, I would say, if the world is about fairness and equitability what is good for the gabbling geese of industry must surely be good for the kiosk builders of the CCWC. One would naively think that anyway.

(Continued on next page ...)

Interesting Links: **Mother Earth [Video]** http://biggeekdad.com/2012/05/mother-earth/#.UXWi_kdg3TQ.email

PFRA Community Pastures: History and Drama of a Prairie Commons

http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Saskatchewan%20Office/2013/04/SKnotes_PFRA.pdf

Unburnable Carbon 2013: Wasted capital and stranded assets <http://www.carbontracker.org/wastedcapital> or <http://carbontracker.live.kiln.it/Unburnable-Carbon-2-Web-Version.pdf>

Climate Forcing Growth Rates: Doubling down on our Faustian bargain (James Hansen)

http://iopscience.iop.org/1748-9326/8/1/011006/pdf/1748-9326_8_1_011006.pdf



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

But the functionaries and burons (that's a bureaucrat that has crossed the line to an automaton) of government must protect us from kiosks and the information that might be conveyed from these dangerous edifices. What other conclusion can one draw from the stonewalling, obfuscation and foot-dragging of several less-than-civil servants otherwise engaged in the orderly liquidation of Alberta's resources? Maybe they are waiting for the CCWC to use local sources of lumber for the kiosk, as in old growth forest converted to dimensional lumber from the Castle watershed. In a land of neo-con ideology, you have to help business everywhere you can. Rather than old growth forest, maybe the CCWC could build the kiosk from the hollow and broken promises of environmental protection; there's certainly enough of that material around to build a fleet of kiosks.

If you haven't grasped it by now the proposed location of the kiosk is on some of the public's land, in the forest reserve, or as some laughingly call it-the "green" zone. That would be green as in "green washing", the spin doctors' tool for fooling the gullible public. This is land held in trust for the greater public good, like oil drilling, timber cutting and sleight of hand exercises to build condos and starter castles. Except for kiosk construction it is there for you to apply for a piece of it. It is after all, your land.

Of course there is the formality of applying so some guardian of the

public trust can determine if someone else has already claimed your spot. In the case of the CCWC application a small snag has developed - where is the spot and is it already spoken for? One conjures up the image of Dickens-era clerks with shades, bent over large ledgers, peering at the ink smudged entries in an effort to divine the answer. This comes from an organization that has the technology to pinpoint a fire start from kilometers away, within minutes, but seemingly can't grapple with a proposed kiosk location.

But there you have it, the specter of kiosk construction and the helpful intransigence of ABSuRD, your partner in conservation. If the CCWC were any less law abiding, than say, your average Albertan, they would have expressed their impatience with this situation by just building the kiosk. Following from the advice of a former Alberta premier to "shoot, shovel and shut up" as a solution to the BSE crises, the variant here would have been "saw, shingle and shut up". It's a safe bet that had the kiosk been built under the cover of darkness, or on a weekend when no one in authority watches anyway, it would be sitting there now dispensing its seditious information about the Castle and conservation. The kiosk still remains a dream of the CCWC, like so many things related to conservation in the Castle. Another approach is necessary to get it built. This is the point at which all you helpful government people need to stop reading - this is strategy and tactics beyond you. The simple solution to this intrac-

table situation is to relabel the application. Ask for a wellsite, a clear-cut or an ATV bridge and put it under the letterhead of a logging company or one of those benevolent multinational oil conglomerates. Your application will be processed at lightening speed and your approval will return to you in six days. Guaranteed!

As a post script to this little tale of bungling and foot-dragging approval was finally granted, in the fourth year of this long journey to the installation of a kiosk. Among the onerous conditions-no live trees may be cut. An incredible irony given that the Forest Service has approved a major clearcutting operation for the watershed. But, given the propensity of kiosk construction to add to the cumulative effects of other attempts to inform the public and provide objective information in a sea of obfuscation the scrutiny and time to process the CCWC application was clearly warranted.

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist and an Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary.



Why Not Wilderness: A plea for wild places in the Canadian West (2013)

Professionally, the author is an Animal Ecologist. Dave Sheppard retired from the University of Regina in the 1980s to build his log home in the "wilds" of the foothills at Beaver Mines, Southern Alberta. He devoted the 1990s to educate Albertans about the rich biodiversity of his backyard, the Castle Watershed, adjoining Waterton National Park to its south. He created the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition which has motivated hundreds to seek protection of this partly wild ecosystem. Failure prompted Sheppard to 'withdraw' and reflect on the Canadian process of protecting lands and comparing it to the more successful process in the USA. Why are Canadians negligent in protecting their biodiverse hot spots and geological and geographical monuments?

Sheppard devoted the next 12 years to this research by visiting "protected" areas in western Canada and protected areas in the western United States, and by extensive use of websites. The effort that yielded a comparison of the quantity and quality of protected areas in the two countries is impressive in its scope and detail. The study focusses mainly on western states and provinces. After 12 years of reflecting in his log home, this important political and historical comparison emerged as a book, most suitably decorated on its cover page by a colourful representation of a mountain lake by Jean Sheppard.

Throughout his years with the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, Sheppard earned the reputation of the gentle diplomat. I am pleased to say that the 156 pages reveal an assertive character. The importance of the subject to himself and to society made it easy for him to release the brakes and inform us of our duty to our future. This is Sheppard's only book which is an expression of a lifetime of ecological learning. The reading is easy, references are listed for each chapter but not cited in the text.

In Chapter 1 Sheppard offers his understanding of what wilderness is. "Wilderness is Nature in Her purest form." "Preservation of our remaining wilderness would be a statement of who we are as a people." Wilderness is cheap. The more you manage it the more it deteriorates.

These concepts prevail for the discussions of Canada - US comparison, conservation depreciation, impact on wildlife or rivers, and protection of federal, provincial or state lands. Throughout we are reminded of the many Canadian social and political shortcomings. Protection means protection by legislation without the escape clause of ministerial discretion. It took 132 pages for the word 'sustainable' to show up. No wonder: after all, wilderness is the best example we have for 'sustainability', and wilderness can best teach us the meaning of the word. Although the reader is occasionally reminded of the importance of wilderness to species at risk and biodiversity, it does not get its full treatment until the last chapter. Overall, the book is a clear statement of Canadian society and its relationship to natural systems.

The text is rich in noteworthy observations for the process of designating protected places. Our materialistic consumptive society is given its due, specifically its attitude of indifference and distraction. Locals are not united in land protection and are splintered by too many issues and too much self-interest. Protection implies human restrictions, and in populated areas this has political implications. Restrictions on human activity are so much easier to impose in sparsely populated areas. Almost half of Alaska is protected, with 90% of wildlife protected areas being located in the Arctic. Provincial governments, responsible for public lands, do not act with foresight (except Nova Scotia). Consequently, in southern Alberta wilderness is confined to a few isolated valleys. Even the National and Provincial Parks are managed for purposes other than preservation. We need determined federal and provincial leadership to explain to locals who live by wilderness that they have much to gain from protecting it.

In the USA they are dealing with the same issues: Their Wilderness Act of 1964 certainly helps, and they have made good use of it, especially on federal lands. American politicians lobby for what their constituency supports. The US National Park system has numerous categories and levels of protection not found in Canada. National Monuments, for example, are designated by the President. Americans take pride in their well managed parks, whereas urban Canadians are under the illusion of endless wilderness. Canadians

do not have national wilderness legislation (Willmore Wilderness Act is a rare exception and is a provincial act).

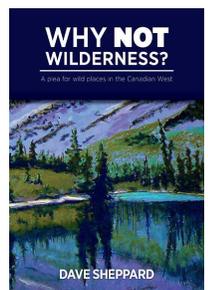
Why Americans have expressed their long-term vision for protected areas more than Canadians is an intriguing question (Chapter 9). Sheppard offers differences in federal land tenure and political systems as important explanations. However, the numerous variables in geology, national history, climate, vegetation, population distribution, concept of freedom, national pride, and societal progression from east to the west makes this definition too complex. The Canadian exploitation of western resources and recreational areas leaves little room for long-term contemplation.

Sheppard has sharp words for the ineffective Alberta process of land protection and laments the lack of a unified voice by the numerous environmental groups in the province. Hopefully, numbers still count.

How are we going to create the process for federal or provincial governments to lead us in the ethical protection of our biodiversity with binding legislation? Unfortunately Sheppard does not elucidate such a process. Business as usual positions: "Will do" (government and industry) verses "No you will not" (independent citizen groups) is not working. "Will do" verses "No you will not" leads us into ineffective untold battles for species, trees, lakes, rivers and land. Wilderness is a foreign concept for modern society and the associated restrictions are difficult to accept. Sheppard is emphatic that tourism is not compatible with wilderness.

Sheppard's contribution is essential reading in a Canadian pursuit of ecosystem-based identity. Decision-makers and the voting public should show their wisdom by reading this book with care for appropriate long term action to emerge. Determined government leadership is needed to save our wounded wild lands.

Reviewed by Klaus Jericho: retired from Health Canada, past president and member of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, and esteemed member of the Southern Alberta





A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

April 22, 2013

Hon. Brad Wall
Premier of Saskatchewan
Legislative Building
Regina, SK, S4S 0B3
Email: premier@gov.sk.ca

Dear Premier Wall:

Re: Maintaining PFRA Pastures in the Public Domain

On behalf of the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE), we would like to express our grave concerns about government decisions to possibly sell fragile grassland currently managed under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) without adequate public consultation, and without due consideration for impacts on all of the stakeholders, including the natural environment.

After almost 80 years, the transfer of 1.8 million acres of grasslands from the federal government to the province of Saskatchewan represents a radical shift in the control of an important community resource. This ill-conceived decision affects not only the farmers and ranchers who have sustainably grazed livestock on these pastures and who might not otherwise be able to afford this land, but it also threatens habitat for the many species-at-risk that rely on these remaining natural grasslands. These lands currently provide multiple community benefits including hunting, nature hikes, archeological heritage, sacred and ceremonial First Nations sites, tourism, and scientific study – benefits that will be irretrievably lost if this land leaves the public domain.

The Government of Saskatchewan has a long history of land stewardship and maintaining cultural and natural heritage. Despite the decision of the federal government to evade its responsibility, it is important that prairie provinces continue the legacy of protecting existing PFRA land. We respectfully request that the Government of Saskatchewan maintain the natural values of public lands for the use of rural communities; for grassland ecosystems that provide important ecological services (soil conservation, water conservation, wetlands, carbon sequestration); for plant and wildlife habitat; and for healthy opportunities for recreation and meaningful experiences in nature.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Barber', with a stylized, cursive script.

Braum Barber
Chair

cc: PPPI, public4pastures@gmail.com
Hon. Peter Kent, Minister of the Environment, minister@ec.gc.ca
Hon. Gerry Ritz, Minister of Agriculture, gerry.ritz@parl.gc.ca