



**"How can we have something better if we do not imagine it? How can we imagine it if we do not hope for it? How can we hope for it if we do not attempt to realize it?"**

**Wendell Berry**

**June 2014**

## **Helen Schuler Nature Centre (Re)Dedication**

**No SAGE meeting in June.**

**Oldman River Tribute**, June 8th at 2 p.m. at the Helen Schuler Centre. Organized by Rena Woss at [rena.woss@gmail.com](mailto:rena.woss@gmail.com)

**2nd Annual Nature Play Day** Saturday, June 14th at noon, Henderson Lake. Organized by the Helen Schuler Centre.

**Free Self-guided Xeriscaping Tour**, Saturday June 21st with presentation by Steve MacRae. [www.oldmanbasin.org](http://www.oldmanbasin.org) (see [Prairie Urban Garden](http://www.prairieurban.com) website for xeriscaping information)

Alberta Water Council **Re-Fresh Symposium**, June 24-25 [www.awcreusesymposium.ca](http://www.awcreusesymposium.ca)

The Helen Schuler Nature Center has recently been renovated and will be re-dedicated with a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 6th at 11:00 a.m.

The renovation project involved a 500 m<sup>2</sup> expansion of the existing building. The additional space was designed to respond to increasing public demand (larger tours) and to allow for future programming opportunities including travelling science-based exhibits.

In addition, the expansion modernized the facility, improved accessibility and demonstrated sustainable building practices by targeting a gold rating through the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program.

One of the central features integrated into the Helen Schuler Nature Centre is a living roof. The living roof involves plants grown in a special soil of varying depths. The living roof acts as an insulator (as many plants transpire to maintain lower temperatures); it absorbs water from rain events thus reducing surface runoff into the river; and it can provide habitat for insects and birds. They can also be quite beautiful.

Other LEED efforts are to reduce energy consumption (electricity and heating) by using natural light as much as possible, and low energy fixtures for lighting; and by better insulating the building. This project includes 6" of mineral wool insulation held onto the

outside of the structure by fiberglass girts to reduce thermal bridging through the building envelope. Eight solar (photovoltaic) panels were installed to produce renewable electricity for the facility.

More fundamentally, the lifecycle of materials and products were considered. Recycled content, energy required to mine and process the materials, the pollution generated through the process, transportation distances, and how they are disposed at the end of the useful life are all considered to find the best choice of materials for Lethbridge.

Learn more by planning to tour the Helen Schuler Nature Centre this summer.

## **Goldenkey Abandons Penny Project**

Goldenkey Oil announced at the beginning of May that they will not pursue their oil exploration plan in West Lethbridge. Clearly, the overwhelming opposition to the project, including that of SAGE, alarmed the company.

Two important things came out of this experience for the long term. The first is that it shows that citizens of Lethbridge have become aware of the issues around fossil fuel exploitation - particularly, the social and environmental consequences of the industry. The second is that it lead to the

creation of a government roundtable tasked with evaluating urban drilling and hydraulic fracturing in Alberta.

This task force was, of course, simply a delay tactic to neutralize opposition, but it may allow Albertans to open a rational discussion around regulations, the role of the Alberta Energy Regulator, and the future of the oil & gas industry. The question becomes: How much social and environmental damage are we going to permit as we exploit the dregs of fossil fuels in a warming world?

## **SAGE 30th Anniversary**

SAGE celebrated its 30th Anniversary providing a voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community within Lethbridge and throughout southern Alberta.

Many SAGE members who provided environmental leadership in the 1980s and 1990s joined the celebrations. It was noted how much more complex and global in scope environmental issues have become. On the other hand, there seems to be greater environmental awareness in general, and more balanced media attention today, compared to decades past.

Noteworthy was the groundswell of concern in Lethbridge around the Goldenkey Penny Project, much of which focussed on the potentially negative environmental impacts to air and water. It was hoped that the momentum could be directed to longer term concerns around oil & gas production in the region and our unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels.

We would like to thank everyone for coming out to the celebration and the community support we have received.

# Stumping the Forest

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., written 2010)

Usually people of my advanced age group are favorably disposed towards fiber, both for the physical constitution and the moral one. But, I find myself more and more anti-fiber when I witness the ongoing war in the woods over industrial, clear-cut logging. Each generation has its own rendezvous with the land; it would seem today's Forest Service is at least a generation behind today's public that want their forests managed for more than dimensional lumber. The specter of logging in the Castle River watershed, in southwestern Alberta reinforces this dichotomy. It follows pitched battles by concerned citizens over logging in the Ghost watershed, Bragg Creek area, Kananaskis and Crowsnest Pass.

The impression one is left with in reviewing the actions and intent of

our Forest Service in these disputes is an agency out of touch, lacking a unifying sense of forest values. Observers might conclude that leaving forests to the care of the Forest Service is akin to leaving a pig under the protection of the butcher. In one case all that is left is the squeal, in the other just sawdust, stumps and sediment.

Forests are more, much more than fiber, described as dimensional lumber, fence posts and now bark mulch for landscaping. But, fiber vision, a variant of tunnel vision, has become a debilitating disease in which perception and reason are restricted by arrogance and ignorance. Vision is further distorted by vested economic interests and politics. If left untended the malady progresses to a type of institutional blindness, in which no other forest attribute or value

can be discerned. Its legacy, other than rotting stumps and eroding skid trails, includes streams filled with silt, a ravaged landscape that has lost visual interest, an unnatural quiet, with no trees to capture the wind or shelter birds and a vacant space, across which wildlife are reluctant to travel.

If there was an appropriate metaphor for the situation it would be a brain dead dinosaur, whose tail hasn't yet got the message that forests are more than fiber. The tail, consisting of industrial clear-cuts, continues to swing wildly, crushing and smashing everything in its path. It is almost as if the sole goal of our Forest Service is to reset the geological clock back to a less biologically diverse time when there were only primordial pines and ferns.

## Interesting Links:

Volunteer Opportunities at Waterton Lakes National Park

[www.parkscanada.gc.ca/waterton-volunteer](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/waterton-volunteer)

Top 10 New Species (discovered in 2013)

[www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/in-pictures-the-top-10-new-species/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/in-pictures-the-top-10-new-species/)

How to 'green' your next barbeque

<http://www.enn.com/wildlife/article/47382>

Film: *Maharadja Burger* by Thomas Balmes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yVpcHrU2Jo>



**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](mailto:sage-communications@sage-environment.org)

As for the foresters that design the logging plans, the bureaucrats and politicians that push them over citizens' concerns and the corporate directors who collect the profit from deforestation, they will soon be extinct. But we must give them their due; they are doing their very best to take with them creatures whose residence in these watersheds is at least 10,000 years longer than theirs. That which exploiters fail to value, or do not value, they take no trouble to comprehend. Of clean water, cutthroat trout, bull trout, grizzlies and connections only lip service is paid.

The forests of the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains were viewed by early policy makers as pivotal to the settlement and well-being of the area later to be known as Alberta and Saskatchewan. Hence, the forests were "reserved", for water, local timber needs and to sustain wildlife. How quickly our Forest Service has forgotten history. The need for watershed protection and maintenance of biodiversity is not an artifact of history, but a compelling need for today (and the future). We need to learn to take our wealth from our forests in less damaging ways, and to realize wealth is also found in managing them for more than fiber. An intact forest is a symbol of progress, a landscape covered with stumps is not.

The Forest Service, in their antiquated public input process, sucks the oxygen out of legitimate debate over forest management with

the time tested "DAD" approach (Decide-Advise-Defend). Whatever the public process is, the deal is rigged and participants end up wasting time and energy on something our Forest Service was really never engaged in anyway. Any good will engendered by asking the public to participate is squandered and rapidly evaporates into anger towards an agency still in a command and control mode. The rush to cut trees, because they are getting older supercedes forest management for multiple values and, meaningful engagement with Albertans who care about their forests.

I know there are still professionals in our Forest Service that care about forests and have the public interest as a focus. These voices of reason, of balance and of restraint are overwhelmed by the politics of timber harvest.

If, in the future, you plan to drink water, enjoy a forest landscape, fish and hunt or watch wildlife, now is the time to pay attention to the rapid industrialization of our forests. The focus should be less on wood fiber and more on moral fiber in forest management. A lack of public oversight now will doom us to a new Alberta coat of arms displaying a field of stumps where forests once stood.

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

## Windy Bombast

There has been a succession of Commentaries in the Lethbridge Herald regarding wind as a source of renewable energy. The authors seem to coalesce around the promotion of nuclear energy and a rejection of the overwhelming consensus in the science of climate change.

Their arguments against wind power are mainly focused on economics (subsidies), on its intermittent production, and on aesthetics.

Regarding economics, wind power in an unregulated electricity market like Alberta must be competitive or it would not be expanding as it is. There are no feed-in tariffs in Alberta. Energy Return Over Energy Invested (EROEI) is competitive with current conventional oil production and much better than bitumen extraction, making it a viable technology. Complaints about the costs of transmission borne by the province are specious, as they apply to all electricity providers. Suggesting that 'spinning reserves' (using natural gas) are required for wind is also misleading as these reserves are already in place to match variations in demand.

Wind does have intermittent production, but over the period of a year the amount of electricity produced is predictable (roughly 35 to 40% of the rated capacity). Electricity produced by wind turbines can be absorbed by the grid without additional costs or operating concerns. This is true to up to 20% wind power of the total electricity production.

Aesthetics? Well, it is difficult to believe that we should ignore the health and climate impacts of coal-fired electricity because some people don't like the look of wind turbines.

A lot of wind has been expended on disparaging renewable energy technologies. Are they perfect? Not at all, but perhaps it is time to begin to work together to solve such an overwhelming problem like our energy future. A good place to begin is with some experimentation.

## Anti-Fragile: Things that gain from disorder (2012)

Nassim Nicholas Taleb has written a number of books about randomness, volatility and the stock market, his most famous being *The Black Swan*. The thesis of this previous book was essentially that we try to manage and plan for small amounts of volatility around the average, but the unpredicted and unpredictable events are what causes real change or collapse of systems. So, he advises, look for the Black Swans and capitalize on them.

Taleb's latest book, *Anti-Fragile: Things that gain from disorder*, was meant to provide insight into avoiding the effects of fragility when faced with a Black Swan.

There are some interesting ideas - though they seem to distill down to what might be called folk wisdom: Trust people not plans; small things are more resilient; keep your options open; rely on people who have 'skin in the game'; if it ain't broke, don't fix it; pressure creates diamonds; you only need one reason to reject an idea; for every benefit there is a risk; you learn more from failure than success.

To be anti-fragile, an idea, organization or system must not only be robust, but actually improve with 'stressors'. Taleb provides a series of examples meant to show how some stress actually makes things better when people keep their options open and 'skin in the game'. He says curiosity is anti-fragile, as is trial and error tinkering in science and technology.

What is not anti-fragile (or what one might call fragile, if one weren't trying to coin a few buzzwords to gain notoriety) are bureaucracies, formal education, academic research - or more generally, modern society: "We are fragilizing society and economic systems by denying them stressors and randomness, putting them in the Procrustean bed of cushy and comfortable - but ultimately harmful - modernity" (p.81).

Taleb rejects education ('Lecturing birds on flying') and medicine ('What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'). He suggests it is better to lift a very heavy weight once than a lighter weight many times; and that one should follow religious calendars for fasting and feasting: the body, like nature, gaining from disorder and volatility.

Some of this may challenge the reader (another stress to improve the gains), but a lot of it is simply irritating. The author seems to be obsessed to coin the next catchy buzzword, often for no apparent reason, and his seemingly nonsensical side-stories and rants, his awkward & embarrassing self-promotion, his irrational condemnation of everything academic or bureaucratic or journalistic is quite simply distracting. Totalled, there are at least 200 pages of text that could have been culled. But what can one expect from an author that recoils from the 'fragilizing interventionism' of copy editors ...

Some ideas are so generalized or confused that it detracts from the work. One example is his concept of 'annealing': he says (p.102) that "annealing, in metallurgy, a technique used to make metal stonger and more homogeneous ..." and Taleb relates it metaphorically to the type of stress that makes things find their equilibrium, as a form of anti-fragility. We don't hear about annealing again - it was just a trial balloon for another buzzword. The only problem is that the metaphor is wrong: annealing makes ferrous metals softer and tougher (less strong). Annealing is precisely not what his metaphor is hung on.

He flips through isms without clarification on what he could possibly mean: modernism, environmentalism, Stoicism, and so on. After a while, it seems like the author is simply snowing the reader with a blizzard of unrelated and incomprehensible references and stories - mostly about how smart, virtuous or refined he is compared to the hoi polloi.

And to share my biggest belly laugh:



"[Self-]Marketing is bad manners - and I rely on my naturalistic and ecological instincts. ... It is clearly much better if others (preferably someone other than his mother) are the ones saying good things about him, and it would be nice if he acted with some personal humility" (p.403). Self-awareness does not seem to be a quality of this author.

Despite how unlikeable the author appears to be, *Anti-Fragile* does have some interesting insights. He talks about strategic planning: "Corporations are in love with the idea of strategic planning. They need to pay to figure out where they are going. Yet there is no evidence that strategic planning works - we even seem to have evidence against it. ... William Starbuck [says strategic planning] makes the corporation option-blind, as it gets locked into a non-opportunistic course of action" (p.234).

I had hoped to learn a bit more about making systems more anti-fragile - or, better, how society might prepare for an environmental Black Swan event. In fact, he offers little practical advice (which was the premise of writing the book). Instead we get some platitudinous remarks like: "We are witnessing a fundamental change. Consider older societies - those societies that have survived. The main difference between us and them is the disappearance of a sense of heroism; a shift away from a certain respect - and power - to those who take downside risks for others" (p.375).

That Taleb is anti-modern is quite clear, but his solution seems to rely on the Nietzschean ubermensch who boldly drags the effete Last Man into an anti-fragile future.

If your reading time is valuable to you, I would give this one a pass.





ALBERTA

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

*Office of the Minister  
MLA, West Yellowhead*

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March 26, 2014

Mr. Braum Barber  
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment  
PO Box 383  
Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9  
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Dear Mr. Barber:

Thank you for your March 3, 2014, letter regarding the Government of Alberta's future land-use plans in the headwater regions of the Oldman River.

The Government of Alberta's approach is to develop our resources in an integrated and sustainable manner. The Integrated Resource Management System is the means by which Alberta will achieve responsible resource stewardship, setting and achieving the environmental, economic, and social outcomes Albertans expect from resource development.

Within the Integrated Resource Management System, regional plans represent a key tool to achieve these outcomes. The plans are future-focused and are developed collaboratively with Albertans. As well, the plans establish firm environmental limits and related management triggers for air, land, water, and biodiversity. We have received numerous questions about interim measures to stop economic growth while regional plans are being developed; however, the clear intent of the Land-use Framework is to manage growth, not stop it. Our government believes that development activity and the conservation of biodiversity can be achieved on numerous landscapes in Alberta.

Environmental monitoring, evaluation, and reporting are essential to the Integrated Resource Management System. As we move forward, this monitoring will be comprehensive across land, air, water, and biodiversity, co-ordinated by an arms-length agency. Recently Dr. Lorne Taylor was appointed as chair of the agency and Dr. Greg Taylor was appointed as vice-chair. These two people have considerable experience with environmental and monitoring matters.

Dr. Lorne Taylor was the founding chair of the Alberta Water Research Institute and he was instrumental in creating the Government of Alberta's Water for Life Strategy, which remains our strategy to this day. Dr. Greg Taylor is a former Dean of Science at the University of Alberta and was a member of the advisory board that created the monitoring agency.



The Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency is expected to be operational in 2014. This agency will deliver greater focus, co-ordination, and integration of monitoring activities throughout the province, starting first with the Lower Athabasca Region and then assuming broader provincial programs. Data and information will be open, accessible, and reported in a manner that is meaningful to the multiple users.

The government recognizes the importance of our water resource – we all share the responsibility to ensure a healthy, secure supply of water for our communities, environment, and economy. Our Water for Life strategy reflects these goals and our regional plans, including the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, are meant to help us meet our targets under this strategy. In 2013, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development engaged Albertans across the province in water conversations to discover the priority issues around managing our water resource. The results of these conversations will be used to help guide the regional planning process. I encourage you to read the report *Our Water. Our Future. A Conversation with Albertans* at [www.environment.gov.ab.ca/info/library/8771.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.ab.ca/info/library/8771.pdf).

While southern Alberta saw unprecedented flooding in June 2013, we must also be prepared for other changing weather conditions such as drought. There are continuing discussions on the evolving science of climate change, and climate change is expected to impact Alberta in many ways. To better understand these changes, the Government of Alberta is undertaking adaptation planning. As the Government of Alberta continues through the ongoing process of renewing our Climate Change strategy, adaptation planning will be a key component of this process.

Forest legislation and policy has served to protect, conserve, and ensure the sustainable management of our forest land, despite ever increasing pressures from population growth, industrial use, insect and disease outbreaks, wildfire, and climate change. The Government of Alberta is committed to finding the right balance between environmental, economic, and social values of Alberta's forests. Environment and Sustainable Resource Development is continuing to develop an Alberta Forest Strategy to ensure Alberta's forest management legislation and policies address ongoing pressures on the forest resource. This strategy will formulate the province's commitment to Alberta forests by providing long-term direction under the Land-use Framework and the Integrated Resource Management System.

We recognize that many Albertans and visitors enjoy recreational access to our public land, including off-highway vehicle use. Since the Public Lands Administration Regulation came into effect, we have more policy tools to manage recreational impacts on public land. These tools allow Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to manage the level of recreational use to protect sensitive or over-used areas, while still allowing Albertans and visitors opportunities for recreational use.

I appreciate the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment contributing to the consultation process on the draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The formal public consultation on the draft plan has concluded and the Land Use Secretariat is completing a final compilation of the feedback. The Government of Alberta anticipates a final plan will be ready for approval in summer 2014.

Sincerely,



Robin Campbell  
Minister

cc: Honourable Richard Starke  
Minister of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation

Honourable Greg Weadick  
MLA, Lethbridge-West

Bridget Pastoor  
MLA, Lethbridge-East

The following press release was sent to SAGE.  
SAGE was active in open houses and meetings with Goldenkey Oil Inc. in opposition to urban drilling in West Lethbridge.



## **Goldenkey Oil Inc. Makes Decision on the Penny Project and related Facilities, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.**

**April 30, 2014 – For immediate release**

Lethbridge, Alberta – Goldenkey Oil Inc. has decided to withdraw from its Penny Project and will not be making application to access its minerals in the Lethbridge area. Goldenkey considered the following elements in its decision as a result of their Project Participant Involvement Program which included several public consultation events, a dedicated project website, many inquiry responses, meetings with various stakeholders and widely disseminated project description materials:

- The cost and risk benefit of the geological success compared to the cost of the application process;
- The anticipated protracted processes in obtaining licensing and other approvals in each step of subsequent project development;
- The resources required in providing accurate risk information on balance with existing predictable and manageable risks, including proper information dissemination; and,
- Stakeholder Engagement process and tools such as the Criteria Gathering & Input Forms, Community Consultation Event Intake Sheets and Evaluations provided valuable input from the public and other stakeholder groups.

“While Goldenkey has the utmost confidence in the Alberta Energy Regulator and the governing regulations to direct resource development in a safe, efficient, orderly and environmentally responsible manner, this has become a case of counting the increased cost for being successful in the application process against the prospect of technical success for an exploratory well scenario. Goldenkey has decided on a project basis that the barriers here did not justify the costs.” says David Hill, Goldenkey Project Representative.

More Information on the Penny Project can be found on [www.penny-project.ca](http://www.penny-project.ca).



## Invitation:

# OLDMAN RIVER WATER TRIBUTE



Event: **OLDMAN RIVER TRIBUTE**

When: Sunday, June 8  
Where: Indian Battle Park  
Time: 1:30 pm

For more information:

Email: [rena.woss@gmail.com](mailto:rena.woss@gmail.com)  
Email: [prenevsh@telusplanet.net](mailto:prenevsh@telusplanet.net)  
Phone: Rena: (403) 795-9554

Lethbridge is situated in one of the driest parts of Canada. With less than 11 inches of rain per year, water is scarce and droughts are frequent. Thanks to our Oldman River, we are able to live here and enjoy a prosperous and abundant life. The waters of our river have quenched our parched prairies and transformed this desert into an agricultural haven. Recently our waters were under threat. Applications were filed to drill and frack for oil inside our city limits. Fracking would have put our water at risk. For each well drilled, millions of gallons of fresh water would have been contaminated with hundreds of toxic chemicals, transforming it from wholesome to hazardous waste.

As the *Sun and Wind capital of Canada*, we can safely and responsibly create energy with our abundant renewable resources without ever poisoning our scarce supply water. We believe that water is not a commodity to be violated but a life force to be honoured and protected.

## Invitation

As a finale to Environment Week, we invite you to join us for a special community event on **Sunday, June 8 – 1:30 pm at Indian Battle Park**

Our City and Government officials, religious leaders and First Nations representatives will lead our community in a procession from the field at Indian Battle Park to the banks of the Oldman River (signs will be posted). There we will pay tribute to the Oldman River with speeches, poetry and song. Join us in this tribute. Please wear something blue.

**Please join us for this first ever community event  
honoring our Oldman River**