

Southern Alberta Environmental Group

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NEWSLETTER

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Announcements

SAEG 2004 Annual General Meeting And Potluck Dinner

6:00 p.m., Thursday, 7 October 2004

Bradley.Fitch residence, 625 – 18 St. S. Lethbridge

SAEG members and their families welcome. Following dinner, there will be elections and a slide show on travels in southern Africa. Please bring food (a casserole, salad or dessert) and your own dishes. Drinks will be provided.

Climate Variability: Planning for Floods, Droughts and Change

6-8 October 2004, Saskatoon, SK

Presented by Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin and Canadian Water Resources Association. For more information see www.saskriverbasin.ca/conference/ or phone 1-800-567-8007

Alberta Ambient Air Quality Objectives Priority Setting Workshop

9:30 am – 4:00 pm, 28 October 2004

J.G. O'Donoghue Building, 7000 – 113 St., Edmonton

The Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) is hosting a workshop to identify priority substances for the next three years of air quality objective development. Ten spots are available for representatives of NGOs, such as SAEG. Financial support for travel and participation is available. If interested in representing SAEG, contact Klaus (327-4062). For more information on the workshop contact Russ at the AEN office, aen@web.ca or 780.439.1916.

Interpretation Canada 2004 National Conference

20-24 October 2004, Lethbridge Lodge

This conference for heritage interpreters offers sessions in creative skill development, management, marketing and entrepreneurial skills. Keynote speakers include Sam Ham, Ben Gadd, Betty Weiler and Kevin Van Tighem. Tours will visit key natural and historic sites in southern Alberta. For more information see www.interpcan.ca or call 320-3064

Notes and Updates

Call for Nominations for 2004-2005 Board – If you wish to become more involved in the work of SAEG, consider putting your name forward to serve on the Board or a

committee. Board positions include president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and six directors. For more information contact past-president Sylvia at 328-6502 or current president Klaus at 327-4062. Elections will be held at the annual general meeting on 7 October 2004.

Justice Denied? Alberta's Environmental Appeal Board

– Four months have passed since SAEG was denied standing by the Environmental Appeal Board (EAB) and reasons for dismissing the appeals have not yet been provided despite repeated requests. The appeal cost SAEG \$15,000 in legal costs to two different law firms and hundreds of hours of volunteer effort by its members. Fortunately the generosity of members and of Huckvale Wilde Harvie MacLennan LLP as well as assistance from Trout Unlimited Canada has meant SAEG is still financially solvent, although members are bewildered by the EAB process and many feel a fundamental avenue of justice has been denied.

SAEG representative Cheryl Bradley has talked with several others who have participated in the EAB process and takes some comfort in knowing that SAEG is not alone in its view that Albertans are not being well served by EAB. The Environmental Law Centre of Alberta (ELC) is currently reviewing EAB decisions regarding standing, including interviewing parties who have participated in the process. Their findings will be available early next year.

Oldman Basin Water Management Recommendations –

In July 2004 the Oldman Basin Advisory Committee (BAC) made the following recommendations to Alberta Environment regarding Water Conservation Objectives (WCO) in the Oldman River basin.

- *Oldman River WCO* - Maintain the current instream objective (i.e. the 80% fish rule curve plus water quality guidelines) as the WCO [in the Oldman mainstem] but examine the potential to adjust operations of the Oldman dam to increase “flushing flows” in the river and to benefit riparian environments. A small majority (not consensus) of the BAC favoured a moratorium on allocation until studies show further allocation is possible. With this WCO, future water allocations will include significant risk of supply shortages. The BAC agreed that irrigation water allocations should be limited by the 1991 regulation.

- *Southern Tributaries WCO* - The BAC supports continued closure of the southern tributaries to applications for new allocations. While no immediate improvements are possible, the Director should establish long-term restoration water conservation objectives for the Southern Tributaries, which would be met by voluntary actions by license holders.

- *Watershed Management* – Future water management planning must address each river basin in an integrated

fashion that includes: water quality and quantity, surface and groundwater together, and management of the upper basin.

- *Apportionment* – There should be a committee dedicated to increased coordination of water management among the four sub-basins of the South Saskatchewan River Basin.

- *Long Term Flow Restoration* – In several areas of the basin, early studies suggest flow restoration is desirable. The government should adopt a plan to restore river flows in such areas over the long term.

- *Future Water Management Studies and Planning* – The BACs strongly support the need for improved studies of the environmental condition of the rivers and the use of these studies in future adjustments to water management.

For more information on SAEG involvement in the BAC process please contact Cheryl at 328-1245.

Oldman Watershed Council Takes Shape – Two water management initiatives in the Oldman River Basin are merging to become the Oldman Watershed Council (the Council). The Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative, formed in 1997, is a broad-based community partnership which has been defining and addressing water quality issues. The Oldman Basin Advisory Committee, formed in 2000, has been developing recommendations about the future of water management through consensus among key stakeholders (see previous article). The merger to form the Council is an acknowledgement that water quality and quantity are linked and that land use also needs to be considered in water management.

The recent provincial *Water for Life Strategy* provides for establishment of multi-stakeholder councils who “work with government in an adaptive management cycle of basin planning and evaluation”. The Government of Alberta will be providing support for coordination and administration of the Council as well as developing and maintaining repositories of information needed for watershed planning.

SAEG members who have been actively involved in both the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative and the Oldman River Basin Advisory Committee support the merger to form the Council and have helped to draft the Council mission, goals and by-laws. Cheryl Fujikawa will be representing SAEG on the interim Board of Directors of the Council.

The Council will be a non-profit organization and is incorporating as a society. Draft by-laws were reviewed at a broad-based stakeholder meeting on 28 September in Lethbridge. By-laws will be ratified by members at a public meeting in spring 2005. Membership is open to all organizations and individuals residing or working in the Oldman Watershed. Currently there is no fee for membership. All members must agree on the vision, mission and goals of the Council.

To review draft by-laws of the Oldman Watershed Council and to become a member, please contact Wendy at (403) 382-4239 or by email wendy.devent@gov.ab.ca.

Water Quality In Our River: Lethbridge Residents Want To Make A Difference - Over 900 Lethbridge residents responded to a July survey mailed to 2500 households in Lethbridge seeking residents' views about water quality in the Oldman River Basin -- and how we can work together to maintain and improve our water quality by using healthy lawn and garden practices. The 37% response

rate to the random survey on behalf of the Urban BMP Team of the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative shows a high level of interest among residents in protecting water quality and understanding their impacts on it.

Preliminary survey results show both a need and an opportunity to address gaps in knowledge about how the stormwater system functions. Less than half (43%) of survey respondents did not know that the stormwater system is separate from the septic sewer system. Two thirds did not know that stormwater is untreated. There is a clear need to help residents understand that, unlike wastewater going down drains inside our homes which is treated at the wastewater treatment plant, water that runs off yards and driveways into the street and down the stormdrain enters the Oldman River untreated.

Less than one-third (30%) of residents knew that herbicides, found in weed and feed type products, are a type of pesticide. Pesticides are chemicals used to kill insects, fungi or rodents as well as vegetation. Almost all residents, however, are concerned that lawn and garden products (pesticides) may affect human health and that water quality in the Oldman River may be declining. Those who know herbicides are pesticides are less likely to use weed and feed type products, suggesting a little education can go a long way in reducing herbicide and pesticide use in Lethbridge, as one way for residents to help protect water quality.

Survey results are currently being more fully analyzed by NGB Evaluation Solutions Inc. and will be available in November on the ORBWQI website www.oldmanbasin.org.

Water Conference Presentations Available On-Line – Several presentations from the Confronting Water Scarcity Conference, hosted in Lethbridge on 13-16 July 2004, are now on the conference website <http://www.confronting-water-scarcity.ca/presentations.htm>.

Proposed Sell-off of Public Lands under Grazing Lease; Letters Needed – In a July 23 letter to 9000 agricultural leaseholders of public lands, Alberta Sustainable Resources Development Minister Mike Cardinal announced that public lands in the White Zone, the most settled area of the province, are up for sale. A leaseholder can apply to buy a section of public land (one square mile) and if deemed surplus by the province, the land would be sold to the highest bidder for private use.

Public lands in native condition offer Albertans important recreational opportunities as well as sustainable ecological services including carbon sequestering, biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and extensive livestock production. Strong opposition to the sell-off suggests these services are of greater value to many Albertans, now and in the future, than more money in the bank.

If you wish to add your voice to the many others objecting to this, please write a letter to Hon. Mike Cardinal (fax 780.415.4818) and Premier Klein (fax 780.427.1349). Ask the Minister to initiate development of a policy for public lands, by Albertans for Albertans, which will guide those to whom we entrust management well into the future.

Good News for the Peace Park - Oil and gas companies recently declined to bid for methane drilling rights in the Flathead and Elk watersheds. A cross-border alliance of community groups applauds them. Visit www.cbmwatch.ca.