



“In elevating the economy above all else, we fail to ask the most important questions:

What is an economy for? How much is enough? Are there no limits? .”

David Suzuki

April 1st, 2015

Fee-For-Service Agreement Tabled by Council

SAGE Meeting April 9th, Lethbridge Public Library.

SAGE Membership Dues are being gratefully accepted.

Alberta Water Quality Awareness Day, June 5th. Register a [ALMS](#)

A memorandum of agreement between Environment Lethbridge and the City of Lethbridge has been tabled by Council pending more information.

The fee-for-service agreement would support the development of environmental benchmarks for Lethbridge. These

benchmarks would provide a reference from which the effectiveness of future interventions can be evaluated.

Environment Lethbridge would also become a central repository for environmental information and provide direction on best practices for stewardship. With community partners representing business, industry, education, and the environment involved in the process, a broad base of expertise can be accessed and results would reflect a consensus position that moves Lethbridge toward sustainability.

Despite four years of active communication with City Council and the Environment Committee of Council,

there are still gaps in understanding on the role Environmental Lethbridge can play in the community, and the value provided to the City for communication and accessing community expertise.

Council tabled the decision after requesting a more detailed budget from Environment Lethbridge on how the three years of fee-for-service would lead to the goals stated in the memorandum of agreement.

There were also concerns about the quality and accuracy of the informational materials that will be made accessible to the public. The concern is based on the recent confusion around the merits of curbside recycling and composting in Lethbridge. Because of the unique structure of Environment Lethbridge, however, all information would be evaluated by a broad spectrum of stakeholders and reflect the best the community has to offer. As a stakeholder, SAGE is preparing a FAQ on recycling to help clear the confusion.

An inclusive and independent voice for sustainable practices remains the goal for Environment Lethbridge.



City Council Buys Oil Company for Lethbridge

In a surprise move last Thursday, City Council approved the purchase of Golden Key's assets in West Lethbridge. Due to low oil prices, the province has expedited the approval process and the City will begin drilling this spring.

Based on multiple letters from four residents who don't like paying taxes, and some Herald Roast & Toasts, Council decided to augment the tax base by producing oil & gas within the city limits. "We've always felt second-rate to Medicine Hat, and this is our chance to tap into some free wealth," the Mayor said.

When asked if the new wealth will be used to support curbside recycling, composting, or the independent expertise offered by Environment Lethbridge, a Council spokesperson admitted "now that we are in the oil business, we will no longer be pursuing any of our environmental goals ... it's money-time!"

A consultant has since been hired to evaluate the wages of Council and the City Manager to align them with executives of transnational petroleum corporations.



Beavers - An Ally or Inconvenient Species?

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., July 2014)

The beaver is quite a package: it swims like a fish, cuts like a chain saw, moves materials like a front end loader, is the first water engineer and the first logger, and transforms landscapes at a scale that rivals humans. Some might consider them an inconvenient species.

As our national symbol the beaver is equally loved, hated and universally misunderstood. They can come with horns or halos. When they flood roads and property, cut favorite trees or inconvenience us in other ways they can seem the evil incarnate. To the myriad of plant, insect, fish and wildlife species beavers create habitat for and, to those that appreciate biodiversity, beavers are divinely inspired. In that balance beavers are seriously underrated as a species that can help us weather the storm of climate change.

The essence of climate change is greater variability in our weather. For many landscapes the trend is towards warmer and drier conditions. It may also mean more violent storms that dump massive amounts of rain in a short time period. It's a conundrum of generally less precipitation overall, but delivery faster than the landscape can absorb. In a perverse way it means increased drought and flood conditions, often within the same year.

What beavers do, and have done for centuries, can mitigate some of this increased variability. We may have overlooked a natural ally in our efforts to conserve and manage water.

When a beaver hears running water it clicks the switch into dam building mode. Deeper water is a safer home for beavers. Beaver dams create impoundments of

stored water, often of significant volume. Research indicates that beaver activity can increase the amount of open water in a watershed by nearly 10%. But, that's only the water we can see. Beneath the ponds and adjacent areas is a much more profound story. Multiply the volume of surface water by 5-10 times to get a picture of the amount of hidden ground water storage.

Beaver ponds both store and deliver water. By slowing water down, allowing it to seep into the ground to shallow aquifers, downstream flows are enhanced from two to 10 times over streams without beavers. Most important, that water is delivered later in the season, when flows are normally low (and in drought very low) helping fish survive and providing essential supplies to us downstream water drinkers.

Interesting Links:

Great local films from the **Resilient City project**

<http://www.theresilientcity.com/>

Too Good To Waste [City of Calgary]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQCz3Ygs568&feature=youtu.be>

Shindell, The Social Cost of Atmospheric Release

<http://www.economics-ejournal.org/economics/discussionpapers/2013-56>



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

On another front, beaver dams function as speed bumps for streams, slowing down the velocity of moving water. Moving water has incredible power, especially during floods and can be extremely destructive. An array of beaver dams and ponds in a watershed can delay and reduce the flood peak and the energy associated with that quickly moving mass of water.

Beaver dams increase the width of the effective floodplain up to 12 times. Wider floodplains work to slow down water by spreading it out. This reduces the erosive force, allowing water to be captured in surface irregularities and eventually some into shallow aquifers. Much of the sediment carried by flood waters is dropped in the floodplain, improving water quality. The impact of a flood is dampened, slowed and reduced which decreases the negative impacts on downstream communities.

Our attempts to mitigate floods and droughts aren't always successful and, are very costly enterprises. Often engineered structures destroy many natural attributes, fish and wildlife populations are negatively affected and visually the results detract from natural landscapes.

If watersheds had more beaver dams and ponds that would increase the capability to capture and tame flood flows, mitigate droughts and better manage risk. Integrating beavers into our future flood, drought and watershed plans can reduce costs, impacts

and add substantially to benefits. These natural dam builders and water engineers can be aggravating and helpful, costly and beneficial. It is a matter of time and place coupled with a healthy dose of tolerance.

The challenge is current beaver populations are a fraction of historical numbers. Population recovery has been slow, partly because we have not fully understood and appreciated the many services provided by beavers and the benefits for us. Another look at beavers will show they are a most convenient species to have as an ally as we adjust to water scarcity and periodic water overabundance.

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



Environment Lethbridge
Fundraiser
Rain Barrels—\$70 each
(Only 22 remaining for this Spring)
Order Online:
<http://www.environmentlethbridge.org/>

From Alberta Invasive Species (AISC)

Changes to the Prohibited Noxious and Noxious species in the Weed Control Act have been proposed.

The proposal is with the Minister of Agriculture and could be approved at any time. There are 11 yellow hawkweeds proposed for addition: Whiplash hawkweed, Yellowdevil hawkweed, Kingdevil hawkweed, Smooth hawkweed, Common hawkweed, Spotted hawkweed, Wall hawkweed, Tall hawkweed, Queendevil hawkweed, European hawkweed and Showy hawkweed.

AISC has fact sheets in development. Watch for them soon at www.abinvasives.ca

There are 5 other species being proposed including: African Rue, Alkali Swainsonpea, Pale/European Swallow-wort (Dog Strangling Vine), Black Swallow-wort and Queen Anne's Lace (Wild carrot).

Fact Sheets on these 5 species are already on the [AISC website](#).

That will bring the total number of regulated invasive plants to 91. A handy feature of the AISC Fact Sheet web page is a search function that allows you to use either common name or scientific (Latin) name.

Online Episodes from the Nature of Things



Songbird SOS

<http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/episodes/songbirdsos>

'It seems inconceivable that we have lost almost half the songbirds that filled our skies only 40 years ago. Songbird SOS takes a journey with the birds to discover why this is happening and what we can do about it.'

TV is often in disrepute as a mind numbing time waster that distracts us from more serious matters, but programmes like *The Nature Of Things* still rarely disappoint. And on the internet, they can be watched at leisure and with almost no commercials (almost).

This recent episode tackles yet another indicator species in decline - songbirds. The villains of the piece are well known; high rise buildings in cities, habitat fragmentation in Alberta's north due to resource extraction, persistent pesticides like the honey bee killing neonicotinoids in Saskatchewan wetlands and some new complications like the 9/11 Tribute Beams in New York that flare so high and so brightly they confuse birds on migratory routes across the continent.

The best parts of these nature series are the solutions, when we have them. High rise buildings can be "marked," as FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) volunteers have been pushing for in Toronto. Birds perceive reflective windows as continuations of the landscapes they are flying through, resulting in deadly collisions. Select high rise windows have been made 'feather friendly' with a film birds detect, reducing collisions by some 70%. The Tribute Lights in New York can be turned off when bird flocks become sensorally trapped in the beams. Extensive remedial experimentation is profiled at a pesticide free coffee plantation in Costa Rica. Here, agro-chemicals are replaced with birds consuming deleterious insects in shady areas of the multi species plantation; much better for coffee drinking humans, hungry birds and beneficial bees.

Another villain cited for the decline of songbirds, domestic and feral cats, become the subject of:

The Lion in Your Living Room

<http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/episodes/the-lion-in-your-living-room>

This episode tackles almost every-

thing about cats in a condensed format – how they land on their feet from free fall, why they purr, the hand Vikings offered in helping orange cats disperse and where and why cats were domesticated - hardly likely to be the last word on that subject. Sadly, there is little to be done to mitigate the hunting instincts of the Lion in your garden, beyond not letting Tigger out of your living room.

Will a cat that is unable to go outside, explore the neighbourhood, make friends and enemies and create havoc in the neighbours' gardens still be a cat and a species which will retain the devotion of their humans? The estimated billion birds a year lost to cat predation might well hope the answer is yes, but as with so many things, it will be humans who make the ultimate decision.

On the plus side, only one bird is killed in the making of this episode and you can watch 50 minutes of cat cuteness without going to YouTube and feeling you are wasting time. Or at least you can avoid the clarion call to capitalism known as commercials – and still get cute cat videos. Many studies have emphasized the importance of humans interacting with nature as a precursor to caring about nature; could the position of cat as intermediary between the wild and the tame be behind our seeming fascination with the wild and tame cat? And more importantly could the liminal cat help protect nature through motivating us to care?

Blue Future (2013)

With *Blue Future: Protecting water for people and the planet forever*, Maude Barlow completes her trilogy on protecting water from commodification and making access to sufficient clean water a human right.

With the successes Barlow has seen at the United Nations in recent years enshrining water as a human right, this book has an eye to the future.

Blue Future traces the path to bringing water as a human right to world attention and its support in the United Nations. She continues to advocate for water as a commons and quotes Bocking's definition of the commons: "'The air we breathe, the fresh water we drink, the seas, forests, and mountains, the genetic heritage through which all life is transmitted, the diversity of life itself.' *Commons* is synonymous with community, co-operation, and respect for the rights and preferences of others" (p.68).

The commons is contrasted to enclosure which Barlow describes: "Enclosure threatens the environment by favouring short-term profits over long-term stewardship. Corporations find it financially desirable to shift health and safety risks to the public and to future generations. Enclosure also imposes new limits on citizen rights and public accountability as private decision making supplants open procedures of democratic participation. Finally, enclosure

imposes market values in realms that should be free from commodification, such as community and family life, public intuitions, and democratic processes" (p.74).

Enclosure, Barlow argues, represents the commodification of water, where trading "fails to give water priority to municipalities, local farmers, human needs, and ecosystem preservation" (p.84).

Through the rest of *Blue Future*, Maude Barlow documents the implications of water scarcity in agriculture, mining, and energy production. She quotes the IEA that the volume of water consumed for energy production will double by 2035 - it is unclear where this water will come from. And because energy, water and food production is entangled, the limits to infinite expansion become clear.

And the last portion of *Blue Future* is dedicated to the politics of free trade. Barlow argues against 'investor-state clauses' that give corporations the right to sue foreign governments for compensation or to place a chill on governments considering new laws and practices to protect their environment, the health and safety of their people, or social rights (p.230).

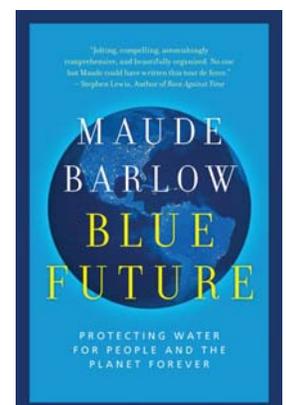
To counteract investor-state clauses in free trade deals, Barlow quotes Shannon Biggs, who explains "that the law in most Western countries recognizes the rights of corporations while denying communities the right to protect



their own health, safety, and welfare in the places where they live. Entire human societies have come to value "endless more," to the detriment of all. Biggs sees the move to assert local democratic control as a new civil rights movement for people and the planet. "Passing local laws that assert communities' right to make governing decisions that affect them directly, and recognizing nature's own right to exist, flourish and regenerate its vital cycles is essentially civil disobedience through local law-making," she says" (p.204).

Another dimension of resisting the loss of sovereignty through free trade is to celebrate municipal ownership of water and wastewater treatment services. She suggests this can be done by becoming a 'Blue Community': "To qualify as a 'blue community,' a municipality must adopt three actions: (1) recognize water as a human right; (2) promote publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater treatment services; and (3) ban the sale of bottled water in public facilities and at municipal events (p.129).

Blue Future is perhaps the best book of the series, providing clear insight into the politics of water.



Letter Written by Klaus to be submitted to the Lethbridge Herald:

Decision-Making Process at City Hall

The recent public debate about the disposal of resources at our landfill prompted us to question the decision-making process at City Hall.

More than ever, managing a modern city is knowledge-based. The speed of adaptation of technology by the rapidly increasing population makes most issues complex. This applies to water/sewer management as it does to transportation, parks, or resources temporarily stored in landfills (examples of landfill mining to recover resources already exist). The complexity of issues of modern society requires detailed study by participating citizens and counsellors.

Our final decision-making body is City Council. The decisions they make is only as good as the information they were given or sought. We assume that such up-to-date information is provided by supporting departments such as Infrastructure, Planning, Parks, Law Enforcement, or Waste Recycling services, Economic Development Lethbridge, Environment Lethbridge, Council Environment Committee or Council Financial Committee. If these city sources cannot provide the needed information, then they and councillors have to seek it elsewhere and share it amongst themselves. At this stage, it is not helpful to ask the general public for their opinion, because collectively they too will not know. It is also not helpful to ask various committees for their opinion, unless they can be assured that committee members were well informed. The same applies to the purchase of expensive consultants, whose recommendations are often difficult to ignore because of their expense.

Once City Hall has gathered the best information available for the issue at hand, an effective public information program needs to be instituted. Following this open public debate it is then fair to ask Councillors to make their final decision. This is what we ask of them when we vote for them. We trust that this decision is made in the resource, financial and environmental interest of the public for the long term. Piecemeal short-term solutions are not helpful.

To reuse or recycle resources is indeed a complex issue and obviously not solved by present black boxes, expensive city recycling stations, or volunteer efforts. The disposed resources are just too valuable. We expect academic and research institutes and industry to lead in the correct management of these resources. Judge a community by its resource recovery operations which focuses on reducing, reusing (for same purpose), recycling (for other purposes), recovering (energy), before disposal is considered. We are years behind other communities. Let us learn from them.

Southern Alberta Group for the Environment



19 March 2015

Lethbridge City Council
City Hall
910 – 4 Ave. S., Lethbridge AB
Attn: City Clerk, bev.burke@lethbridge.ca

Dear Honorable Mayor and Councillors:

Re: Bylaw 5824 – Amendment to Land Use Bylaw 5700 re: 1405 – 40 Avenue South
Bylaw 5826 – Amendment to Land Use Bylaw 5700 re: 1410 – 24 Avenue South

SAGE (Southern Alberta Group for Environment), a non-profit society established in 1984, is a leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community through informing citizens, participating in public processes and supporting sound environmental initiatives and actions. We support the proposed change in land use classification from Future Urban Development (FUD) to Parks and Recreation (P-R) on these two parcels of public land adjacent to the Oldman River valley in southeast Lethbridge to clarify their function as part of the River Valley Parks System.

It is our understanding that these parcels were zoned Urban Reserve in *Land Use Bylaw 4100* and that all parcels with that zoning were arbitrarily switched to Future Urban Development (FUD) when *Land Use Bylaw 5700* was instituted in 2011. At that time detailed consideration was not given to the most appropriate land use district for individual parcels of land designated as FUD under *Land Use Bylaw 5700*. This provides an opportunity to rectify that.

These scenic parcels of public land are grassland and used extensively for outdoor recreation by residents of Lethbridge as evidenced by the network of informal trails that run through them. Bylaw 5824 refers to a parcel west of Lethbridge College and north of Six Mile Coulee. Bylaw 5826 refers to a parcel west of Tudor estates. The parcels are adjacent to the Valley District and therefore subject to development setback as per the *River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (Bylaw 5277)*. A walk along the tops of the coulees from Six Mile Coulee northward past Tudor Estates towards Park Royal Estates provides ample visual evidence of natural slumping as well as accelerated slumping attributable to developments on adjacent uplands. Minimum legal setbacks do not appear to be sufficient. Rezoning these parcels to Parks and Recreation (P-R) will provide assurance that developments contributing to slumping do not occur.

(Continued)

The proposed rezoning is consistent with policies to conserve and enhance the unique character of the Oldman River valley set out in the *Integrated Community Sustainability Plan/Municipal Development Plan (2010)*. Of particular relevance are five policies on page 52:

Section 6.5.1 Lethbridge's River Valley is the Primary Open Space System:

- 3) Restrict development on or near to hazardous lands in the river valley
- 4) Ensure the River Valley is accessible to all residents
- 5) Incorporate strategically located view corridors adjacent to the river valley
- 6) Increase accessibility to the river valley by requiring linear open space along the valley crest.
- 7) Create a continuous pathway throughout and along the top of river valley.

Rezoning of these two parcels from FUD to P-R is also consistent with the *City of Lethbridge Bikeways & Pathways Master Plan (2007)* (Figure 7.2) that proposes a continuous pathway along the top of river valley extending from Lethbridge College north to the Sugar Bowl. In addition the proposed rezoning of these parcels, and others in a similar situation that may be proposed for rezoning in future, contributes to the *River Valley Parks Master Plan* currently being updated and inviting community input.

Yours sincerely
Braum Barber, Chair