

Southern Alberta Environmental Group

Box 383, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y7

NEWSLETTER

May-June, 2004

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Announcements

Re-Inventing SAEG (Planning Sessions)

8:30 a.m., 22 & 29 June; Community Room, Save-on-Foods

2004 Environment Week

Theme: Our Environmental Footprint

31 May – 4 June, Lethbridge

Numerous activities are planned including a presentation on green building design (5 pm Monday, HSCC), a composting demonstration (10 am Tuesday, City Hall), walk or bicycle to work (Wednesday), a presentation on world food challenges (11 am Thursday, library theatre) and a talk on Our Environmental Footprint by B.C. author Dr. Bill Rees (7 pm Friday, City Hall). Throughout the week citizens will have opportunity to determine their environmental footprint using a computer available at City Hall. For more details, watch local media or contact Cecily at 320-6393.

Alberta Environmental Network Annual General Assembly

28-30 May, Kamp Kiwanis near Calgary

There will be sessions on “strategic shifts” by Alberta Environment and on “engagement opportunities” regarding greenhouse gases, water strategy, waste management and coal bed methane. Caucus sessions will develop a “message to government”. To register contact the AEN office at 780.439.1916 or aen@web.ca or visit www.web.ca/~aen.

Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition Annual General Meeting

Saturday, 5 June

For further info check www.ccwc.ab.ca, call 402.627.5059 or email ofc@ccwc.ab.ca.

Confronting Water Scarcity: Challenges and Choices

13-16 July, University of Lethbridge

Keynote speakers are Peter Block, a specialist in managing change within organizations, Thomas Homer-Dixon, director of the Centre for the Study of Peace and Conflict, Peter Lougheed, former Premier of Alberta, Sandra Postel, director of the Global Water Policy Project, and Henry Vaux, president of the Water Education Foundation based in California. They will challenge our grasp of water issues and move us out of our comfort zones. Concurrent sessions will focus on water management, aquatic health, governance and case studies. There will be urban and rural tours focusing on

water scarcity challenges and choices in southern Alberta. For more information and to register visit www.confronting-water-scarcity.ca or call 329-2244.

Notes and Updates

Members News - • SAEG member Cheryl Bradley has been selected as a 2004 Emerald Award finalist in the Individual Commitment category. Debby Gregorash prepared her nomination with support from other SAEG members and colleagues. Recipients will be announced at the 13th Annual Emerald Awards Ceremony on Wednesday, 9 June, at the Winspear Centre in Edmonton. Anyone is welcome to attend. For more information visit www.emeraldawards.com.

•Thank you to all SAEG members who helped with the Earth Day Program on Trumpeter Swans presented by Robin and Marion White at the public library and to those who put up displays. About fifty people attended. Special thanks to Sylvia Campbell for taking the lead in organizing the event and for chairing the program. Thank you also to all those who brought such yummy home-baked goodies and to the library who co-hosted the event.

SAEG Volunteer Opportunities - •Individuals with fresh energy and ideas are needed to help lead SAEG into the future. Consider becoming involved in the work of the organization (see opportunities below). Please take a moment to inform friends and colleagues about SAEG and invite them to become members. •Two planning sessions on re-defining SAEG are planned for 22 & 29 June, with professional facilitation provided by Alberta Community Development. If you are interested in participating please call Sylvia at 328-6502. •Do you want to learn more about water management in southern Alberta? Are you willing and able to participate in monthly stakeholder meetings dealing with water management direction in the Oldman River basin? SAEG representative, Cheryl Bradley, is looking for an understudy. Please contact Cheryl at 328-1245.

Gardening with Native Plants – There is growing interest in using plants native to Alberta in gardening and environmental restoration. The practice is considered more environmentally friendly than using non-native plants which may not be adapted to the prairie environment and which may become invasive. To promote the accessibility and use of native plant material, the Alberta Native Plant Council has published a list of over 60 suppliers of native plants. A companion publication is *Guidelines for the Collection and Use of Native Plants*. Both are available at the website of the Alberta Native Plant Council, www.anpc.ab.ca.

Lethbridge Toxic Round Up Begins May 15 – The first Toxic Round Up of the season takes place 10 am to 2 pm on Saturday, May 15th at 1430 – 33 St. North, Lethbridge. Old paint, used oil, fertilizers, weed killers, drain cleaners and any solvent that is flammable, corrosive, reactive, toxic or contains environmental contaminants will be accepted. For more information call 329-7367.

Provincial Recycling Program for Electronics – On April 21st, Premier Ralph Klein announced that Alberta will be implementing the first provincial electronic recycling program in Canada. Effective October 1, 2004, televisions, computer monitors, CPUs, laptops, electronic notebooks and printers will be collected, reused, recycled and turned into new products. About 190,000 televisions and 90,000 computers are discarded by Albertans each year.

Electronics contain materials such as lead, mercury, cadmium, beryllium and PVC plastics that can cause significant environmental and health risks if they end up in Alberta landfills. However, the metals, glass and plastic in these used products can be recycled into valuable products, including the next generation of electronics.

An environmental fee, ranging from \$5 to \$45 (depending on the item), will be placed on each product included in the program. A non-profit organization – the Alberta Recycling Management Authority (ARMA) – will manage the province-wide recycling program. For more information visit www3.gov.ab.ca/env/waste/ewaste.

Ecotrust Funds Worthy Projects (by Klaus Jericho) - Ecotrust is a granting agency made possible by the collaboration of concerned corporations, individuals and the environment non-government organization (ENGO) sector. It is a uniquely Alberta initiative. The financial basis of Ecotrust is the donations made by corporations. The Alberta Government conditions for contributions were not accepted by Ecotrust and therefore Alberta Government departments only contribute "In Kind" as requested by individual projects. Ecotrust has some 11 corporations and 12 ENGOs as partners including Southern Alberta Environment Group. Since 1992, Ecotrust has allocated over \$3.3 million to Alberta community organizations.

Grant application is open to not-for-profit organizations, in support of community-based environment-enhancing projects in the Spring and the Fall of each year. Maximum contribution to projects is \$20,000 and the number of project support is limited by the quality of applications and the present limit of approximately \$150,000 for each granting period.

All applications are reviewed and voted on by a project review committee representing members of corporations and ENGOs. Project contact persons are also interviewed by phone or in person. For several years SAEG was represented on this project review committee by Bill Brown whose place was taken by Klaus Jericho in 2002.

This Spring 34 projects (14 projects last Fall) are under review on May 19 in Calgary. This list of projects includes the submission by SAEG: "Design and Evaluation of an Urban Stormwater Education Program in Lethbridge". A current Ecotrust project in Lethbridge is the ongoing school naturalization project at Wilson Middle School. The total amount requested this granting period is \$460,000. Fourteen projects have a strong education / awareness component,

four projects are for school naturalization, four for habitat preservation, four for applied research, four are for sustainable practices, two for environmental quality, and two for the restoration category. Some 20 projects include financial remuneration for coordinators.

Water Licence Appeal Decision Expected in June – At a Preliminary Meeting of the Alberta Environmental Appeals Board (EAB), on April 20 in Lethbridge, members of the Southern Alberta Environmental Group (SAEG) sought standing to appeal an amendment of a St. Mary River Irrigation District water license granted by Alberta Environment. The amendment, granted on October 30, 2003 allows the St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID) to allocate 12,000 acre feet of water, saved through publicly funded efficiency improvements, for uses other than irrigation and without returning any water to the stressed southern tributaries of the Oldman River.

SAEG members, through letters, written affidavits and direct evidence, argued that they were directly affected by the decision. Members stated that they live, work and recreate along rivers of the Oldman basin and that their well being relies on healthy aquatic and riparian environments. Some SAEG members irrigate using water directly from the river and others receive water through SMRID canals. They argued that irrigation districts, including the SMRID which is the biggest in Canada, have a responsibility to promote conservation and efficient use of water and to demonstrate stewardship by restoring flows to stressed rivers. Members stated they joined SAEG to work together on environmental matters and to engage in policy and regulatory processes of government, including the environmental appeal process.

SAEG asked for a stay on SMRID proceeding with allocating water for other purposes, pointing out that SMRID already has been providing about 3,000 acre feet of water to purposes other than irrigation in violation of the conditions of the 1991 licence which only allows for temporary diversion of water to other purposes up to a maximum of three acre feet in one year.

SMRID, on the other hand, argued that SAEG and its members were not directly affected since the Director's decision did not result in more water being allocated from the rivers and that they were not legally required, nor did they intend, to reduce their diversion from the southern tributaries of the Oldman River. Instead they are studying the potential for irrigation expansion. They intend to proceed immediately with allocating water for other purposes under the amendment.

EAB is planning to provide a decision about SAEG's directly affected status in June. If SAEG is given standing, then the appeal will proceed. Copies of affidavits and other written material can be obtained by contacting 328-1245.

To date, SAEG has spent about \$15,000 in this matter, primarily on legal fees. About \$8,500 has been raised so far. Lethbridge lawyer Cam MacLennan has provided quality service at reduced rates. Donations to assist with the appeal would be greatly appreciated and can be sent to SAEG, Box 383, Lethbridge AB T1J 3Y7. Cheques should be made out to Trout Unlimited Canada, River Health Fund. Charitable tax receipts will be issued.

A river is the report card of its watershed. Alan Levere