

# Southern Alberta Environmental Group

Box 383, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y7

## NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Cheryl Bradley, phone: 403-328-1245, fax: 403-380-4969, e-mail: cebradley@shaw.ca

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### Announcements

#### SAEG Business Meeting

7:30 pm, Thursday, 8 April 2004

Fish & Game Hut, 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. and 10<sup>th</sup> St. S.

Everyone welcome.

#### SAEG Earth Day Celebration

##### WORLD OF THE TRUMPETER SWAN

7:00 pm, Thursday, 22 April, Lethbridge Public Library

This sophisticated 2-projector show will follow a Trumpeter family from its wintering grounds in Yellowstone to the eastern slopes Alberta breeding grounds in spring and back again in late autumn. Through slides and story-telling, Robin and Marian White will share the folklore and ecology of these magnificent birds, at risk in Alberta. This is a great way to celebrate spring and Earth Day. Please plan to join us for this free presentation co-sponsored by Lethbridge Public Library. Refreshments provided.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Crowsnest Birding Festival

5-6 June, Crowsnest Pass

The program includes guided hikes, bird counts, dinner at the Crowsnest Mountain Resort, a presentation on Trumpeter Swans and a raffle of a print donated by Robert Bateman. For more information visit the website of the Crowsnest Environmental Action Society, <http://members.shaw.ca/ceas>.

#### Confronting Water Scarcity: Challenges and Choices

13-16 July, University of Lethbridge

Keynote speakers are Peter Block, a specialist in managing change within organizations, Thomas Homer-Dixon, director of the Centre for the Study of Peace and Conflict, Peter Lougheed, former Premier of Alberta, Sandra Postel, director of the Global Water Policy Project, and Henry Vaux, president of the Water Education Foundation based in California. They will address the scope of water concerns globally and nationally. Concurrent sessions will include scientific, practical and hands-on information about water use, water health and governance with a focus on issues related to climate change, best management practices, and the status of research and knowledge. For more information visit [www.confronting-water-scarcity.ca](http://www.confronting-water-scarcity.ca) or call 329-2244. Registration will begin in early April.

### Notes and Updates

#### SAEG is 20 Years Old: Have We Made a Difference? –

Two decades ago, on 8 February 1984, SAEG was officially incorporated under the *Societies Act of the Province of Alberta*. The aims and objectives of the organization at incorporation are similar to those today – to inform the community about environmental issues, to be an environmental advocate, and to work with other groups with shared goals regionally and nationally. Main concerns listed at the time of incorporation were watershed management, soil degradation, toxic materials in the environment, wildlife habitat and environmental resource materials. Areas of activity today are water quality/quantity, air quality, and land use, including biodiversity protection, protected areas, urban development and waste management.

A 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a good time to take stock of accomplishments and ask “has SAEG made a positive difference”? Please consider this question and provide your views in writing to the editor. Responses will be included in future newsletters and used by the Board in considering SAEG’s future.

#### SAEG Volunteer Opportunities -

•Currently Bill Brown and archivist Winston Jones are sorting through SAEG documents from the last twenty years to determine what will be retained in official archives. If you have any relevant documents, please pass them along to Bill Brown, 328-2870.  
•The process of archiving files presents a good opportunity to document the history of SAEG. Anyone interested in undertaking a volunteer project to review past minutes and newsletters and to compile a history of SAEG, please let us know.  
•Individuals with fresh energy and ideas are needed to help lead SAEG into the future. Please take a moment to inform friends and colleagues about SAEG and invite them to become members. Consider becoming involved in the work of the organization. Call Klaus, 327-4062 if you are interested in contributing time and energy as a Board member.

**Members News -** •Gerry Buchanan, long-time SAEG supporter, is recovering well at home after a short stay in hospital. We’re wishing her a full and speedy recovery.

•Sylvia Campbell, with assistance of Debby Berg of Alberta Community Development, is planning sessions in May and June to engage SAEG’s directors in a process of Board development. It is hoped the result will lead to revision of SAEG’s constitution and ultimately revitalization of the organization.

**Ecotrust Applications for Urban Initiatives** – Alberta Ecotrust is a non-governmental fundraising agency dedicated to supporting grassroots environmental projects throughout the province. SAEG recently provided a letter of support for an application to Alberta Ecotrust by Sierra Club of Canada – Prairie Chapter to develop a tool kit which will assist Alberta communities in defining and addressing issues of urban sprawl. If funding is secured, a needs assessment will be the first step. SAEG also has submitted an application to Alberta Ecotrust to assist with development of an urban stormwater education program through the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative.

**Pentagon Enters Climate Change Debate** - A secret Pentagon report is predicting an imminent scenario of catastrophic climate change which would challenge United States national security. According to the report's authors, the planet is carrying a higher population than it can sustain. By 2020 shortages of water and energy supply will become increasingly harder to overcome, plunging the planet into war. They warn that 8,200 years ago climatic conditions brought widespread crop failure, famine, disease and mass migration of populations that could soon be repeated. The report predicts that future wars will be fought over the issue of survival rather than religion, ideology or national honour. The report's authors recommend climate change 'should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a US national security concern'. (Source: *The Observer*, 22 Feb 2004).

**Take the One-Tonne Challenge** - Canadians can help protect our climate by using less energy and fewer resources in our daily activities and reducing our individual greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne. The average Canadian produces five tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) each year so one tonne is a reduction of 20 per cent. Tips to meet the challenge include driving less, idling your vehicle less, checking tire pressure regularly, using compact fluorescent light bulbs, sealing air leaks in your home, turning the thermostat down at night and choosing energy-efficient appliances and vehicles. To determine the current volume of emissions your household produces each year and the amount which can be saved by taking specific actions visit [www.climatechange.gc.ca/onetonne/english](http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/onetonne/english).

**Environmental Concerns re Upgrade of Crowsnest Highway** – The Crowsnest Environmental Action Society has responded in writing to a functional planning study to upgrade Highway 3 through the Crowsnest Pass to freeway standard. The need for such a major upgrade is questioned. Environmental concerns include impacts on wildlife habitat and corridors, implications for a sustainable walking path system between and out from communities, and carbon emissions related to alternative routes. It is suggested that communities beyond the Crowsnest Pass should be involved in review of the proposal. Visit <http://members.shaw.ca/ceas> for more information.

**The Land Advocate: Worth the Price of Subscription** – Just out is the second edition of a quarterly newsletter *The Land Advocate* published by the Land Advocate Society of Western Canada. The newsletter is dedicated to giving landowners the facts on oil and gas development. Visit [www.landadvocate.org](http://www.landadvocate.org) to subscribe.

**Oil & Gas Development Devalues Property** - A recent study by Alberta's Energy and Utility Board (AEUB) concludes that oil and gas development has a net negative impact on property values. The study looked at property values in three central Alberta municipalities. The report concludes that adding a well to an undeveloped rural residential area can reduce values by 5% and that a typical oil and gas development with several wells and associated facilities can result in up to 10% decline in property value. The AEUB released the study only after Freedom of Information Requests from scores of landowners throughout the province. The report *Impact of Oil and Gas Activity on Rural Residential Property Values* can be obtained by contacting the AEUB at 403-297-8311. (Source: *The Land Advocate*, March 2004)

**Milk River Dam Preliminary Feasibility Study Update** – The results of a \$237,000 feasibility study of on-stream and off-stream water storage options in the Milk River Basin was submitted to Alberta Environment in January 2004. The study was begun in November 2002. According to the Department's website, "the results of this study will allow Alberta Environment to make an informed recommendation to the government on how, or if, to proceed". A decision is expected by late spring 2004. Preliminary information is that the benefit/cost ratios of all storage options are less than 0.6.

**SAEG Appeal Proceeds on April 20: Plan to Attend** – On April 20 in Lethbridge SAEG will appear before the Alberta Environmental Appeals Board (EAB) regarding the appeal of an amendment to a St. Mary River Irrigation District water license granted by Alberta Environment. Argument will be made about the directly affected status of SAEG and its members. SAEG members are invited to attend.

Affidavits on behalf of SAEG and of Cheryl Bradley were filed with the EAB on March 30. Attached to the affidavits were letters from SAEG members explaining why they are affected by this decision and confirming that SAEG is acting on their behalf.

The amendment, granted on October 30, 2003 allows the St. Mary River Irrigation District to allocate 12,000 acre feet of water, saved through publicly funded efficiency improvements, for uses other than irrigation and without returning any to the stressed southern tributaries of the Oldman River. With such large public investment in irrigation infrastructure and such large public interest in having healthy rivers, it seems reasonable to suggest that saved water be used to save the rivers.

Donations to assist with the appeal can be sent to SAEG, Box 383, Lethbridge AB T1J 3Y7. Cheques should be made out to Trout Unlimited Canada, River Health Fund. Charitable tax receipts will be issued.

*[Water] scarcity may have its roots in water shortage, but it may also be a social construct, a product of affluence, expectations and customary behavior....scarcity has various causes, some of which are capable of being remedied or alleviated. A society confronting water scarcity usually has options. Scarcity is not necessarily inevitable or immutable.*  
J.T. Winpenny, UN Food and Agriculture Organization