



**“Patience is also a form of action.”**

**Auguste Rodin**

**February 2012**

Next **SAGE** meeting  
Thursday, March 1st at 7  
p.m., Fish & Game Hut.

**Membership Dues:**

Mail to SAGE @ Box 383  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
T1J 3Y7

Watch for **Home & Garden Show** in March. Vol-  
unteers requested for  
OWC booth.

If you haven't voted for  
the [OWC Fuelling  
Change project](#) proposal,  
we need your support  
(we are currently in 6th  
place)

**Fracking Fracas**

There is growing interest  
in what is being termed  
the 'Bakkan Fairway' -  
land running parallel  
with the U.S. border  
with access to the best  
of the Bakkan shale oil  
and gas reserves be-  
neath. Others might  
know it as the Milk River  
Ridge - ranching and  
farming country depend-  
ent upon fresh ground-  
water.

Roughly \$500 million

dollars have been spent  
on the Bakkan play, \$230  
million on land leases  
which has driven prices  
up to over \$800 per  
acre. The exploitation is  
being driven by multi-  
stage fracturing technol-  
ogy.

There is some excite-  
ment in the region on  
how to capitalize on the  
oil & gas activity, with  
Southgrow hosting an  
upcoming workshop

about economic oppor-  
tunities.

Unfortunately, there  
seems to be a lack of in-  
terest in the technology  
that drives it: a technol-  
ogy that continues to  
raise alarms regarding  
contamination of  
groundwater, earth-  
quakes, and toxic releas-  
es of chemicals to the  
environment.

**Water Conservation, Efficiency, & Productivity at OWC**

The Oldman Watershed  
Council (OWC) conduct-  
ed a municipal conserva-  
tion, efficiency and  
productivity planning  
workshop in October  
2011 and the results of  
the discussion are availa-  
ble on the [OWC website](#).

The first discussion topic  
was what municipalities  
are currently doing to  
conserve water. Initia-

tives included the instal-  
lation of water meters,  
education, incentives for  
low-flow devices, and  
the better management  
of water rates to dis-  
courage wasteful water  
uses.

Regarding the opportu-  
nities for water conser-  
vation, the discussion  
highlighted the benefits  
of replacing front lawns

with xeriscaping, and  
more education to raise  
water-awareness. There  
was also an interesting  
suggestion to place blue  
plastic 'water pigs' on  
the lawns of heavy us-  
ers. Stocks and pillory  
were not mentioned,  
however.

The discussion also in-  
cluded an exploration of  
barriers which, like most

of environmental issues,  
included the difficulty of  
affecting behavioural  
change.

The OWC website in-  
cludes some interesting  
presentations by the  
Town of Okotoks and  
the City of Lethbridge, as  
well as the Alberta Ur-  
ban Municipalities Asso-  
ciation (AUMA).

## Castle Clear-Cutting Commences.

Spray Lake Sawmills has cleared the staging area to begin building access roads and unloading equipment for clearcutting operations in the Castle Special Place protected area.

Alberta's stand to lose the value of this area as a tourist destination, as a recreational area, as a filter for our water, as protection from flooding, as a source of late summer water from snowpack, as carbon sequestration, and as habitat that supports nat-

ural biodiversity. In exchange we will get fence posts and toilet paper (and maybe not even toilet paper).

A reply to SAGE's letter published in the December Newsletter may be found at the end of this newsletter. The predictable response seems to exaggerate the public consultation and the science supporting this type of logging. It is unfortunate that Sustainable [*sic*] Resource Development would not delay this project until the

completion of the land-use plan for the South Saskatchewan region.

Lawful and peaceful demonstrations have been ongoing to raise awareness about the damage to this natural area. If you wish to participate in the protection of the Castle, contact information and events will be posted on the [Stop Castle Logging](#) blog.



## SAGE Suggests Improvements to Livestock Operations

Regulations under the *Agricultural Operations Practices Act (AOPA)*, legislation dealing with livestock operations and manure management will expire in 2014. Alberta Agriculture is considering what changes may be needed to the regulations as well as to the act itself. On January 11, 2012 SAGE attended a meeting with Alberta Agriculture representatives to discuss issues regarding livestock operations in our region.

According to the *Oldman State of the Watershed Report (2010)*, there are over 500 confined feeding operations in the Oldman Watershed and the large majority of these are in the lower prairie portions of the watershed. Irrigated portions of the County of Lethbridge have the highest density of feedlots, pig barns, and poultry facilities. Water quality in the prairie

subbasins of the Oldman Watershed is determined to be of poor to fair quality due to excess nitrogen, phosphorous, suspended solids and fecal coliforms. There is little doubt that livestock operations are contributing to degradation of water quality. Air quality is also degraded due to odour and dust, particularly in areas of high concentration of confined feeding operations.

Several suggestions to improve the legislation have been presented and include:

- the inclusion of a public interest mandate to include public health and environmental considerations;
- to expand the definition of 'directly affected party' to include people and organizations beyond adjacent neighbours;

- to include a requirement to assess cumulative environmental effects in decision making;
- to mandate compliance of 'grandfathered' operations in the future, and immediately for expansions or changes in ownership;
- to mandate a limit to manure application based on phosphorous rather than nitrate-nitrogen;
- expand requirements to monitor air, water and soil, and make data publically available;
- provide a more responsive mechanism for processing fines and administrative penalties; and,
- create a more effective framework and tools to suspend and decommission noncompliant operations.



**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:

[sage-communications@sage-environment.org](mailto:sage-communications@sage-environment.org)

## The Future of Life (2002)

## (Book Review)



One of the remarkable things about reading an author like Edward O. Wilson is that the quotidian becomes quickened. In *The Future of Life*, positions are renewed and balance is restored in the discussion about the future of life on earth.

One such environmental position is 'sustainability', which is a word Wilson seems to abjure - instead he speaks about 'permanence' and asks: "How best can we shift to a culture of permanence, both for ourselves and for the biosphere that sustains us?" It is a good word for a time when 'sustainability' is being steadily drained of meaning.

In the first chapters of *The Future of Life*, E.O. Wilson explores the current state of the world. He notes that the current ecological footprint (the appropriation of productive land and sea) is a 50% overshoot of what the earth can sustain, and he compares the footprint of developed nations, which is around 10 hectares per person, to developing nations with less than one (and a world average of 2.1 hectares per person).

Wilson discusses global grain production and the current distribution to livestock to feed a growing appetite for meat products. And he surveys trends in soil erosion and water consumption for agriculture and the impact on future food production. Humans already "appropriate 40 percent of

the planet's organic matter produced by green plants" and Wilson draws a trajectory into the future showing the obvious limits for human population growth and the consequent impact on other species. Interestingly, Wilson reveals: "When Homo sapiens passed the six billion mark we had already exceeded by as much as a hundred times the biomass of any large animal species that ever existed on the land."

The author soon arrives at the thesis of the book: the survival of species. He poignantly describes his experience of touching a Sumatran rhinoceros knowing that the species is very unlikely to survive on earth, and he asks why we are so short-sighted.

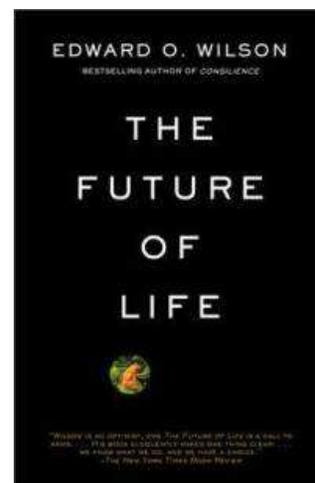
In a longer passage, Wilson describes the richness of our ecosystem: "The soil, water, and atmosphere of its surface have evolved over hundreds of millions of years to their present condition by the activity of the biosphere, a stupendously complex layer of living creatures whose activities are locked together in precise but tenuous global cycles of energy and transformed organic matter. ... When we destroy ecosystems and extinguish species, we degraded the greatest heritage this planet has to offer and thereby threaten our own existence." Paradise found is paradise lost.

Wilson describes many of the species currently endangered due

to hunting, habitat loss, and the impacts of climate change in which the northward velocity of climatic zones exceeds the ability of slower paced flora and fauna to migrate.

He cites the Red List which estimates that "almost one in four of Earth's mammal species and one in eight of the bird species are at some degree of risk. ... As a result, the estimated annual rate of extinction jumps to between one hundred and one thousand species per million." This rate of extinction is very likely underestimated, however, as "more and more new species are pouring into the threatened categories of the Red Lists and sliding down the ratchet towards oblivion. When that acceleration is taken into account, the rate jumps to between one thousand and ten thousand."

Though the book is a decade old, it is based on a timeless wisdom. He gives some advice to the world community to create a foothold for preserving biodiversity. He also applauds meaningful advocacy and states that protestors "are the living world's immunological response" - a nice thought that considers humans as a part of the natural ecosystem.





ALBERTA

SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

*Office of the Minister*

AR28973

December 16, 2011

Mr. Braum Barber  
Vice President  
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment  
Box 383  
Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y7

Dear Mr. Barber:

Premier Alison Redford forwarded your email of November 23, 2011 regarding the planned timber harvest in the Castle region of southern Alberta. Premier Redford has reviewed your concerns and asked that I respond on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

The Castle region is part of the C5 forest management area that extends from the northern boundary of Waterton Lakes National Park to just south of Kananaskis Country and occupies approximately 3,522 square kilometres of public land. The Government of Alberta manages the C5 area as a multiple-use zone that supports a variety of activities, including timber harvesting, cattle grazing, oil and gas production and recreational opportunities. Timber harvesting has taken place there for the past century, including commercial forestry for at least the past 50 years. Even now, the area retains its attraction for tourists and the natural diversity we see today.

Sustainable Resource Development supports and guides timber harvesting activities within a framework of legislation, regulations, approved forest management plans and area specific operating ground rules. The department prepared the C5 Forest Management Plan using the most current research and science available. In addition, we provided many opportunities for community input. The plan meets internationally accepted standards for sustainable forest management practices and includes provisions to minimize impacts on non-timber resources, such as wildlife, watersheds and recreational opportunities. You can find these standards by following this link [www.csa.ca/documents/publications/2419617.pdf](http://www.csa.ca/documents/publications/2419617.pdf).

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*Alberta* ■

Protecting water quality is one of the top forest management priorities in Alberta. Independent monitoring of the watershed in areas where timber harvesting is scheduled in the C5 region shows that decades of sustainable forest management practices have had little impact on water quality or quantity. The department also ensures timber harvesting activities continue to respect watershed integrity through continued monitoring of watershed function and inspections of harvesting and reforestation operations.

The C5 plan also reflects the need to reduce the risk of disease, insect infestations and extreme fire behaviours in the forests where people live, work and play. I encourage you to review the C5 Forest Management Plan on Sustainable Resource Development's website at [www.srd.alberta.ca](http://www.srd.alberta.ca). Here you can find the science used to develop the plan along with a record of the opportunities that were available for stakeholders and public to provide input during the development of the plan.

The Government of Alberta supports regional land-use planning and recognizes the time and effort many Albertans have spent in the planning process. The Castle area falls within the South Saskatchewan region, where regional planning is under way. The regional plan will help guide any decision regarding additional protection for the area or new recreation and tourism opportunities. I encourage you to participate in this process, as there are still opportunities to share your views.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Frank Oberle', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Frank Oberle  
Minister

cc: Honourable Alison M. Redford, QC  
Premier

Honourable Diana McQueen  
Minister of Environment and Water