



**"Never does nature say one thing
and wisdom another."
Juvenal**

January 2011

SAGE - A Year in Review

Next **SAGE Meeting**: February 3rd, Fish & Game Hut (there will be no January meeting).

Greensence plans questionnaire for upcoming byelection. [Watch for the results.](#)

Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) looking for research assistant ([short term contract](#)) to compile an information bank on water research in the region.

SAGE has been active this Fall advocating in three major policy areas. The first was wetland policy which is under pressure from tar sand interests as the government works to properly value wetland in provincial regions.

The second was the Parks Act, currently being revisited by legislators. The Parks Act may significantly alter the

management and use of parks, wilderness areas and ecological reserves in the province. There are also concerns about removing articulated values from legislation, leaving them to ministerial discretion.

And the third was expanding potato production into native grasslands, and habitat for species at risk.

Other advocacy has

been focused on proper environmental impact studies for oil and gas drilling on the Blood Reserve and open pit mining in the Livingstone Range.

SAGE continues to explore project ideas for the Moving Towards Sustainability initiative. These ideas will be discussed at the AGM this spring.

All the best for SAGE supporters in 2011!

Canada Captures Colossal Fossil in Cancun

Canada was awarded its fourth consecutive Colossal Fossil award at the climate change talks in Cancun.

This country was recognized for its unwavering dedication to increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Though Canada had agreed

to reduce emissions by 6% before 2012 relative to 1990 levels, emissions have actually increased, exceeding this commitment by about 34% (2008).

The [National Inventory of GHG](#) summarizes: "Between 1990 and 2008, major in-

creases in oil and gas production (much of it for export), as well a large increase in the number of motor vehicles and greater reliance on coal-fired electricity generation, have resulted in a significant rise in emissions."

During the celebrations in Cancun, the tar sands were given special mention as MVE (most valuable emitter). The Canadian representative accepting the award challenged other nations to try to break our veritable 'dynasty of denial' in South Africa next year.

Sustaining Municipalities (... living in a bubble)

The Municipal Sustainability Strategy Working Group has published its report - [Building on Strength: A proposal for municipal sustainability in Alberta](#). The report was directed by the Premier to "promote sustainability by strengthening regional co-operation, municipal viability, and community accountability." In general, the mandate was to determine what constitutes a sustainable community; what services a municipality should provide; what capacity building tools are required; and what indicators should be measured (see box).

Measures of Sustainability

1. Sustainable governance;
2. Operational and administrative capacity;
3. Financial stability;
4. Service delivery;
5. Regional co-operation;
6. Infrastructure;
7. Community well-being; and

pendence upon clean water, clean air, productive soil, and a stable climate.

Those participating in the working group, based on available documents, did not even raise the topic of the responsibility of municipalities managing environmental uncertainty (beyond legislated regulations), or the management of hundreds of millions of Gas Tax dollars purportedly allocated for infra-

structure that enhances the environmental performance of municipalities.

Without leadership from the provincial government, it is no wonder that there is so little interest within municipal governance for advancing policy that addresses values outlined in the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan.



CHRIS MADDEN

Courtesy of [Chris Madden](#)

The term 'sustainability' usually refers to a more holistic perspective including economic, social and environmental factors. For Alberta's Municipal Affairs, it seems, the sustainability of a community can occur in a bubble, without considering our de-

Some Interesting Events & Online Sources:

Pathways2Sustainability (Feb. 23-25 in Red Deer) www.pathways2sustainability.ca

Bill 29 on Coal Bed Methane ownership

http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/bills/bill/legislature_27/session_3/20100204_bill-026.pdf

[http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files%5Cdocs%5Cchansards%5Chan%5Clegislature_27%5Csession_3%](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files%5Cdocs%5Cchansards%5Chan%5Clegislature_27%5Csession_3%5C)

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



The Ecological Rift - Foster, Clark & York (Book Review)

The Ecological Rift is a series of essays written over the past few years and adapted for a coherent book. It addresses nine 'planetary boundaries' that are crucial for maintaining a liveable earth. These include: ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, global fresh water use, change in land use, biodiversity loss, atmospheric aerosol loading, chemical pollution and climate change. Some may be viewed as approaching irreversible degradation, and some threaten qualitative changes that could destabilize the planet.

The book provides some of the science around these planetary boundaries, but focuses more on organizational drivers that curb our collective response. The most significant driver is an economy premised on accumulation and growth that is unconstrained by democratic governance or social value.

The authors address the high discount rates for future benefits compared to mitigation strategies employed today, and the general reliance on 'trickle-down ecology' which assumes greater wealth and technological efficiencies in the future to address future problems created today.

The book also provides some perspective on three paradoxes: the Lauderdale Paradox which is the promotion of private riches through the destruction of public wealth - the more we destroy our commons, the more valuable it becomes for those who gain control of it; the Paperless Office Paradox which points to the fact that the development of substitutes may not lead to a reduction in resource consumption with implications for renewable energy; and the Jevons Paradox which notes that efficiency gains often result in even greater resource consump-

tion. An example of the Jevons Paradox might be LED lighting: LED uses considerably less energy than conventional lighting, they can last as long as 20 years, and costs are dropping. If we only replaced our existing lighting, this would lead to a considerable reduction in electricity consumption. But these benefits lead to new lighting applications, like building façades or park benches. Efficient LED lighting may result in even greater electricity consumption.

The Ecological Rift challenges our assumptions and provides a critique of the economic and social preconceptions that encumber our collective future.

The book would likely not be to the taste of cold-warriors and technology peddlers.



Moving Towards Sustainability - Green Building

It has been estimated that almost half of the energy in North America is used to construct, light, and heat/cool buildings. Improving the performance of buildings could have a significant impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (as well as water consumption).

Typical strategies for reducing energy consumption in Canada is increasing insulation thickness or using products that have better insulating values for the same thickness. Foam insulation has the added benefit of better sealing the home, as a significant amount of energy is lost through air movements through the building envelope (walls and roof).

If you seal the home well, a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) effectively heats the fresh incoming air with stale air being removed from the building. A ventilator is important to keep the air fresh inside the living space.

Good windows in cold climates are important, with triple-pane, gas filled styles being recommended. Special coat-

ings can be added to maximize heat gained from the sun (east and south exposures) and reduce heat gains in the west (often undesirable in the summer). Proper shading for seasonal sun-positions can help reduce overheating your home in the summer (and avoids the need for air conditioning).

High efficiency furnaces and water heaters reduce your gas consumption. Ground-source heat pump ('geothermal') systems may also be effective for home heating if you buy your power from alternative energy sources (wind, solar). There is also a drain water heat exchanger that may be installed on your sewer stack that preheats cold water using waste heat from the shower.

Most of these strategies cost more money up front, with cost recovery occurring over many years (the cost payback depends on the cost of energy). If the cost of borrowing remains low, however, many of these technologies have returns (the savings on lower energy consumption) that are

(Special Feature)

comparable to safe, low yield investments.

Unfortunately, the *real* costs of not building to higher standards of energy performance will be borne by us all. The cost implications of hampering ecosystem services and ignoring the impacts of global warming may exceed the costs of mitigation through good design.

Potential projects that SAGE could engage with include public seminars for choosing technologies and helping access government incentives; advocating for incentives that promote green building/renovations; partnering with Habitat for Humanity for a 'green' home; partner with city at Home & Garden Show; advertise neighbourhood utility (energy/water) use; develop a municipal green building guideline; and 'green' the Fish & Game Hut.

This is a submission for SAGE's Moving Towards Sustainability initiative. A more detailed account will be made available in a comprehensive report in 2011.



To: Hon. Cindy Ady
Minister, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

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 relief and appreciation that Bill 29 has been withdrawn for reconsideration.

We hope that future legislation will not only sustain the current level of management for existing protected areas but will allow for the expansion of current parks and the creation of new parks, such as the Castle Crown Wilderness Area. We also encourage a clear definition of purpose and uses for Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves that would prioritize ecological integrity and maintain the important ecological services these areas provide for clean and reliable water supplies, carbon storage, and biodiversity. Finally, we look forward to a transparent public consultation process with Albertans that identifies our collective values and clearly integrates these values into legislation, rather than relying on the caprice of future governments to protect our parks.

Thank you, again, for demonstrating your respect for democratic process by reassessing the effectiveness of the proposed Parks legislation.

cc. Bridget Pastoor, MLA Lethbridge East
Greg Weadick, MLA Lethbridge West
Mayor Dodic, Lethbridge



ALBERTA
ENVIRONMENT

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Medicine Hat*

AR 42620

December 2, 2010

Mr. Braum Barber
braum.barber@lethbridgecollege.ca

Dear Mr. Barber,

Thank you for your letter dated November 12, 2010, regarding Alberta's intent for a new wetlands policy, on behalf of the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment.

The Government of Alberta appreciates the Alberta Water Council's significant contribution to the development of a provincial wetland policy. The policy intent developed by the Government of Alberta incorporates the majority of recommendations submitted by the Alberta Water Council in 2008. These recommendations include non-consensus agreement on a no-net-loss management policy.

As you mention in your letter, abundance is only one of many metrics that would be used to assess the value of a wetland. The government recommends a policy intent that will require the overall value of a wetland, along with its physical location, to be considered when making decisions. Wetlands should be considered in the context of their landscape, and numerous factors, including hydrological connectivity, wildlife corridors, and other concepts around interconnectivity need to be evaluated.

Our policy intent will allow the government to offer a comprehensive wetland policy that takes distinct geographical differences into account, rather than suggesting a no-net-loss policy. A no-net-loss policy may be insufficiently flexible to support the complex needs of wetland management in the province because it does not address wetland function. For example, in northern Alberta, which is 40-50 per cent wetlands, considering only the area of a wetland could mean destroying potentially higher value boreal forest to replace a wetland. In southern Alberta, wetlands are relatively scarce and simply replacing one wetland with another is not enough to make up for more than 100 years of development.

In addition to direct replacement, non-replacement options will seek to advance the state of science and knowledge around management and reconstruction of all wetland types, with the ultimate goal of conserving wetlands across the province. The Government of Alberta believes that a wetland policy that considers both physical area and functional attributes of wetlands will contribute significantly to wetland conservation in the province.

Alberta

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Alberta's policy intent will focus first on avoidance – everything must be done to avoid impacts to wetlands. Second, developers will be required to minimize what impacts cannot be completely avoided. Finally, as a last resort, the policy intent will require compensation for wetland loss that reflects the value of the wetland.

Some environmental groups have expressed concern that government's intent lacks a clear goal for wetland conservation in the province. Your government agrees that any province-wide wetland policy must have a desired outcome clearly articulated for effective wetland management, and this will be developed. When wetland value is clearly defined, concrete and quantifiable goals will be established.

An overall outcome, along with clear, function-based province-wide wetlands policy will be developed with the support of environmental groups, municipalities, Aboriginal communities, and industry in a transparent and collaborative process. This will ensure that decision-makers have the necessary tools to make scientifically informed management decisions, based on agreed upon criteria.

Thank you for your interest in ensuring Alberta's wetlands remain protected for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Rob Renner
Minister

c.c. Hon. Mel Knight
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development

Greg Weadick, MLA
Lethbridge West