



NEWSLETTER

October 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, 5 Oct 2006

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

South Saskatchewan Basin Management Plan: Environmental Issues and Opportunities Danielle Droitsch, Bow Riverkeepers

Danielle is a lawyer with ten years experience in watershed protection, including work with the Washington-based American Rivers. She is Chair of the Alberta Environmental Network Water Caucus. Her slide presentation, beginning at 7:30 pm, will be followed by discussion and a brief SAGE Board meeting. Everyone welcome. Refreshments provided.

Lethbridge Naturally

Environmental Education Speaker Series

7 p.m., Tuesday, 17 Oct 2006

Community Theatre, Lethbridge Public Library

Coreen Putman (Helen Schuler Coulee Centre), Joanne Hedenstrom (Lethbridge Naturalists Society) and Kelsey Prenevost (SAGE) will share ways to improve environmental stewardship. Free admission. Sponsored by the Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators and the Public Library.

Moving Towards Action

Southern Alberta Environmental Education Summit #4

8:30 am – 4 pm, Wednesday, 11 Oct 2006

Esplanade Arts Centre, 401-1 St. SE, Medicine Hat

Join others from southern Alberta to discuss and learn about environmental education in our community. There will be presentations on the sustainable living project in Craik Saskatchewan, renewable energy, native prairie, water, waste, air quality and civic leadership. No registration fee. To register email russmi@medicinehat.ca or phone 529-8188. This is an initiative of the Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators.

SAGE News

SAGE Asks “Should Lethbridge Plan to Limit Growth?” (source: email notes by K. Jericho and C. Dick, Aug 2006) – Klaus Jericho, past-president of SAGE and environmental representative on Economic Development Lethbridge (EDL), has urged that group to seriously consider the negative economic, social and environmental implications of suburban sprawl and proactively plan to avoid it. He suggests measures such as setting limits to the size of the city by establishing a Green Belt, municipal planning to ensure residents are generally within short travel times to work and daily/weekly needs (e.g. food markets), and encouraging public transport.

Cheryl Dick CEO has responded that EDL is committed to a “balance of growth and conservatism” but that “there is public desire for Lethbridge to grow to keep the economy strong and ensure a strong tax base that supports infrastructure demands”. She notes that alternative energy is a priority of EDL and that the City is developing a Municipal Sustainability Plan.

Klaus suggests an ongoing community dialogue on this topic. Public forums in developing EDL’s 2009-2011 Business Plan could be an important venue for this dialogue.

SAGE Informed that Export Powerline Route Avoids Milk River Ridge

– SAGE learned in a meeting with representatives of the Montana Alberta Tie Line (MATL) on 25 Aug 2006 that the preferred routing of a proposed powerline between Lethbridge and Great Falls has been shifted eastward away from the Milk River Ridge. SAGE as well as provincial and federal wildlife agencies had expressed concerns about the impacts of a trans-ridge route on environmentally significant grasslands. MATL representatives have listened to these concerns. Another significant factor in the re-routing decision was a shift east of the proposed tie-in point in Montana.

There are other environmental concerns about the project. Provincial environmental organizations are expressing concern about the implications of electricity export for achieving environmentally sustainable

energy development in Alberta. Landowners along the route are concerned about effects of the proposed 240 kV transmission line on their health and property.

The Alberta Energy Utilities Board and the National Energy Board will review the proposed project. A decision has not yet been made about whether the review will include a public hearing.

SAGE Comments on IJC St. Mary - Milk Rivers Report – In late June, SAGE submitted comments to the International Joint Commission on the report of a Task Force set up to examine measures for improving administrative procedures of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers apportionment between Canada and the United States. Vice-president Edith Olson prepared SAGE's submission with assistance from Cheryl Bradley and Cheryl Fujikawa. Key points in the submission follow.

Fairness of the 1921 Order – The result of the 1921 Order is that Canada is entitled to 55 per cent of the combined flows while the US is entitled to about 45 percent. This has been the working arrangement for 85 years and SAGE agrees its continuance is reasonable and fair.

Monitoring of Flows – SAGE agrees with the Task Force suggestion that there be better monitoring of river flows and water withdrawals. This will help not only to ensure proper administration of the 1921 Order, but also improve knowledge of how water is being used.

Monitoring of Aquatic Ecosystem Health – SAGE encourages IJC to also recommend monitoring indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. Health of the St. Mary River below the St. Mary Dam in Alberta is degraded as is that of the Milk River below the Fresno Dam in Montana. Monitoring will help identify where improvements to instream flows are needed as well as the outcomes of any improvements made.

Balancing Periods – The period for addressing deficits or surplus deliveries between jurisdictions currently is about two weeks. SAGE is concerned that longer balancing periods considered in the IJC report may lead to more withdrawals during low flow conditions and increased stress on the aquatic environment.

Improving Water Storage and Conveyance Facilities – IJC recognizes that improvement to existing irrigation infrastructure in both Alberta and Montana has the potential to address some issues regarding the current international sharing arrangement. SAGE concurs with this point. Rehabilitation of storage and conveyance facilities in Montana would allow the U.S. to enjoy more fully its entitlement. Alberta has made improvements to irrigation infrastructure over the last few decades and intends to continue to do so for irrigation and other sectors under the Water for Life Strategy.

Water Use Efficiencies – Identifying inefficiencies in use of diverted water can help identify opportunities for water conservation through improved technologies and practices. SAGE proposes that a portion of water saved through increased efficiencies should be used to improve aquatic environments and riparian health.

Additional Storage – IJC mentions additional storage as a possible measure to improve administration of the

agreement. Any such measures will require assessment of environmental impacts. SAGE has expressed concerns about environmental impacts of on-stream storage on the Milk River in Alberta as identified in a 2003 feasibility study funded by the province and has made those concerns known to IJC.

Watershed Approach – SAGE agrees with IJC that a collaborative, ecosystem-based approach to planning and managing these international watersheds is preferable to one based on management by separate political jurisdictions.

Issues and Updates

SSRB Water Management Plan Approved – On 30 Aug 2006 the Alberta Government announced approval of the Water Management Plan for the South Saskatchewan River Basin. The public process to develop the plan began in Nov 2000. Members of SAGE and many other stakeholder groups devoted many hours to the plan.

Phase One of the water management plan was approved in Jun 2002. It authorized water allocation transfers within the SSRB, subject to Alberta Environment approval and conditions. Phase Two resulted in a draft plan which was submitted for public review in November and Dec 2005. The approved plan echoes the draft plan recommending that Alberta Environment stop accepting applications for new water allocations in the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins, Crown Reservations to specify how water not currently allocated is to be used, and increased minimum flows in the three rivers to improve the aquatic environment and riparian health. It also sets allocation limits for the Red Deer River.

To see the plan visit www.environment.gov.ab.ca.

Defining a Land Use Framework – In the Spring 2006 budget the Alberta Government committed to invest in a "new initiative to develop a comprehensive land use framework for Alberta – a framework that will guide future decisions on how Alberta's land is used, whether that's to preserve sensitive grasslands, open up recreation areas, manage growth around our major cities, or preserve our valuable farmland".

The newly formed Sustainable Resource Environment Management Office (SREM) is leading a process to define the land use framework. SREM is a cooperative effort of Environment, Energy and Sustainable Resource Development. There is a project team from seven government departments. In September 2006, consultations will be held with over two dozen sector-based focus groups to address the question – 'What would you envision a land use framework would look like?' Broader public consultation on a draft framework will occur in 2007.

Alberta Environmental Network has asked for expression of interest among its members group for involvement in the process. Vice-president, Edith Olson, has offered to be key contact for SAGE. Anyone eager to help Edith, please contact her olson5@telusplanet.net.

Beware of Climate Change Bafflegab – Individuals including Tim Ball, Albert Jacobs and Duane Pendergast, all connected to a Calgary-based group called Friends of Science, have appeared in local media over the last few years casting doubt on the growing body of scientific evidence regarding global climate change. An article by Charles Montgomery in the *Globe and Mail* (12 Aug) documents links between Friends of Science and oil and gas companies and suggests a deliberate campaign by vested interests to muddy public understanding of climate science.