

Southern Alberta Group For Environment

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NEWSLETTER

May, 2005

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Announcements

SAGE May Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 5 May 2005

Fish & Game Hut, 9th Ave and 10 St S., Lethbridge

The Board agenda includes updates on ongoing activities and discussion of new SAEG initiatives. Anyone interested in helping to set direction or in getting involved in association activities is welcome. Refreshments provided.

2005 Annual General Assembly of the Albert Environmental Network

3-5 June, 2005

Bennett Environmental Education Centre, Edmonton

In addition to annual reports from various caucuses and committees, there will be a training sessions coordinated by the Sierra Club of Canada entitled Building Capacity in Communities – An Advocates Training Weekend. Focus will be on enhancing organizing skills, learning how to use media effectively, developing and implementing action plans, and building coalitions. Questions can be directed to Geneva Rae at 780-439-1160.

Lethbridge Environment Week Activities

5-11 June, 2005

Activities in the planning stages for 2005 environment week include a “reel mow-off” between youth groups and local celebrities, a free public transit day, the grand opening of the Wilson Middle School water wise garden, and pond dipping and water quality testing at Henderson Lake. Stay tuned for times and places of events. The Environment Week committee is comprised of representatives from Alberta Environment, City of Lethbridge, Oldman Watershed Council and SAGE.

Notes and Updates

Missed Credit – A big thanks goes to Susan Dakin, City of Lethbridge Environmental Manager, for coordinating shared effort in developing environmental displays for the 2005 Home and Garden Show in Lethbridge on March 16-19. Your editor unwittingly failed to acknowledge Susan’s great contribution in the last SAGE newsletter.

SAGE Director Garners Useful Info at Native Plants Workshop (by Cheryl Fujikawa, SAGE Director) – I represented SAGE at the annual workshop of the Alberta Native Plants Council (ANPC) in Edmonton on April 9-10.

The theme of the workshop was Grow Naturelle – Low Impact Gardening. Workshop information was relevant to SAGE’s activities through the Oldman Watershed Council to improve stormwater quality in Lethbridge.

There was a presentation on efforts of the Edmonton Naturalization Group to put more nature back into parks, schools and residential yards, which means less use of pesticides and fertilizers and less watering. The City has nursery plots devoted to native plants that are available to natural area stewards and group projects as needed. Edmonton also has a Master Composter program.

The results of a study on wildflower seed packets were presented by Cynthia Pahl. The large majority of products do not contain seeds native to Alberta and some contain seeds of plants regarded as nuisance weeds. I obtained a CD copy of the study results which is available for borrowing.

There was a session on new invasive plants. Four important new ones causing problems in riparian areas are tamarisk, Russian olive, sea buckthorn and yellow clematis (*Clematis tangutica*). A rogue’s gallery of invasive non-native plants is available at www.anpc.ab.ca.

A kit on reducing pesticide use was presented by Pesticide Free Edmonton and Sierra Club of Canada. I obtained a CD regarding the effect of pesticides on children which is also available for borrowing.

ANPC is updating guidelines for collecting native plants. The guidelines will differ depending on the purposes for which collection is occurring, be it for retail, education or research. Anyone interested in reviewing the draft document is invited to contact ANPC through their website.

SAGE Ideas Wanted (by Cecily Smith, SAGE Director) – I am part of a group under the Oldman Watershed Council generating a plan for working with retailers of lawn and garden products on initiatives which will reduce risk of stormwater contamination in Lethbridge. We are considering hosting mini workshops about beneficial yard and garden practices which conserve water and reduce fertilizer use. Ideas about workshop topics and presenters would be appreciated! Please provide me any ideas by phone (403) 320-6393 or e-mail smithmeg@telus.net.

Mow Down Pollution Program – The small engines found in lawn mowers, leaf blowers and weed trimmers and other small off-road engines are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, noise and smog. As part of the One-Tonne Challenge, Canadians are invited to bring their gasoline-powered lawnmower or trimmer to any of 120 Home Depot stores across Canada between April 28 and May 8, 2005. In exchange, individuals will receive:

- As much as \$100 in an instant rebate on the purchase of a new, cleaner mower (e.g. a reel push mower or electric mower).
- Customers who do not wish to purchase a new product can bring in their old gasoline lawnmower or trimmer for free recycling.
- Both working and non-working gas mowers and trimmers are eligible for trade-in. The only condition is they have to have an engine, and if possible have the fluids removed in advance.

The Home Depot will donate \$10,000 in product to help naturally “green up” a park in the community that has turned in the highest number of old gasoline mowers and trimmers per store. See www.climatechange.gc.ca.

Autosmart Question and Reply (by Klaus Jericho, SAGE director) – Canada’s Autosmart Fuel Consumption Guide for 2005 states that 1 litre of gasoline produces 2.4 kg of carbon dioxide. I asked Autosmart to explain how one liter of fuel can produce so much carbon dioxide.

Autosmart’s reply: Gasoline is very rich in carbon and during the combustion process the carbon combines with a lot of oxygen from the air to form carbon dioxide. A litre of gasoline containing 0.64 kg of carbon combines with nearly three times that amount of oxygen, thus producing about 2.4 kg of carbon dioxide. There is less carbon in an ethanol/gasoline blend so only 1 kg of carbon dioxide is produced when 1 litre is burned.

SAGE Participates in International Water Privatization Discussions (by Nicola Miller, SAGE Director) - In April 2005 the Council of Canadians, supported by an anonymous donor, convened a meeting of some 40 social and environmental activists from across Canada, the US and Bolivia, to discuss the issue of water privatization. I was pleased to represent SAGE at this meeting held in Orangeville, Ontario. Other Alberta based groups attending were the Parkland Institute (Edmonton) and the Council of Canadians, Red Deer Chapter.

Participants presented a diverse body of interests including groups who are primarily concerned with damming or diverting rivers, others involved in water quality as it relates to livestock issues, outreach to youth groups, First Nations against the export of water from their lands, as well as people in various areas who have fought the implementation of bottled water plants or bulk export of water. Cohesion revolved around shared beliefs in the importance of protecting water as sustainable and as a good of the public commons, rather than a privatized commodity.

The result of the meeting is that participants have formed a loose coalition of activists under the working title, Water Commons Network. The Network is currently setting up an electronic listserve through which members will share their experiences (what worked and what didn’t), assemble ideas for combating or supporting similar proposals and offer one another assistance in our various realms of expertise.

I feel that the incipient Water Commons Network is an inclusive and dedicated group of people who are determined to derail a growing political agenda of water privatization and export, not only in Canada but globally. As such, I hope that SAGE members will be interested in continuing to work with the Network.

Milk River Basin Watershed Council Forming – A meeting was held in the town of Milk River on April 27 to discuss the formation of an Interim Steering Committee that will work towards the formation of a Milk River Basin Council. SAGE was unable to have a representative at the meeting. A message has been sent to Alberta Environment’s coordinator, Sandi Riemersma, asking to be kept informed about progress.

The Milk River Basin is blessed with a wealth of environmentally significant features (plant and animal species at risk, vegetation communities of conservation concern, environmentally significant areas). A key interest of SAGE is ensuring that decision making is well informed about environmental matters including water and land management plans and practices needed to maintain the ecological integrity of aquatic ecosystems and significant environmental features in the basin.

Other watersheds have within their boundaries established environmental organizations who attempt to represent the environmental protection interest on a volunteer basis. This is not the case for the Milk River Basin. SAGE is enquiring about how the environmental interest will be represented within the Milk River Basin Council.

Any SAGE members interested in working on this matter, please contact Cheryl at 328-1245.

Agrologists’ Paper Recommends Getting Tough on Water Management - A lengthy discussion paper on water management in southern Alberta caused quite a stir at the April 1, 2005 conference of the Alberta Institute of Agrologists (AIA). It was, however, not an April fools joke. The AIA commissioned paper, prepared by Waterecon Consulting, is based on sound research and contains the following recommendations:

1. No new water licence applications should be accepted in the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB).
2. Existing licences should be purchased to ensure that Instream Flow Needs are met.
3. Groundwater resources should be included in the SSRB management plan.
4. Return flow management should be emphasized.
5. Reporting of water use should be mandatory for all licenced uses.
6. The reliability of supply associated with licences with different priorities must be better communicated to all licensees.
7. More resources are required for monitoring and enforcement.

The paper can be found at www.aia.ab.ca/policy.

DFO Officers Being Pulled out of Lethbridge – Plans are afoot to pull federal fisheries officers out of the Lethbridge and other prairie offices of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Rumour has it there were complaints about staff being “too harsh” in enforcing the federal Fisheries Act.

Mother Nature always comes to the rescue of a society stricken with...overpopulation, and her ministrations are never gentle. Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe 900-1900 (1986).