



**“Perseverance:  
Stubbornness put to good use.”**

**Attributed to the Wall Street Journal**

**July 2013**

**Walk the Headwaters** was cancelled due to an inability to find volunteer walkers for the total distance.

**Sacred Spirit of Water**, a documentary will be shown on July 4th, 7p.m. at CASA.

OWC Urban Team **Knapweed Pull** July 4th from 5 p.m to 9 p.m. at Cottonwood Park.

Alberta Clean Technology Industry Alliance (ACTIA) is planning a Clean Drinks event on September 26th, 6 p.m. at TecConnect with local speakers. Contact [www.actia.ca](http://www.actia.ca) for more information.

### **PPPI Keeps the Vision**

The Public Pastures - Public Interest group is sustaining its effort to raise public awareness of the federal government's devolvement of responsibility for public land (PFRA pastures), much of it natural prairie grasslands.

The PPPI has released its Principles which include: (1) to keep the ownership of PFRA pastures in the public domain as the best way “to balance diverse interests, to preserve the integrity of the pastures, and to ensure that the legacy of the pastures is secured for future generations; (2) to

### **MULTISAR in Jeopardy of Nickle-and-Dime Provincial Funding Cuts**

MULTISAR (Multiple Species at Risk) provides a cooperative network of farmers, ranchers, conservation groups and industry who work together to conserve and recover Alberta's native grasslands and endangered species.

Last year **MULTISAR** celebrated 10 years of success, conserving over 300,000 acres of our most critical species-at-risk habitat through the identification of key lands and developing conservation strategies for them.

Wildlife and range experts work together with landowners, lessees, industrial groups and other conservation partners such as Alberta Conservation Association to cooperatively develop special management approaches to conserve and recover multiple species at

maintain livestock grazing as a priority for the management of healthy grasslands; (3) utilize professional pasture managers to preserve the expertise developed over generations; (4) to preserve the natural landscapes and ecological integrity of the pastures; and (5) to preserve the cultural and historical significance of these heritage rangelands.

Authors Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson have toured the grasslands to raise public interest.

risk including sage grouse, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, short-horned lizard, northern leopard frog, prairie rattlesnake, swift fox, western blue flag and others.

Other wildlife like pronghorn antelope and sharp-tailed grouse also benefit. The landowners with species-at-risk on their land are involved in MULTISAR and voluntarily participate in the development and implementation of management plans.

The annual cost to Albertans of this proven program is just \$400,000 per year. Without government funds, several parts of the MULTISAR program will be terminated in just a few weeks. Alberta's commitments to farmers and ranchers in

southern Alberta will remain unfulfilled and the government's own species at risk recovery plans will be ineffective.

The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development needs to provide secure ongoing permanent funding for MULTISAR, thereby continuing to leverage the money by a factor of three, as they currently do.

Please, advocate for continued and long-term funding for MULTISAR with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, your MLA and members of government and opposition parties. Their contact information may be found at [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca).

### **Our Gender-Bending Water**

**The Tye** recently reported research on the longnose dace, a silvery minnow found in the Oldman and the Bow rivers. Random catches of the minnow have shown a sharp decline of male minnows, and “In some parts of the Oldman River, downstream from cattle feedlots and municipal waste treatment outflows, male dace had all but vanished from the population.”

The leading suspects are chemicals that mimic endocrine hormones that carry signals for physiological growth during development. The Tye

article notes that “23,000 toxic compounds are estimated to be present in the Canadian living and working environment - with 1,000 new ones added every year.” Many are endocrine disruptors that affect the development of boy-parts. Most are not captured in standard municipal water treatment or waste-water treatment facilities.

Researchers have noted a steady shift in fewer male births over the decades. A recent documentary called **The Disappearing Male** has caught the attention of the public.

## Clear Future for Business: Muddy One for Canadians

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., written March 2012)

Okay, I get it! In light of federal government plans to de-regulate, defang environmental legislation (the Federal Fisheries Act is first) and deny public process by arbitrarily speeding up regulatory hearings, the message is now blindingly obvious to me.

This is the message the federal government sends: Rules are too restrictive, the public isn't concerned about the environment and dollars can flee in an instant if we don't create a safe haven. With careless strokes of political pens, the federal government wishes to reset the legislative clock backwards to a frontier era of minimal government

oversight. Current governments seem reticent to plan, employ evaluative tools based on actual monitoring data, use the tool of cumulative effects analysis, or any science for that matter, to chart a predictable course for the future.

It would seem they don't want to think or care about tomorrow- it will have to take care of itself. This is in direct contrast to previous governments and generations who looked to the future and set in place the environmental legislation used today. There is nothing inherently wrong with the legislation although many might quibble

with its administration. The answer does not lie in throwing out the cumulative refinements of many years, but in addressing the logistical questions of how legislation is applied.

Our federal government is bound to water down environmental legislation like the Federal Fisheries Act (others will follow) so the bar is set low enough for industry to accept there is no longer an impediment to investment and development. The bar, by the way, is presumably going to be set to "get government out of the way and let corporations flourish." What that inevitably means is the exter-

### Interesting Links:

Jessica Ernst, Brief Review Threats to Groundwater ... <http://www.ernstversusencana.ca/>

Edmonton's Energy Transition - Pembina Institute <http://www.pembina.org/pub/2391>

Keeping Pace: Improving environmental decision-making in Canada  
[http://cwf.ca/pdf-docs/publications/KeepingPace\\_May2012\\_web.pdf](http://cwf.ca/pdf-docs/publications/KeepingPace_May2012_web.pdf)

Presentation by local Grade 11 student, Amenemhet Sanchez: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8MASVT1SqI>



**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)

nalization of costs to the environment and society, to enhance the profit margin of corporations and business. It follows a long held belief, bereft of much analysis, that regulations are an unacceptable cost to business.

Conversely, if there was full cost accounting for development projects, especially related to mining and energy, Canadians might be shocked at the bottom lines for the costs and consequences to the public and the environment compared with the financial benefits. Certainly objective accounting would indicate the false economy, even foolishness, of further axing professional government staff that often provide the only assessment and regulatory role in development projects and proposals. Cutting over 700 environmental research, monitoring and regulatory positions might be a signal of the intention to abandon protecting the environment.

In the spin to continue to attract foreign investment, governments will castigate, criticize and demonize anyone who objects to this anti-environment trend of deregulation by making the objec-

tors "enemies of the state". It's as if we Canadians are expected to hike up our skirts and wink at any investor, cheapening ourselves at the expense of our ecological virtue.

The public face of business touts corporate stewardship, with saccharine statements about care for the environment. However, behind the scenes unelected captains of industry are setting our policy at the same time our government moves to deny us the opportunity to register objections and question the merits of development projects.

While "certainty" and "realistic timelines" are part of the corporate rhetoric, the federal government response for "efficient" and "streamlined" review processes spells an inherent danger. Rushing to give investors a quick approval for development risks a lack of reflective review, cumulative impact assessment and a full appraisal of long term costs, consequences and benefits. It could be viewed as an abrogation of the public trust.

In the ideology of greed, where the corporate whim overrides the public good, the

unmistakable message is- we don't care about the future. Corporate interests have spoken and what they say is- we have to reset the clock to today, not tomorrow. Today is as good as it gets and we must quickly extract the maximum value, as a return on private investment, soon as is possible. When the children of tomorrow find out a brimming bank account won't buy them clean water, breathable air, fertile soil, space, biodiversity or a suite of essential ecological services, well, that's just too bad.

Gandhi said, "The future depends on what you do today"; given the plans and the actions of the federal government related to changes in environmental legislation and oversight, Gandhi's words are prophetic and alarming.

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## What Money Can't Buy: The moral limits of markets (2012)

The argument presented by Michael Sandel in *What Money Can't Buy* is pretty straight forward: There are instances in which we rightfully feel uncomfortable with the intrusion of 'market mechanisms' in our personal and civic life. My first impression was that the book was unimpressive - stating the obvious. Afterward, though, I found myself thinking more about the many interesting examples he provides and the implications for environmental advocacy, and it is from this perspective that I would like to share this book.

The two main arguments Sandel provides to understand what money should and should not buy include the 'fairness objection' and the 'corruption objection'. The "fairness objection asks about the inequality that market choices may reflect; the corruption objection asks about the attitudes and norms that market relations may damage or dissolve. ... The fairness objection points to the injustice that can arise when people buy and sell things under conditions of inequality or dire economic necessity. According to this objection, market exchanges are not always as voluntary as market enthusiasts suggest. ... The corruption objection is different. It points to the degrading effect of market valuation and exchange on certain goods and practices. According to this objection, certain moral and civic goods are diminished or corrupted if bought or sold" (p.110).

Sandel provides many examples of each type of objection. He shares examples of queue-jumping where people can pay extra to gain priority access, bypassing lines at airports, amusement parks, and restrictions to car pool lanes. There are companies that provide the service of line-standers in which unemployed or homeless people are hired to wait in lines to access Congressional hearings or access free tickets for Shakespeare in the Park.

He gives further examples of the state offering incentives to drug addicts for 'voluntary' sterilization, bribes by medical groups for people to lose weight, buying the right to immigrate to the United

States, and buying the rights to hunt endangered species.

Sandel explains the standard neoliberal perspective that everything is a market transition, and that putting these things in the market optimizes the system - the people who pay the most, it is said, will enjoy the good or service more and others are not left less well off by the transaction. The fairness objective, on the other hand, argues that not everybody enters the market on a voluntary basis (that they are coerced by financial need), and that market transactions confuse money with value - the ability to pay as opposed to a sense of fairness in civil society.

More interestingly is the creeping of market relations into areas that corrupt our institutions, our intrinsic virtues, and our sense of human dignity. Sandel tells of a village in Switzerland deciding whether or not to accept a nuclear waste storage facility. The citizens were evenly split, so the state offered a cash incentive to accept the facility. The support for the facility actually diminished to 25% after the cash incentive was offered. "When people are engaged in an activity they consider intrinsically worthwhile, offering them money may weaken their motivation by depreciating or "crowding out" their intrinsic interest or commitment" (p.122). The Swiss villagers were willing to accept the facility as a form of virtue, for the greater good in a society that derives its electricity from nuclear power. The monetary offer corrupted this sense of virtue.

Sandel argues that mainstream economics has overlooked the "commercialization effect." By this he means "the effect on the characteristics of a product or activity of supplying it exclusively or predominantly on commercial terms rather than on some other basis - such as informal exchange, mutual obligation, altruism or love, or feelings of service or obligation" (p.120).

It is this point that has relevance to environmental advocacy. Monetizing or incentivizing the 'value' of nature, biodiversity, or the reduction of pollution emitted into the soil, water and air diminishes the in-



trinsic motivation that will arguably be needed to preserve a healthy biosphere. Sandel states: "Where global cooperation is at stake, allowing rich countries to avoid meaningful reductions in their own energy use by buying the right to pollute from others (or paying for programs that enable other countries to pollute less) does damage to two norms: it entrenches an instrumental attitude toward nature, and it undermines the spirit of shared sacrifice that may be necessary to create a global environmental ethic" (p.75). In other words, to rely on financial incentives might undermine the ethical accountability and commitment we will need to advance the common good: market-reasoning 'crowds out' moral reasoning.

Sandel argues that virtue is not a finite resource that is used up with use (as mainstream economists suggest), but a muscle that must be exercised. He quotes Aristotle who taught that virtue is something we cultivate with practice: "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts" (p.128). Similarly, Rousseau held that the more a country asks of its citizens, the greater their devotion to it: Civic virtue is built up, not spent down, by strenuous citizenship.

It might similarly be contended that environmental ethics is a civic muscle that must be exercised - that cap-and-trade schemes, clean development mechanisms, and carbon taxes are intrusions of market relationships into a place where virtue and moral reasoning may be more effective. Market mechanisms debase our sense of the sacred as it relates to our interrelationship within the (natural) world.

These are more than platitudes. Sandel offers a very real glimpse of the creeping erosion of what may very well be our most valuable resource: environmental ethics.

