



**“We think that when the canary dies,
we can simply buy another canary.”**

Lorne Fitch

December 2011

No December meeting.

Next **SAGE** meeting tentatively Thursday, January 5th at 7 p.m., Fish & Game Hut.

Alberta given C-minus grade for water quality by [Ecojustice](#), mainly due to its reluctance to protect headwaters from energy extraction, and logging. Efforts to block logging in the Castle Special Place are [ongoing](#).

Vehicle Damage in Six Mile Coulee

Six Mile Coulee, located at the south end of the City near Sandstone, experienced damage this past summer due to illegal access by all-terrain vehicles.

The vehicle traffic has trespassed on fragile eastern slopes of the coulees, destroying native grasses, wild flowers and shrubs, and leaving the slopes exposed to erosion.

A group of local stewards has contacted the City and the adjoining land owners in an effort to have the park better secured, and to have clear signage posted to discourage these types of activities.

The new Municipal Development Plan states: Lethbridge will “Strive to conserve, enhance and where possible restore

the biological diversity of the river valley and riparian areas within.”

Six Mile Coulee offers a unique riparian habitat in the City that is enjoyed by respectful hikers and bikers for many decades since becoming a City park in the mid-1970s. SAGE has, and will continue, to advocate for better stewardship for Six Mile Coulee.

Values and Voices for Stewardship

The Southern Foothills Community Stewardship Initiative has released a report called [Values and Voices](#). The initiative was designed to “better understand the value of this landscape in the words of the people who live, work and play here, and to determine their priorities for maintaining healthy ecosystems across the region.”

Eight values identified in the process include: “water security, or the reliable supply of clean water produced by a properly functioning landscape; the traditional lifestyle and culture epitomized by ranching and farming in wide-open spaces; the region’s renowned aesthetics; its diverse wild-

life and ability to sustain it; opportunities for low-impact recreation; clean air; the ability to produce food sustainably; and the ethic of stewardship shared among many of the region’s residents.”

It was argued that maintaining a healthy, contiguous, and functioning landscape will require

local education and stewardship, leadership in science-based best practices for land-use and monitoring processes, and “forward-thinking provincial and municipal governance.

The report contains many thoughtful insights and concludes with six clear recommendations.

Alberta Not Properly Monitoring GHG Emissions & Credits

In 2008, the Government of Alberta published its [Climate Change Strategy](#) that relied predominately on carbon capture and sequestration - an unproven mitigation technique to which the government has committed tens of billions of dollars to implement.

The Auditor General has raised questions about government efforts to properly monitor and validate carbon credits issued to agriculture and the tar sands. Not a single carbon credit issued to agricultural operations could be sufficiently verified in the audit process.

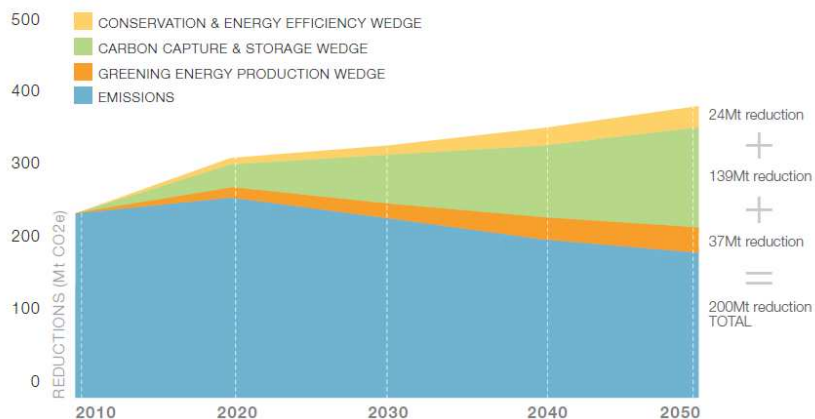
The primary agricultural credit is related to no-till practices which may sequester more carbon because the soil is less disturbed. It could not be confirmed by the Auditor General that these practices were actually being done. The credits granted may be purchased by anyone, including energy companies to

offset their own emissions.

The audit also discovered some irregularities in the submissions by tar sand operators as they relate to tailings. Suncor used questionable methods of estimating emissions, and completely ignored CO₂ emissions, which may represent as much as 90% of fugitive emissions from tailing ponds.

According to a [Globe & Mail article](#), the Alberta government has responded that they are 'tweaking and enhancing the system'. There are many concerns about poorly monitored and validated emission claims, particularly as the provincial government 'invests' in changing the world-perception that bitumen from the tar sands is 'dirty oil'.

GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION WEDGE -- HIGHLIGHTING GREENER ENERGY PRODUCTION REDUCTIONS



Some Interesting Articles & Research:

Fueling a Biomess - Using forest bioenergy for energy (www.greenpeace.org)

Fracking up our water, hydro power, and climate. Ben Parfitt

(<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/>)

Provincial government still failing Alberta's rivers. Water Matters

(<http://www.water-matters.org/>)

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

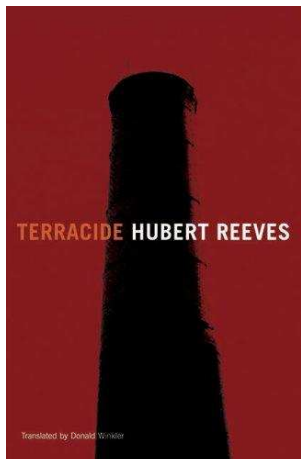
Terracide (2009) & You are Here (2008) (Bonus Book Review)



Terracide, by Hubert Reeves, is disappointingly more optimistic than the title would lead one to expect.

Reeves weaves a number of metaphors and word-plays into a standard litany of environmental and social challenges: air quality, energy, food security, pollution, animal cruelty, and planetary poverty. In fact, most of the book explores how humankind undermines the foundation of its own existence.

Probably one of the more clever metaphors Reeves uses is one of the twelve labours imposed on Hercules by the king of Tiryns, Eurystheus. Hercules was tasked with cleaning the Augean stables in a single day. The stables had not been cleaned for 30 years while housing 1000 head of prolific dung-producers - you can see where the metaphor is appropriate to our times ... Well, Hercules accomplishes the task by diverting a couple of rivers to wash out the stables. The myth doesn't mention the imminent ecological disasters of river diversion, or downstream hypoxia from the heavy load of waste introduced, but it does seem like something we would try with our Herculean technologies.



Reeves seems to believe that it is within our ability to avert each of the challenges he explores, but contradicts this by concluding with a more pleasing pessimism:

"Fifteen billion years of evolution have produced a being able to unearth the origins of the universe that gave it life, able to decode the behavior of atoms and galaxies, to explore the solar system, to master the forces of nature, but unable to marshal its resources in such a way as to avert its own elimination." (p.154)

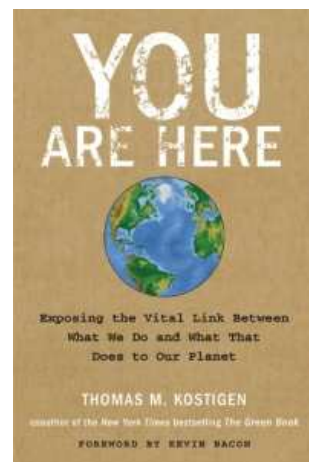
Good one, Hubert. From expecting apocalypse in *Terracide* and getting standard fare, I approached Thomas Kostigen's book *You are Here* expecting standard fare and got, well, standard fare.

Kostigen is a journalist and the writer of a number of books on the environment and social issues. Like *Terracide*, he explores how human interaction is both damaging the planet and causing untold distress for a large number of human beings around the world.

What makes this book engaging is the journalist's eye as he visits the very places that he relates. His intention is to make the environmental

and social impacts more real by connecting them to people living in places as diverse as Mumbai in India, Linfen City in China, Shishmaref Village in Alaska, the Pacific Ocean, and his home in Santa Monica, California.

By and large, Kostigen succeeds in his task.



What was striking about both books was the emphasis placed on the impact of environmental challenges on the human population, with very little attention on the interdependence of species in nature. Both authors seem to view humankind as somehow separated from the environment, and at times they appear to be offering a simple apologetic for using the environment as a source of resources and a sink for wastes - it is, after all, just something that we crazy humans do and will continue to do.

Neither author offers much in the way of challenging the structure of our collective ruin beyond changing our individual awareness and behaviour a bit. Good primers, but they fall short of the spanking humans need voiced right now.



November 22, 2011

City of Lethbridge
Environment Committee
c/o Alderman Jeff Carlson, Chair

RE: Six Mile Coulee Stewardship

Recent All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) activity in Six Mile Coulee has begun to compromise the fragile slopes, damaging native grasses, wild flowers and shrubs, exposing the soil to wind and water erosion, and increasing the risk of spreading invasive species of non-native plants. The vehicles have been illegally accessing the City Park through adjoining private land over a fence that has been breached.

A group of local stewards has approached City Parks and they have contacted the owner of the fence requesting that it be repaired. They have been assured by the City that efforts will be made to secure the park from further vehicle access. We appreciate this support from City Administration.

This sort of activity is likely to increase due to intensified development along the coulee and the apparent absence of enforcement of park bylaws in this area: Section 34 ("Motorized Equipment") of the Parks Bylaw states that "No person shall: ...Operate off road vehicles, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles or any motorized transportation device in a park." Concerns about increased risk of environmental impact in Six Mile Coulee were voiced by SAGE to City Council in March 2002 during the approval process of the Sandstone development. Predicted environmental degradation (e.g., slumping) has occurred since the development was approved. SAGE remains concerned about the environmental degradation to this important river valley area.

Six Mile Coulee is a unique parkland area within the City that contains many species of native plants, and provides a variety of habitats for wildlife, including a productive riparian ecosystem. It is said that Helen Schuler conducted much of her coulee research in this area because of the variety of plant species in an unspoiled state. It has been accessed by respectful hikers and bikers for the past number of decades, and it has been used carefully by College programs in environmental science and engineering. The park provides many useful ecosystem services, educational services, and is enjoyed by the community in its current state.

Our intention is to raise attention to the importance of Six Mile Coulee as a City Park. SAGE would encourage the City to provide more security by coordinating the maintenance of fencing with adjoining landowners; by posting clear signs discouraging the use of motorized vehicles or other damaging activities in the coulees; and by informing those living along the coulee slopes about the importance of preserving the park.

We believe it is in our long term interest as a 'sustainable community' to consider a protected-area-designation for Six Mile Coulee, and to pay more attention to managing current and future use in or adjacent to the coulee to preserve its significant natural features, its ecological integrity, and its value as a natural resource for low-impact recreational and educational activities.

Sincerely,

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

Braum Barber
SAGE

cc. Becky Cousins, Six Mile Coulee Steward



ALBERTA
SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Office of the Minister

AR28559

November 7, 2011

Mr. Braum Barber
braum.barber@lethbridgecollege.ca

Dear Mr. Barber:

Thank you for your recent email regarding a Request for Proposal to sell public land in southern Alberta. I am pleased to provide the following information.

We have heard from Albertans about the need for public input into the Request for Proposal, as well as concerns about the potential impacts on water and the local ranching community. The Government of Alberta is committed to public input on decisions and to ensuring our valuable resources exist for generations to come. Water use and availability continue to be government priorities.

The government has decided to cancel the Request for Proposal and will continue to manage this public land in the best interest of Albertans.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Frank Oberle
Minister

cc: Honourable Greg Weadick, MLA
Lethbridge-West

Alberta ■



November 23, 2011

SAGE
Box 383
Lethbridge, Alberta
T1J 3Y7

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

On behalf of the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE), we would like to express our continued concern about clear-cutting within the 1000 square kilometers of Castle Crown wilderness area. We have voiced our concern previously with little effect, but are encouraged by the new objectives of the Government of Alberta that will allow for the reconsideration of this ill-conceived plan. The Castle Region represents opportunities for addressing the *Water For Life Strategy*, enhancing carbon sequestration, and preserving habitat for species challenged by the impacts of logging.

The Citizen Society Research Lab at Lethbridge College conducted a poll that indicated more than 85% of people in Lethbridge and region oppose logging the Castle Crown, and support the creation of a wildland park in the area. The results are considered accurate to 3.5% with a 95% confidence. Furthermore, in October 2009, the City of Lethbridge publically endorsed the protection of the Castle Special Place through provincial legislation. The City recognizes the significance of maintaining the integrity of the watershed upon which the region relies for economic, municipal and recreational uses. It defies comprehension that the Government of Alberta continues to ignore public sentiment around this important issue.

The plan to clear-cut the Castle area will have negative impacts on tourism, recreation and the environment for our region. The Castle area is the source of as much as a third of our water and this logging may impact water quality in the region and reduce late-summer flows as the water retention capability is compromised. This region also provides sensitive habitat for species, not to mention its importance for carbon sequestration. Certainly there is a good economic case to preserve the watershed and wilderness that the Castle Crown represents.

It has been suggested that the Castle Special Place be designated as a Wildland Park as a testament to a provincial vision of sustainability. We support this vision.

We look forward to your thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

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

Braum Barber
SAGE

cc. Minister McQueen, Environment & Water
Minister Frank Oberle, Sustainable Resource Development

Public transit occupancy must be increased

WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2011 02:00 LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Efficiency in public transport implies the time needed to reach our destination and to minimize harm done by gases emitted.

In Lethbridge, travel by bus takes more time than travel by private car and the low occupancy rate of buses is at odds with the harm done by gases emitted. Most citizens drive their cars and add harmful emissions to those emitted by the buses. How do we get more people into our buses and thus reduce the number of cars on our roads?

Our bus system has some 22 buses operating daily and four buses are added to serve the U of L students during semesters in the peak hours of 7-9 a.m. and 2-4 p.m. This service burns some 1.2 million litres of diesel annually, which emits 3.24 million kilograms of carbon dioxide and other harmful gases. To this we add the emissions produced by thousands of private car users. High occupancy of buses serves our collective good; low occupancy is harmful if it does not remove cars from our roads.

Recently the city transit system and the U of L Students' Union made their second attempt to increase occupancy of our buses. In the referendum held Oct. 28, 2,888 of 6,825 undergraduate students voted and declined the U Pass proposal by a 30 per cent margin. For the second time, students and city transit failed to reach a process which would reduce emissions from private cars. Parking passes are issued to some 3,000 students per semester, some 1,200 annual passes to faculty members and 350 permits for residence occupants. In addition, there is pay parking by the hour.

The amount of carbon dioxide produced annually by the cars driven by U of L students and faculty is conservatively estimated to be four million kg of carbon dioxide and other harmful gases. This does not include emissions added by cars at pay parking stalls.

Students, faculty and visitors to the university have an obligation to negotiate a process with city transit which increases occupancy of our buses and removes cars from our roads and university parking stalls. The atmosphere does not distinguish between emissions based on ownership of cars. This process also applies to the Lethbridge College and all other institutions in the city. Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is accepted as a global need for the common good and Canada is far behind in its international commitment to reduce greenhouse gases.

Klaus Jericho
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
Lethbridge



Premier of Alberta

Office of the Premier
Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T5K 2B6
Telephone 780 427 2251
Fax 780 427 1349

November 3, 2011

Honourable Diana McQueen
Minister of Environment and Water
425 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister McQueen:

This letter outlines how we will work as a government and the objectives I am trusting you to deliver on as Alberta's new Minister of Environment and Water and a member of our Cabinet team.

Together we have the honour and privilege to serve the people of Alberta. Democratic renewal and regaining Albertans' faith in the political system are at the core of our objectives as a government. That faith will come from the responsive, responsible, accountable and transparent way in which our team will operate.

Innovative approaches will be needed to deliver results for Albertans. This has been started through a reorganization of government to better align with the priorities of Albertans and what we need to accomplish as a team. While innovation and fresh ways of thinking are vital, this does not alter Ministerial Responsibility. You are fully accountable for all matters under your purview.

We are one team with one agenda: to deliver a better Alberta. You are expected to work with your colleagues in the design and implementation of integrated solutions to the challenges at hand. Inclusiveness will define us as a team. Our partnerships must be broad and meaningful so Albertans know that each and every one of them is a valued member of the team. Finally, transparency of intent and of action will be the standard.

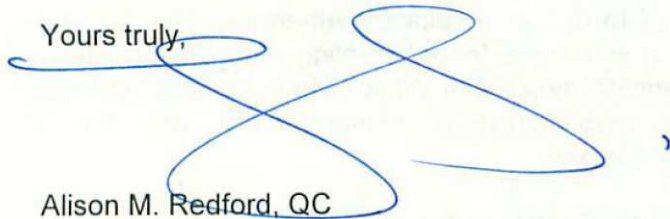
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As Minister of Environment and Water, I expect you to work within the parameters outlined to deliver the following objectives:

- Begin the final stage consultation on key actions under the *Water for Life Strategy* with proposals on how to move forward together with stakeholders and experts.
- Together with the Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development, Energy and Sustainable Resource Development, design and implement an initiative to make Alberta the national leader in energy efficiency and sustainability.
- Develop the appropriate partnerships, inside and outside of government, to deliver a credible and open source information system on science-based environmental indicators.
- In collaboration with the Ministers of Energy and Sustainable Resource Development, implement the Regulatory Enhancement Task Force recommendations, including the creation of a single regulator for oil and gas.
- Together with the Minister of Energy, work with the federal government to ensure future coal-fired regulations support the common goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, without unduly impacting Alberta consumers.

I trust you are as thrilled as I am by the opportunity before us. Albertans have placed their trust and hopes in us and I am determined to exceed their expectations. You have an important role in making that happen.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by 'M. Redford'.

Alison M. Redford, QC