



NEWSLETTER May 2006

Editor: Cheryl Bradley, phone: 403-328-1245,
fax: 403-380-4969, e-mail: cebradley@shaw.ca

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1K 3Y7

A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community.

Announcements

Next SAGE Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 4 May 2006

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

The Board agenda includes organization business and discussion on environmental matters currently being dealt with by SAGE. The proposed Montana Alberta Tie Line project will be part of the focus of this meeting.

Everyone welcome. Refreshments provided.

SAGE Picnic at Setaspell Outpost

17 June 2006

Debby Gregorash has kindly offered to host SAGE's annual pot luck picnic at her country place near Police Outpost Park. Please mark this date on your calendar.

Details will be provided in the next newsletter.

SAGE News

New SAGE Board – SAGE's new Board, determined at the April 6 annual general meeting is as follows:

President – Kelsey Prenevost

Vice-President – Edith Olson

Past-President – Sylvia Campbell

Secretary – Faisal Shaffi

Treasurer – Diana Williams

Director – Cheryl Fujikawa

Director – Sister Mary Eileen MacEachern

Director – Nicola Miller

Much appreciation to outgoing Board members Bill Brown, Klaus Jericho, Cecily Smith and Rena Woss for their significant contributions of energy and ideas to the work of the Board. Bill and Klaus have both served as Presidents of SAGE and long-standing Board members. Cecily has served as secretary and Board member for several years. Rena has led the light pollution education initiative. Thank you all.

Ken Revak will continue as newsletter distributor. Cheryl Bradley will remain as newsletter editor while

welcoming expressions of interest from others who may want to try their hand at it.

SAGE Comments on Agriculture MOU – SAGE has been asked to comment on a draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) between the Ministers of Sustainable Resource Development and Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AFRD) and the Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB). The MOU defines the agricultural legislation/regulatory framework, including the NRCB Act and the Agricultural Operations Practices Act, and the roles of provincial government agencies with responsibility for agriculture.

Ann Baran has provided comments on behalf of SAGE emphasizing the need to ensure environmental sustainability of the agricultural industry and for meaningful public consultation in decision-making. If you want to see a copy of the MOU and SAGE's comments, contact Ann at couleesedge1@hotmail.com.

SAGE Meets MATL - On April 26 SAGE met again with representatives of the Montana Alberta Tie Line Project. MATL is proposing to build a private, for profit 240 kV transmission line between Lethbridge and Great Falls. SAGE reiterated concerns expressed during the first meeting on August 10, 2005 and again in an open house on September 25, 2005. These concerns have not yet been adequately addressed.

SAGE's main concern is routing of the line over the Milk River Ridge and the impacts on environmentally significant native prairie. Native grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems in Canada due to degradation and fragmentation for urbanization, industrial development, invasive species and rangeland conversion to cropland. Environment Canada, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and affected landowners also have expressed concern about the company's 'preferred' route over the Ridge and inadequacies in the environmental assessment.

SAGE has requested written documentation of the reasons a route east of the Ridge is no longer being considered. MATL representatives have agreed to document their reasons in writing.

MATL has made application to the National Energy Board and is hoping to have approval by mid-summer. Interventions have been filed by directly affected landowners concerned about impacts on their health and property. The Toxics Watch Society of Alberta, The Prairie Acid Rain Coalition, The Pembina Institute, The Lake Wabamum Enhancement and Protection Association, and The United Power Transmission Area Groups also have filed an intervention arguing that the application should include information on the environmental impacts of the power sources that will supply the line, the reasons that Alberta might need the power line, alternative ways that Alberta could meet any identified needs, and assessment of the environmental costs weighed against economic benefit.

Notes and Updates

Encana Proposed Drilling in Suffield National Wildlife Area Headed for Panel Review – On April 24, federal Environment Minister Rona Ambrose announced that a proposal by Encana Corporation to drill 1275 shallow gas wells in the Canadian Forces Base Suffield National Wildlife Area will undergo an environmental assessment by an independent review panel. The decision was made based on a recommendation by the Department of National Defense.

SAGE and other provincial and national environmental groups had requested a panel review instead of an internal comprehensive study so that there will be a public hearing and full airing of the issues. The cumulative impacts on nationally significant grasslands and on dozens of wild plants and animals considered at risk is a key issue as is the failure of industry to restore native grasslands disturbed by wellsites, compressor stations, pipelines, and access roads.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is discussing with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board the possibility of a joint panel. Information on the timing of next steps and public involvement will follow that decision.

St Mary-Milk River Task Force Report - The report of a task force on sharing of the waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers between Canada and the United States is just released. The St. Mary/Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task Force (Task Force) was established in December 2004 by the International Joint Commission (IJC) at the request of the Governor of Montana. The Task Force investigated a number of opportunities for improving the current administrative measures used in apportioning the flows. The report is found at www.ijc.org/rel/pdf/SMMRAM.pdf

Key findings of the Task Force are:

- Natural flow determination would be improved by additional flow monitoring, better accounting of consumptive uses and determining conveyance losses for the U.S. St. Mary Canal.
- The U.S. has historically received 4% less than the combined flows to which it is entitled and Canada has

received 4% more. There is a shortfall in water diverted by the U.S. from the St. Mary River and Canada has not fully diverted its entitlement of the Milk River.

- Longer balancing periods and allowing credit for surplus deliveries would help both countries realize a greater portion of their respective entitlement.
- A more collaborative approach to management of the international watersheds is merited.
- Improvements to the St. Mary storage and conveyance facilities in Montana and additional storage on the Milk River in Alberta may allow diversion of full entitlement by both countries however environmental impacts and instream flow needs would need to be considered.

Oldman Watershed Council Supports Southern Foothills Study – Cheryl Fujikawa, SAGE representative on the Board of the Oldman Watershed Council (OWC), reports that \$5,000 is being granted to the Livingstone Landowners Group for undertaking a cumulative study of land use in watersheds of the southwest foothill. Land owners, local government, industry and environmental groups are cooperating in this initiative which will provide key information about current and future trends of land use in this area. The results will provide a base upon which local land owners and government can plan for the future.

Safety of Home Turf Pesticides Questioned – On April 24, NDP MP Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre) introduced a federal private member's bill to place a moratorium on the cosmetic use of chemical pesticides in the home and garden and on recreational facilities such as parks and golf courses, until scientific evidence showing that such use is safe has been presented to Parliament. You can show your support for Bill C-225 by contacting your Member of Parliament.

Questions have been raised about Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency's (Agency) assessment that 2,4-D, the most common herbicide used to kill weeds in grass, can be safely used on lawns if directions are followed. A study recently published in the Official Journal of the Canadian Paediatric Society is critical of the Agency's methods and conclusions (www.pulsus.com/Paed/11_04/sear_ed.htm).

Over the past decade citizens across Canada have been taking action to prevent the cosmetic use of pesticides. Ninety municipalities and the entire province of Quebec have passed laws banning the non-essential use of pesticides. Citizens in New Brunswick are currently lobbying for a provincial ban. Saskatchewan has a cost-share funding program that promotes safer alternatives and discourages malathion. Citizens in Winnipeg concerned about emergency spraying by the municipality held a "Pesticides in Children!" forum on April 22-23, 2006 to get realistic advice about limiting pesticide use based on the experience of others.

Cities in Alberta, including Lethbridge, continue to take an "integrated pest management" approach to use of herbicides. The Urban Team of the Oldman Watershed Council, including SAGE, is working on

education initiatives to reduce inappropriate use of pesticides that contaminate urban stormwater and the Oldman River.