



NEWSLETTER

November - December 2007

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A leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community.

Announcements

SAGE November and December Meetings

7:30 p.m., Thursday, November 1, 2007

7:30 p.m., Thursday, December 6, 2007

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

These are regular Board meetings to talk about SAGE business and future plans. Everyone is welcome. Refreshments are provided.

Southern Alberta Council on Public Affairs Sessions

Two environmental topics will be presented at SACPA in November. Cost is \$10 (includes lunch).

Oil Wealth and Genuine Progress – Finding the Balance

Dr. David Swan, Environment Shadow Minister
Alberta Liberal Party

Noon – 1:30, Thurs, Nov 1, 2007

Ericksen's Restaurant, 1715 Mayor Magrath Dr. S

Dr. David Swan will explore the meaning of progress – economically, socially and environmentally – in light of the bounty of oil sands. The presentation will emphasize the urgent need for managed growth using the best of science and human values in setting and enforcing limits to growth.

Coulee Thirst: Plants and Water in the Oldman River Valley

Dr. Matthew Letts, Department of Geography
University of Lethbridge

Noon – 1:30, Thurs, Nov 15, 2007

Ericksen's Restaurant, 1715 Mayor Magrath Dr. S

Dr. Matthew Letts, a climatologist and ecologist who has studied cloud forests, peatlands and now the coulees of Lethbridge, will describe the unique physiological adaptations of trees and shrubs to our semi-arid climate. He will offer his thoughts on the impact of climate change and urban development on the local vegetation and coulees.

Grizzly Country Movie

Community Environmental Education Night

Sponsored by SACEE

7 p.m., Tuesday, November 20, 2007

Lethbridge Public Library

Sustainability Event

Sponsored by Lethbridge Public Interest Research Group

November 20, 21 and 22, 2007

University of Lethbridge

SAGE News

New SAGE Vice-President – Due to major work commitments, Edith Olson has resigned as SAGE Vice-President. Braum Barber was appointed Vice-President by the Board at the October 4th meeting.

SAGE Joins Others in Proposing More Formalized Protection of City Parks (*excerpts from information provided by Reg Ernst*) – Lethbridge Naturalists Society, Helen Schuler Coulee Centre and SAGE have joined efforts asking the City of Lethbridge to designate some of the river valley habitat as preservation areas. "Preservation Area" is a new classification of parks introduced in the 2007 parks master plan. Areas designated as such would have heightened protection.

Proposed parks being submitted for Preservation Area designation are Alexander Wilderness Park, Cottonwood Park, Lethbridge Nature Reserve and Elizabeth Hall Wetlands. Formerly known as "Nature Reserves" these areas are managed to protect ecological integrity and have seen low impact recreational uses and minimal development. Construction of a storm water pond in a nature reserve on the uplands above Alexander Wilderness Park, however, has heightened awareness that nature reserve designation does not guarantee protection.

A 2004 Alberta Recreations Survey indicated that over 65% of Lethbridge respondents feel parks and open spaces play an important role in preserving landscape, plants and animals and that this is beneficial to our community. SAGE is working for more formalized protection to ensure future generations can share these benefits.

Please take an opportunity to talk with other citizens of Lethbridge and recently elected aldermen about the value of our natural environment parks. Encourage their support for designating four of the river valley parks as "Preservation Areas". For more information, contact Reg Ernst regde@shaw.ca or 381-0528.

SAGE Expresses Concerns About Bill 1: The Lobbyists Act (*excerpts from a letter to Premier Stelmach and MLAs drafted by Braum Barber, Vice President, SAGE*) - In principle, we support the spirit of *Bill 1: The Lobbyists Act* as legislation that promotes accountability in governance through a transparent registry process for lobbyists.

Our concerns with the legislation relate mainly with the breadth of designation for 'lobbyists', which includes "a charitable or non-profit organization, association, society, coalition or interest group". The legislation confounds professional lobbyists, acting on behalf of private business to promote their interests, with non-profit, volunteer organizations such as SAGE that are the embodiment of citizenship and participatory democracy.

The activity of lobbying [1(1)(e)] includes practically all communication with public office holders that relate to the development of legislation, regulations, programs, policies or guidelines – in effect, everything that public office holders do that affect the protection and preservation of the natural environment. The Bill exempts from the definition of 'lobbying' all responses to the request for submissions made by a public office holder [3(2)], but this leaves many volunteer organizations in a speak-only-when-spoken-to relationship, which does not readily foster "free and open access to government."

The Bill, furthermore, identifies lobbyists as individuals paid "directly or indirectly" [6(1)] for their advice. If an individual is paid to provide advice, directly or through honoraria, they apparently must abstain from the act of 'lobbying' public office holders or they must register as a lobbyist with concomitant costs – for most organizations exhausting an already limited resource base. Expert members of volunteer organizations who provide advice often receive small honoraria to compensate for lost work time and travel costs. This bill would diminish their ability to participate in activities that involve any communication with public office holders. The outcome would be to severely curtail the effectiveness and credibility of many volunteer organizations.

It is our recommendation to clearly delimit the impact of Bill 1 to include paid lobbyists working on behalf of private interests, and exclude citizen participation in volunteer and non-profit organizations working on behalf of the public interest.

Update on Work of CASA CFO Team – Ann Baran is representing SAGE on a team dealing with emissions of Confined Feeding Operations through the Clean Air Strategic Alliance. She recently provided SAGE members by email an update on the team's progress and requested feedback (couleesedge1@hotmail.com). Ann has been working very hard on the various subgroups of the CFO and we owe her a big thanks.

Four reports are completed and are posted on CASA's website for review – www.casahome.org. The first is a *CFO Emissions Inventory Summary Report*. The estimated numbers of animals in CFOs in Alberta are 84,044 dairy cattle, 6,531,157 beef cattle, 2,027,533 pigs, 307,302 sheep and 2,907,377 poultry. Estimated emissions from these animals are 124,700 tonnes of ammonia, 19,500 tonnes of particulate matter and 4,000 tonnes of hydrogen sulphide and total reduced sulphur. Emissions are highest in southern Alberta. It is recommended that studies be done to estimate the relative impacts of agriculture and other emissions in areas of intensive agriculture.

The second report is titled *Health Effects of Air Emissions from CFOs*. One conclusion based on review of many studies is that there are health effects from CFO emissions, including public health effects in surrounding communities. A second conclusion is that ambient monitoring around CFOs would be beneficial for providing more information on potential health effects from many emissions. Development of a 24-hour Alberta ambient air quality objective for ammonia is specifically recommended. The multi-stakeholder group preparing the report also agreed that odour from CFOs can have health effects; and that a framework which includes both qualitative and quantitative elements be developed to address odour concerns.

The third report deals with *CFO Management Mechanisms*. A short list of eight priority management mechanisms worthy of further detailed investigation was developed. The priority mechanisms are frequent manure removal, moisture management, bicovers, bottom loading, shelterbelts, band spreading with rapid incorporation and/or manure injection, composting and dust palliatives used for roadway management. It is recommended that further investigation be undertaken to determine the ability of each management mechanism to reduce emissions of six substances, and to scientifically quantify the reductions and document any negative residual effects of the mechanisms.

The fourth report is a *Jurisdictional Review*. One conclusion is that a strategic plan for dealing with CFO emissions needs include a package of policy tools and implementation mechanisms. Another is that policy tools need to be tailored to climatic conditions and socio-economic and environmental variables. And a third is that cumulative effects on air should be considered. Evaluation of the effectiveness of a strategic plan also is suggested.

Issues and Updates

Living Home Project Progress Report (*by Braum Barber*) - Lethbridge College, the City of Lethbridge and Cedar Ridge Quality Homes are designing, building and researching an environmentally responsible home in the SunRidge development.

After approval by City Council in September, students at Lethbridge College began to research green building materials for the exterior envelope and foundation, as well as the interior materials. The students will make the final decisions based on criteria such as the energy used to make the material, the

pollution created during excavation of raw materials and manufacturing, the travelling distances for commodities, durability, recyclability, and factors affecting disposal at the end of the life cycle. Interior material selection will also consider the interior air quality by assessing the pollutants emitted into the home such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), formaldehydes, and others.

Once the materials have been chosen, a solar model and heat loss & gain model will be created and used to determine the requirements for heating, cooling and ventilation. It is at this time that technologies such as solar photovoltaic panels, passive solar heating, and wind turbines will be considered. To be environmentally responsible, it is important that the amount of materials, waste, and embodied energy & pollution is minimized *before* alternative technologies are exploited.

There is a misconception that solar and wind technologies are 'pollution free': in reality they have a high initial investment of pollution created during material processing and manufacturing that (with good design and application) can be 'diluted' through use. If a solar panel, for example, is underused over its life span it will have a worse affect on the environment than using electricity generated by a coal-fired plant. Reduction comes first and then an appropriate application of alternative technologies can be effective. The rule of thumb in environmentally responsible design is that we can't consume our way out of an environmental crisis.

The Lethbridge College will be launching a website on November 21st which will explore these issues in detail and will provide an opportunity for community discussion.

Recovery Strategies for Three Prairie Species at Risk Are Posted – On September 25th, proposed National Recovery Strategies for three prairie species were posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry website (www.sararegistry.gc.ca). The strategies are for endangered swift fox, endangered sage grouse and threatened Mormon metalmark butterfly. Public comment is invited for 60 days.

Feedback Sought on Cumulative Effects Management Framework – Alberta Environment has produced a policy paper titled *Towards Environmental Sustainability: Proposed Regulatory Framework for Managing Environmental Cumulative Effects*. All Albertans are invited to provide input to the development of the proposed new legislation. To provide comments, use the online form available at <http://environment.gov.ab.ca> or request a copy be mailed to you by phoning (780)427-2700 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000). Deadline for comment is November 30th.

New Waste Strategy Focuses on Conservation -The Alberta government has defined a road map for waste reduction and management in its new report *Too Good to Waste: Making Conservation a Priority* (<http://environment.gov.ab.ca>). At least eighty percent of material currently sent to municipal landfills can be recovered. The strategy proposes a goal of having

80% of municipal waste reused or recycled. Watch for information on development of a waste reduction and management plan in Lethbridge and area in the near future.

Editor's Footnote

Reflections on Fifteen Years as SAGE Editor (by Cheryl Bradley) – This is the last edition of the SAGE newsletter which I will edit. I have been producing nine monthly newsletters a year for almost fifteen years. With my resignation, I find myself reflecting on 130 editions produced over the lifetimes of four computers and musing about changes in communications. I want to share these with you and beg your indulgence.

I reluctantly took on the role of volunteer newsletter editor in spring 1993, shortly after moving to Lethbridge. I responded to a plea from SAGE's persuasive president of the day, Katharine Russell to replace Edith Olson, who was becoming fully engaged in starting a career and a family. In spring 1993, if anyone had suggested I would still be doing the editor's job five years later, let alone fifteen, I would have scoffed at the thought. A lot has changed. For one thing, Edith is back contributing to SAGE, having raised her children and launched a successful career.

The logistics of producing a monthly SAGE newsletter have often challenged my personal discipline and my commitment to advancing environmental awareness and practice in our community. There were several occasions when I considered just letting it go, especially when my schedule was tight and no one responded to calls for contributions. But the support and encouragement from newsletter readers, many who have stuck with the organization longer than fifteen years, kept me going. You know who you are. I admire you greatly and am so thankful for your contributions and friendship.

The job I set out for myself as newsletter editor was to inform myself and SAGE members about environmental matters relevant to our community. The job required a discipline of attending monthly SAGE meetings and networking with members to keep abreast of decisions by the Board and of members' activities. It occasionally involved prodding; one might say 'nagging', for information. I am thankful to all of those who responded, and particularly to those who have served as president – Katharine Russell, Bill Brown, Sylvia Campbell, Paul Lewis (now deceased), Klaus Jericho and Kelsey Prenevost. And I am thankful to those who provided updates on their activities as SAGE representatives in a variety of multi-stakeholder processes. This is some of the most important work that SAGE undertakes.

The editor's job has also required staying alert for environmental events in Lethbridge and area. Initially I tried to let members know what events were scheduled in the 'Announcements' section of the newsletter and report on outcomes in the "SAGE News" or "Issues and Updates" sections. Through much of the 1990s this generally involved covering one or two events a month, usually organized by SAGE, such as a presentation at the monthly general meeting, an annual Earth Day

program, a coulee clean-up or Environment Week events or a Castle-Crown annual general meeting.

Now there are several organizations and agencies organizing environmental events in our community. SAGE no longer hosts presentations at monthly meetings or for Earth Day. There are many voices and a variety of ways in which messages on environmental problems and solutions are now being communicated. This explosion of interest and communications suggests to me that environmentalism has gone main stream.

For a newsletter editor compelled to report on all of the community's environmental events, the issues being discussed, and the progress being made, the task has become daunting. As hard as I try, I cannot stay attuned to it all. I have come to realize, there really is not a need to. I am heartened by what others are doing and I appreciate it even if I don't know about it.

In 2005, the City of Lethbridge began publishing a quarterly newsletter, *Enviroscope*, which is circulated widely. The Environmental Services group in City administration is responsible for the newsletter and many other initiatives which are moving us towards our goal of becoming an environmentally sustainable community. This is important work.

A new organization – Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators – has formed to enhance knowledge and appreciation of our environment. The energy and drive of SACEE's founder Paul Bohnert in organizing forums and library nights is awesome. Paul sits on SAGE's Board and SAGE is supporting his work with SACEE.

The Public Interest Research Group at the University of Lethbridge is also engaging students and the broader community in meetings and forums on environmental topics. The conviction and energy that youth bring to environmental challenges is so invigorating.

The Oldman Watershed Council, now four years old, regularly informs its members and the broader community about water quality and watershed planning and management. Protecting watershed and water quality have been long-standing priorities for SAGE. It is wonderful to see so many minds with so many different perspectives now working on these challenges through OWC.

Lethbridge is an eddy in a steady stream of provincial consultations on proposed environmental and natural resources legislation and policy. Many SAGE members and others in the community are on government mailing lists to receive information about these consultations and to directly provide their input in a variety of ways.

Environmental issues are regular fare at sessions of the 40-year old Southern Alberta Council on Public Affairs, along with a suite of economic, social and political issues. There is growing realization that all of these aspects of our society are interconnected. It is not "either/or". SACPA sessions usually receive wide coverage in the community.

Local and regional media (newspaper, radio and TV) now profile environmental topics on a regular basis. In the 1990s, clippings of interest from the

Lethbridge Herald and other newspapers or magazines were of a small enough scope and number to be easily synthesized and compactly filed; now they overwhelm my home office. I feel less alone in my angst over our collective future when I see the work of reporters in our community covering current environmental issues and raising awareness about environmentally friendly lifestyles. I hold special admiration for SAGE member Debby Gregorash, a.k.a. D.J. Gaia, who regularly writes a column for the *Sunny South News* and hosted an entertaining radio program over the last few years, mixing conversations about current environmental topics with music and laughter.

I now find the Internet is awash with information on whatever environmental topic I choose to explore. I type in a key word on a topic such as "biofuels" and several pages of webpage addresses come up. Sorting the wheat from the chaff takes patience and critical thinking.

With so much environmental information out there, I have felt increasingly challenged to prioritize what should be included in the SAGE newsletter. Besides informing on local happenings and the good work of SAGE members, I have attempted to select provincial, national and even global environmental issues that have local relevance. Although uneasy about having readers of the newsletter view the world through my lens, I have not underestimated your ability to detect whatever distortions I may have presented and to seek additional information on topics that interest you. With the internet, this is now easily done.

Distribution of the SAGE newsletter has also changed substantially over the last fifteen years. From a few dozen addresses the mailing list has climbed to over 100. I am deeply grateful for the work of Diana Williams and Ken Revak in maintaining mailing lists and distributing newsletters.

Digital information flow has become the norm. Most days I receive half a dozen or more emails through the Alberta Environmental Network informing me about issues, presentations, consultations, workshops or fund-raising events involving member organizations throughout the province. Communication among SAGE Board members between meetings now occurs through e-mail. Many SAGE members now receive their newsletter electronically much to the consternation of some of SAGE's oldest and most loyal members. We must keep our elders in the loop through contact by post or telephone, since they offer the wise voice of experience.

Another important development is that SAGE now has a website, thanks to the leadership of Kelsey Prenevost, Faisal Shaffi and Nicola Miller. I expect the website will play an increasingly important part in SAGE's communication among members and with the broader community. The process by which that will be done has not yet been defined. Stay tuned!

And now, I am letting go.