



**“The just man walketh in his integrity.”
Proverbs 20:7**

May 2011

Imminent Clearcutting of the Castle

SAGE AGM May 5th,
7:00 p.m. at the Fish &
Game Hut.

Greensence **environ-
mental survey** for the
upcoming federal elec-
tion at greensence.ca.

OWC AGM June 9th,
registration at 11:30
a.m. at the Coast Hotel.

Prairie Urban Garden
tour, June 26th.

**Water, Agriculture and
Environment Confer-
ence**, May 31/June 1 at
Lethbridge Lodge Hotel.

The Castle Special Man-
agement Area was
lauded as ‘a milestone in
the preservation of Al-
berta’s natural heritage
for future generations’
in 1998 when it was cre-
ated. The Minister of
Sustainable Resource
Development has de-
cided to allow clear cut-
ting in this area begin-
ning this June despite
public support for its
preservation.

An estimated 3,750
truckloads of logs will be
removed from the area
for processing at the
Spray Lake Sawmills fa-
cility in Cochrane.

The government claims
that this logging is nec-
essary for the manage-
ment of pests and fire
suppression. Neither
claim is substantiated
with scientific research
or modern techniques
currently being practiced

in forests as nearby as
Waterton Park.

Research suggests that
areas that are clearcut
are actually more prone
to pests and wildfires as
a result of disturbance,
drying of the vegetation,
and the monoculture
that replaces a biodi-
verse forest.

For more information
see the [Alberta Foothills
Network](http://AlbertaFoothillsNetwork) website.

Greensence Surveys (most of the) Federal Candidates

Greensence has conducted
a survey on environmental
issues that affect us, both
locally and globally.

A *Green Light* has been
recommended for both
Michael Cormican (Liberal)
and Mark Sandilands
(NDP), and Geoffery Capp
(CHP) earned a *Red Light*.
The Green candidate was

preoccupied with final ex-
ams, and the Conservative
candidate, Jim Hillyer,
chose not to inform the
public on his party’s envi-
ronmental platform.

The questions on the sur-
vey asked for the candi-
date’s position on climate
change; hydraulic fractur-
ing; nuclear power and

renewable energy; subsi-
dies to fossil fuel indus-
tries; infrastructure sup-
port to municipalities and
incentives for home-
owners and small business
to improve energy and wa-
ter performance; corpo-
rate environmental re-
sponsibility in other coun-
tries; and greater account-

ability for the use of Gas
Tax Fund revenues to
achieve ‘cleaner air,
cleaner water, and a re-
duction of greenhouse gas
emissions.’

Full responses from the
participating candidates
may be found on the
Greensence website.

An informed citizenry is the only true repository of the public will.

—~~Jim Hillyer, Ph.D.~~
Thomas Jefferson

Green Jobs

A recent [Pew's report](#) on Green job creation in the United States suggests strong growth in the past few years despite economic instability.

The report says that a clean energy economy invites investments and creates new businesses. Categories of a clean energy economy include clean energy, energy efficiency, environmentally friendly production, conservation & pollution mitigation, and training & support.

In 2008, 80% of green

venture capital investment went to the categories of clean energy and energy efficiency, though 65% of the jobs were created in conservation & pollution mitigation.

[David Thompson](#) shows that Alberta has similar opportunities for types of investment that creates green jobs. A [PERI](#) report indicates that three times more jobs are created for the same investment in fossil fuel-based jobs.

Based on findings from [Heinrich Boll Foundation](#), \$340 billion of the \$2.2

Oldman Watershed Council Notes

SAGE continues to be well represented on the Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) with members on the Executive and the Urban Team.

The OWC [Urban Team](#) is active on a number of local projects. The Prairie

trillion stimulus packages worldwide (roughly 16%) was directed to projects that supported climate policy objectives, including expanding renewable energy, improving building performance and transportation infrastructure. In comparison, about 8% of Canada's stimulus was directed to green projects.

The Canadian government continues to lag behind other countries and may have missed the opportunity to create as many as 150,000 jobs, according to a [recent media report](#).

Urban Garden team promotes xeriscaping (drought tolerant landscaping) through displays, tours, technical assistance, and a comprehensive website which includes the 'best plants' brochure.

The Urban Team also supports the Home & Garden Show each year. This year focused on the riparian areas along the Oldman River within Lethbridge. A report on the condition of these protected areas will be presented to the City of Lethbridge in the near future.

Another program is the successful Yellow Fish Road to raise awareness that most of the water runoff from buildings, parking lots and streets ends up flowing directly into our river (with all of the contaminants and garbage the water brings with it).

Lethbridge is fortunate to have such an effective group promoting good stewardship of our river.

Some Interesting

Agriculture at the Crossroads
Failure to Yield [GMOs]
The 2008 Land Grab
Ethanol Production
Food Secure Canada

Online Sources:

<http://www.fsli.org/>
<http://www.ucsus.org/>
<http://www.grain.org/>
<http://www.sehn.org/>
<http://foodsecurecanada.org/>

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

Frack-First, Think-Later

Oil & gas exploitation has been focusing lately on what were once uneconomical formations. They are now more affordable because of new technologies in horizontal drilling, and stimulation methods using hydraulic and gas fracturing – what is termed ‘fracking’. An oil or gas formation is made up of porous rock or shale that can be cracked or broken up by pressuring the zone using a toxic mix of water or compressed propane. A number of toxic chemicals and sand are pumped into the zone to hold the crack open and allow the natural gas or oil to flow to the well more quickly (and more profitably). Hydraulic fracturing has been a stimulation technique used for over fifty years, but previous fracking pales to the intensity of the methods developed in the past decade.

The problem with hydraulic fracturing is that the cracks generated by the high pressure fluids can compromise the formations that have held the oil and gas in place for millennia, often along existing faults in the formation. The oil and gas (and toxic chemicals added during fracturing) are then liberated and free to migrate to groundwater aquifers or to the surface, potentially contaminating the air and water systems that we rely on. Some zones are more likely to leak than others (shallow shale-gas compared to deeper wells), however, there is little differentiation between them by the regulators and oil & gas companies.

Fracking has become a worldwide issue, dramatically illustrated in the Josh Fox documentary *Gasland*, and Alberta-based *Burning Water*. Quebec has established a moratorium to evaluate potential harms after a flurry of drilling activity. New Brunswick is becoming the next target, having the largest shale bed in North America. Demonstrations throughout the United States have led to moratoriums and new State regulations. Even France has been the center of fracking demonstrations in Europe. Our own province, on the other hand, has been passing legislation supporting exploitation (i.e., [ERCB Bulletin 2010-39](#) Framework for Well-Spacing; [Bill 26](#) Coalbed Methane Act), and there seems to be a free-for-all in the purchase of leases in southern Alberta to access oil from the Bakkan Shale.

The federal Minister (see following letter) justifies this: “Sustainable development of energy resources is also important to our energy security, our economy and, ultimately, our standard of living.” It begs the question of what ‘sustainable’ really means.

Apparently, we’re only at the beginning of this desperate and intensive phase of oil & gas exploitation – despite the obvious need to reduce our consumption of fossil fuels. There seems to be little research about the affects of

new fracking methods, or the long-term impact on the environment as toxic chemicals leach into the water system. A recent report from [Cornell University](#) suggests that the greenhouse gas impact of shale gas exceeds conventional gas and even coal extraction.

And even if there is no immediate gas migration caused by fracking, each oil and gas well will begin to leak in time, once abandoned. The casing corrodes and the cement that protects the aquifers begins to break down, allowing casing gas to escape into the groundwater. Some studies suggest a very short lifespan for wells being drilled into the zones currently being exploited, which means that there will be a growing number of wells abandoned. It seems a shame that we would accept future contamination of water and air to meet the immediate demand for energy that is largely squandered on inefficient processes and the production of stuff.

The first concentration of horizontal wells with intensive fracturing in the region may occur on the Kainai reserve, directly west of Lethbridge. It is time to support Kainai Earth Watch in their efforts to establish a moratorium until the science is known - we all share the affects of contaminated water and air. Letters to our MLAs, our MP, the ERCB, and Indian Oil & Gas Canada are effective.

Agriculture and Food In Crisis

Fred Magdoff and Brian Tokar edit this collection of essays on food production and food-for-fuel conflicts that exacerbate food security and the ability to meet basic needs worldwide:

"Something is wrong with our agricultural and food systems. Despite great progress in increasing productivity in the last century, hundreds of millions of people remain hungry and malnourished. Further hundreds of millions eat too much, or consume the wrong kinds of food, and it is making them ill. The health of the environment suffers too, as degradation of soil and water seems to accompany many of the agricultural systems we have developed in recent years" (p.283). The authors ask: Can nothing be done?

The answer they offer is termed 'agroecology': studies indicate that agroecology not only out-produces corporate monocultures worldwide, but contributes to a range of public goods including clean water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, maintaining beneficial organisms in the soil, flood protection, and greater groundwater recharge. Agroecology also enhances local environments, strengthens communities, and develops human capacity to provide and adapt.

The concept of agroecology was

(Book Review)

developed in 1996 by "the international peasant federation *La Via Campesina* (The Peasant Way) as the 'people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems,' food sovereignty proposes that people, rather than corporate monopolies, make the decision regarding our food. Food sovereignty is a much deeper concept that food security because it proposes not just guaranteed access to food, but democratic control over the food system – from production to processing, to distribution, marketing, and consumption" (p.212).

The concern is that 84% of beef production is controlled by four corporations, and half of supermarket food was controlled by five corporations in the US. The fastest pace of consolidation has been in commercial seed, where three companies control 40% of the world market. Furthermore, the top six pesticide firms control 75% of this sector. You get the picture - a food network controlled from seed to serving with the ability to control inputs, methods and, ultimately, prices.

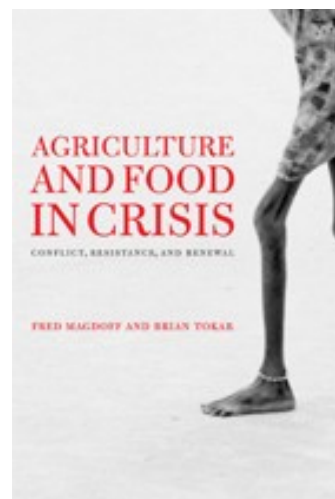
The result is a food system that is vulnerable to price shocks that already leave half the world's



population (more than 3 billion people) food insecure. Dietary changes in China and India's expanding middle class, speculation, conversion of farmland to urban sprawl, climate change, and the diversion of agricultural production to biofuels each contribute to upsetting the precarious balance. In fact, the World Bank in 2008 concluded that 75% of the rapid increase in food prices was due to biofuel production.

Agriculture and Food In Crisis is available through [Monthly Review Press](#) and offers a substantial evaluation of biofuel production as it relates to food prices and addressing climate change. It also provides a historical perspective of modern food crises and offers solutions for renewal through agroecological principles.

The book suggests that the modern production and distribution system upon which we rely for our food is dysfunctional and that we should be building capacity for local reliance. It is a call back to the 'peasant's way'.



Perusing the Platforms: What the Parties Have to Say About the Environment

Conservative

The [Conservative Party](#) platform promises a 17% reduction of domestic GHG from 2005 by 2020, but offers no clear plan on how this might be accomplished. The platform offers support for clean energy technology research, and provides Carbon Capture & Storage as an example. They will also extend the ecoEnergy Retrofit-Homes Program for one more year, and extend the Public Transit Tax Credit.

The Conservative Party promises to enter into a Clean Energy Dialogue with the United States and support developing countries in adapting to and combating climate change.

Green

The [Green Party](#) platform offers an ambitious greenhouse gas reduction target of 30% below 1990 levels by 2020, and to 85% reduction below 1990 by 2040, regardless of what other countries do. The platform suggests a national energy retrofit standard designed for a post-carbon economy that will reduce energy use in existing buildings by an average of at least 80% below that of 2009 levels through free energy audits, incentives, green mortgage loans, and by setting high efficiency standards for new buildings.

The platform touches on a number of environmental themes including a ban on further research in genetically engineered plants, particularly 'terminator' seeds, and the mandatory labeling of food products with genetically engineered ingredients. Nuclear power would be phased out by ending subsidies and establishing a moratorium on uranium mining and refining.

Investments in transit will begin at 25% of the total cost and rising to 75% where municipalities have established policies to encourage smart growth and prevent sprawl, and where transit programs have been designed to increase ridership such as annual U-passes for colleges, ecopasses for neighbourhoods, commuter passes for businesses, and requirements that new developments must be served by transit.

The Green platform promotes the use of manure and farm waste to build soil nutrition and organic content and farmers will be paid for carbon sequestration in soils through no-till agriculture practices. The party plans for a transition to 100% organic farming.

Along with supporting a cap-and-trade system, all subsidies to fossil fuel industries will be removed and escalating carbon taxes to all CO₂, methane, N₂O, fugitive, and other GHG emissions will be applied. No new coal-fired electricity generation

plants will be approved, and all funding for Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CSC) will be directed to renewable solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy projects.

The Greens support triple bottom line analysis, measuring social, environmental and economic costs and benefits: "To set the right prices, we have to change to a 'true' or 'full-cost' accounting method that incorporates economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits in the national accounts. Using this method, products and services are taxed, and thus priced, according to the positive or negative impacts caused throughout their lifecycle."

Liberal

The [Liberal Party](#) platform commits to a long-term greenhouse gas reduction target of 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. They plan to accomplish this by establishing a cap-and-trade system that sets target emissions and allows a carbon market to trade permits, ostensibly to direct emission permission to the most efficient and profitable sectors. The platform offers an investment of \$1 billion to quadruple low-impact renewable energy production from 2009 levels by 2017 to reduce emissions while creating green jobs. A Green Renovation Tax Credit will in-

Perusing the Platforms (Cont'd)

vest a \$13,500 tax credit to homes making energy efficient changes with a target of retrofitting 1 million homes. Local and regional transit, rapid transit and commuter rail that helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also be supported.

The Liberal platform introduces a new Canadian Freshwater Strategy to address growing challenges such as ground water contamination, new measures needed to combat drought and flooding, as well as better water consumption efficiency. The party also promises to strengthen Canada's Environmental Farm Plans, support improved fertilizer and pesticide management, and introduce new environmental goods and services programs that reward farmers for environmentally-sustainable initiatives such as setting aside land for wildlife habitats or carbon sequestration. They also promise to invest in the development of clean energy from farms, including biomass, wind, solar and geothermal energy.

The Liberal Party recognizes that world markets "are demanding more sustainable and environmentally responsible resource products and consumption. Environmental footprints of entire supply chains matter more than ever. Canada is well positioned to benefit commercially from its exports of responsibly harvested natural resource products, and the expertise and technologies needed for cleaner extraction, manage-

ment and consumption of resources abroad."

NDP

The New Democratic Party platform commits to a GHG emissions target of 80% below 1990 targets by 2050. The plan establishes a price on carbon through a cap-and-trade system, which will establish hard emissions limits for the biggest polluters "to ensure companies pay their environmental bills and to create an incentive for emissions reductions." Revenues from this policy will be used to invest in "green technologies, business and household energy conservation, public transit, support to renewable energy development, and transitioning workers to the green economy".

The NDP will meet Canada's G-20 commitment to cut subsidies to non-renewable energy and end the federal bias towards non-renewable energy production, and to meet international obligations to assist developing countries in mitigating and adapting to climate change. The platform provides financial incentives for clean power with a focus on supporting community-owned renewable energy facilities – technologies include solar, wind, water, tidal, and biomass.

The platform promotes a *National Public Transit Strategy* in order to maintain and expand public transit, with a clear

mechanism for sustainable, predictable and long-term funding. And transit use will be encouraged by providing a tax exemption for employee workplace-based transit passes.



Letter to the Editor (Lethbridge Herald, published April 19th)

To this date the Alberta department of Sustainable Resource Development is still giving the green light to Spray Lake Sawmill Co. of Cochrane to destroy (clear-cut) some 60 square kilometres of forest of the Castle Watershed west of Pincher Creek starting this summer. Some 3,700 truck loads of logs will be moved from the Castle area to Cochrane.

In December, I requested of MLA Evan Berger, Sustainable Resource Development Minister Mel Knight and Premier Ed Stelmach, the scientific data and its analysis as it pertains to this project on public lands. To date a reply has not been received. Either the scientific assessment has not been done or it is not divulged to the public. Modern government cannot regulate public lands, or any other impact project, without the guidance of a scientific assessment.

Curiously however, Environment Minister Ron Renner and Premier Stelmach have, as a lobbying effort, invited the European Union to make a science based assessment of the carbon footprint of the Alberta tarsands project.

How do we Albertans decide which impact project will be knowledge based? The application of the scientific process to our projects is the only way to assess the long term consequences of our major projects. To the public, long-term consequences are far more important than short-term impacts. I, therefore, herewith again request the scientific data and its analysis (energy used for the project, consequences to the ecology and carbon footprint, and economic and social consequences) for this project.

This information is essential for decision makers and the public to judge whether this destructive intrusion of the Castle Watershed should or should not occur.

I ask, why do we have our universities, colleges and research facilities if we do not use them to assess our projects for the long-term good of society? The global impact of human activities has reached a level which makes business-as-usual no longer tenable. You can govern without the benefits of science, but you cannot govern well without science input.

Klaus Jericho
Lethbridge



Letter to the Editor (submitted to Lethbridge Herald April 8, 2011)

Re: Preserving the Castle Wilderness

As soon as next month, Spray Lake Sawmills will begin the process of removing as many as 4000 truckloads of timber from the Castle area – clearcutting the forest from Beaver Mines Lake to Castle Falls.

The Lethbridge Herald reported recently on a scientific poll that indicated 85% of people in the region supported the preservation of the Castle area. This area has great natural value for us all as a popular destination for recreation and tourism.

It also has value for water retention to reduce the impact of flooding; as a filter to clean the water we drink; and as a natural habitat to preserve the biodiversity that attracts tourists to the region.

Some say that this type of logging is good for business - but for whom? Clearly, shipping resources to Cochrane for processing leaves little in our communities. For the south, it is difficult to imagine how a site devastated by clearcutting will be good for business.

Minister Knight (Sustainable Resource Development), Greg Weadick (MLA Lethbridge-West), and Evan Berger (MLA Livingstone-Macleod) refuse to address this issue, despite the overwhelming support for preserving the Castle region. It should be designated a Wildland Park as envisioned by Special Places 2000 but, instead, it appears to be a target for exploitation. If you want it to be otherwise, act with your voice and your pocketbook: Communicate your thoughts to your MLA, and avoid buying lumber that is stamped AFPA 88.

And drop by the display at the Bowman Arts Centre if you want to see (what was once) a forest after clearcutting.

Braum Barber
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment