



**“Trying to save ecosystems
has more to do with changing ecosystems.”
Don Rittner**

December 2010

The Good News ...

Medicine Hat planning a [solar thermal](#) electricity generation plant—the first in Canada.

Plans for converting natural [grassland to potato farm](#) withdrawn—the voices of reason prevail.

Alberta Government delays Parks Act for sober second thought.

... and the Shameful.

The [Senate kills Bill C-311](#): Climate Change Accountability Act in an act of cynicism that defies democratic process.

Whither the Wetlands?

The Government of Alberta has chosen to ignore the recommendations of the [Alberta Water Council](#), a publicly funded, multi-stakeholder group that developed a no-net-loss wetland policy that addresses the sustainable development of resources.

Pressure from the tar sand lobby has directed legislation to abandon

the no-net-loss principle in favour of unscientific approaches that involve ‘abundance’ and ‘importance’. In essence, it allows unrestricted destruction of wetland where there is an ‘abundance’ of remaining wetland. As wetland is diminished, it is assumed that they may one day become more ‘important’ and worthy of preservation.

Government representatives suggest that wetland preservation and restoration is too expensive for the industries exploiting resources, though there has clearly been no economic analysis of costs and no evaluation of the considerable benefits of healthy wetland for water storage and purification, carbon storage, and habitat.

Alberta Parks Act No Picnic

The Government of Alberta has introduced Bill 29 - [Alberta Parks Act](#) - that will severely reduce the protection and the preservation of ecological integrity of areas currently managed by Alberta Parks.

Current categories of Wilderness Area and Ecological Reserve have been subsumed under a single category called ‘Parks’. This lack of differentiation leaves all parks vulnerable to activities that are not compatible to maintaining

the ecological integrity that we rely on for the important services that support our society and economic well-being.

Under the proposed act, protected areas may change in land use or may be disposed of without

public or scientific consultation.

Bill 29 lacks a clear definition of purpose; it lacks a clear mandate to preservation; and it lacks the transparency of public consultation. This Act is no picnic for Albertans.

Meeting Notice

SASCI Meeting

"Forest Management and

Logging—A Community

Conversation."

Dec. 7, Heritage Inn, Pincher

Creek. @ 6 p.m.

For a Celadon Christmas and Viridian Holiday Season

As our landfills yawn for the coming Christmas feast, consider a few ways that you might help reduce Santa's footprint.

First, why run eight reindeer when you could improve deer-efficiency with six? Maybe travel a little less by assigning whole countries to the naughty list?

And then there is the tree debate: artificial or natural. As you would expect the most environmentally damaging choice is the cheapest. A recent life-cycle assessment study from [Ellipsos](#) concludes that the natural tree has the lowest overall environmental impact. For the single dimension of climate change, an artificial tree would have to be

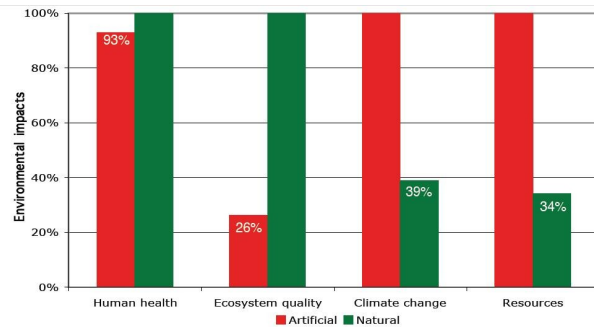


Figure D – LCA results comparing relative impacts for four damage categories comparing main life cycle stages of an artificial tree (red) and a natural tree (green) for one year using a modified IMPACT 2002+ method to include biogenic CO₂ emissions.

used 20 times to supplant the natural tree.

Be sure to use the City program for tree recycling, and consider planting a replacement on your next trip to the mountains (avoid areas scheduled for clearcutting, though).

When preparing for your eat-a-thon, consider organically grown, locally grown and locally proc-

essed products (like [Frito-Lay Sunchips](#) with 100% biodegradable packaging). Consider natural garlands and decorations that can be composted at the end of the season.

And, finally, give the gift of your thoughts about the environment during the perpetual social scrum ... on second thought, maybe avoid the topic - that gift might get returned.

"Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it."

**Charles Dickens
A Christmas Carol**

Some Interesting Online Sources:

Climate Progress reviews the year <http://climateprogress.org/2010/11/15/year-in-climate-science-climategate/>
Government of Alberta Bill 29 http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/bills/bill/legislature_27/session_3/20100204_bill-029.pdf

Environmental Law Centre Bill 29 http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/bills/bill/legislature_27/session_3/20100204_bill-029.pdf

Alberta Water Council Wetland Policy <http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/Projects/WetlandPolicy/tabid/103/Default.aspx>

Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

A Leading Voice for a Healthy and Environmentally Sustainable Community.

Visit us at: <http://sage-environment.org/>

If you are interesting in getting involved, contact us at:

info@sage-environment.org

***Storms of My Grandchildren*—James Hansen (Book Review)**

There are things we know we know - known knowns; there are things we know we don't know - known unknowns; and there are things we don't know we don't know - unknown unknowns. Jim Hansen presents insight into his more than three decades on the front of climate science - he explains what we know, what we don't know, and like an objective scientist, is open to the discovery of unknown unknowns.

What makes this book interesting, however, is Hansen's discussion of the fourth dimension - unknown knowns. These are things we do not know we know because they are veiled by ideology or obscured by what we wish to be true.

To make this clear, Hansen describes the political intrusions into climate science over the past twenty years - particularly how the evidence that should inform the public about the effects of anthropogenic forcings of global warming have been manipulated for short term interests.

James Hansen is a leading climatologist and the director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, adjunct professor at Columbia University, and frequent expert advisor to Congress about climate change since the 1980s. He has risked his job and has endured censure in his efforts to educate the public and its leaders about climate change. Last year, Hansen was arrested in West Virginia while protesting mountaintop-removal coal mining.

What would motivate a scientist of Hansen's stature, a scientist who has always been reluctant to step into the media spotlight, to participate in this high-profile protest? The reason for abandoning this 'scientific reticence' is the same as what motivated him to write the first book of his career ... fear. Not for himself, but for his grandchildren and for us all.

Storms for my Grandchildren is a clearly written state of the world, and projects the consequences of our business-as-usual mind-

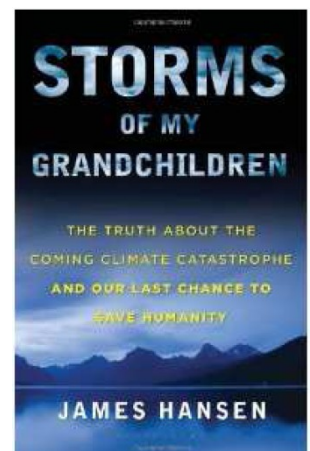


set. The consequences, as you would expect, are grim unless we demand the good governance and policy required for systemic change.

Hansen is more of a scientist than a story-teller, as fluidity is occasionally sacrificed for accuracy and detail. It has a *mea culpa* tone at times which adds to the sincerity of the book, but detracts from the greater culpability of media and government. Hansen offers some possible approaches to make our planet more resilient, and there is even a hint of optimism which is encouraging from a person who understands the issue.

This book speaks to both the informed and to those who are beginning to learn about our impact on the world.

Rating: Four wind turbines out of five.





To: Premier Ed Stelmach
Government of Alberta
From: Braum Barber
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
Re: Bill 29 – Alberta Parks Act

On behalf of the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE), we would like to express our concerns about the apparent retreat in Bill 29 (Alberta Parks Act) from the current protection and preservation of the ecological integrity of areas designated for management by Alberta Parks.

Bill 29 states that the purpose of the Act is to “is to foster an Alberta parks system that conserves unique and representative land within Alberta’s natural regions for present and future generations while balancing environmental conservation and recreation and tourism opportunities.” Clearly, fostering recreation and tourism should be secondary to conservation and these activities should be limited to levels that are compatible to sustaining ecological integrity.

Subsuming current categories of protected areas such as Wilderness Area and Ecological Reserve under the category of ‘Parks’ threatens the adequate preservation of these areas, as well as their conservation in the future given the lack of clarity of the Act as it relates to disposition. As such, prohibitions under Section 55 relating to access and appropriate use should be expanded and clarified, and the process of changing use or disposition under Section 8 should be made transparent through a public consultation (not simply public notice) and should reflect scientific evidence regarding ecological impact.

To summarize, we are concerned that Bill 29 does not adequately sustain the current level of management for existing protected areas due to their conflation under a single category of Parks; Bill 29 does not offer clear definition of purpose or uses that would be compatible to maintaining ecological integrity; and Bill 29 does not provide a transparent and public consultation for changes in use or disposition. We value our natural areas and they provide ecological services that contribute as much to “Alberta’s overall growth and prosperity” as recreation and tourism – this value should be better reflected in the Alberta Parks Act.

cc. Hon. Cindy Ady, Minister, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture
Bridget Pastoor, MLA Lethbridge East
Greg Weadick, MLA Lethbridge West
Mayor Dodic, Lethbridge



To: Hon. Rob Renner
Minister, Alberta Environment

From: Braum Barber
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment

Re: Wetland Policy in Alberta

On behalf of the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE), we would like to express our encouragement to adopt the wetland policy as developed by the Alberta Water Council, a comprehensive stakeholder group of government, non-government organizations and industry representatives.

Wetlands are a critical component for maintaining reliable and safe sources of drinking water for human wellbeing and economic resilience, for carbon storage, for protection against drought and floods, as well as for maintaining healthy ecosystems. Southern Alberta has lost roughly two-thirds of the natural wetlands and the region remains at risk without a clear policy to protect them.

The main objectives outlined by the wetland policy are, in order of preference, avoiding the further loss and degradation of wetlands, minimizing further loss and degradation where it cannot be avoided, and compensation as a last resort which might include the restoration of previously existing wetlands, the creation of wetlands, or the enhancement of existing but degraded wetlands. This reasonable no-net-loss policy to wetland management provides a flexible approach to conservation while allowing the ongoing and sustainable development of resources. In other words, 'sustaining the benefits' of wetlands is best achieved by no-net-loss. Unfortunately, the ability to evaluate the 'benefits' of wetlands in economic terms is rudimentary and prone to the externalizing of real costs. Concerns about the costs of no-net-loss, as suggested by the oil sands lobby, is specious at best without understanding the benefits of a properly applied wetland policy. To reiterate, a no-net-loss policy provides a clearer mandate for sustaining the benefits of wetlands while allowing the science of costs and benefits to develop.

The concept of ‘abundance’ as a tool for evaluating wetland management is not supported by science, and greatly downgrades the benefits of northern wetlands to our collective wellbeing. Abundance should be the goal, not the justification for further loss or degradation. Again, a no-net-loss policy provides clearer direction to industries involved in exploiting northern regions, while encouraging more research in restoration and promoting a vision of sustainable development. Like all knowledge and technological development, costs are reduced with experience – maintaining current wetland through conservation and innovation should be our long-term goal. Similarly, managing wetlands based on ‘importance’ is self-defeating, as the importance will generally always increase with diminishing areas of wetland. The goal should be to value current wetland as important enough to preserve, not make surviving wetland more important by degrading existing areas.

In summary, SAGE requests that the Minister of Environment adopt the wetland policy as developed by the Alberta Water Council with public funding and comprehensive multi-stakeholder input.

cc. Hon. Mel Knight, Minister, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Bridget Pastoor, MLA Lethbridge East
Greg Weadick, MLA Lethbridge West
Mayor Rajko Dodic, Lethbridge