



"That which seems to be wealth may in verity be only the gilded index of far-reaching ruin ... "

John Ruskin

February 2013

SAGE meeting February 7th at 7 p.m. at the Penny Coffee House.

Challenges and Opportunities of Small-Scale Solar PV
(www.lethbridge.ca/Events) event at Tec Connect, March 14th.

Ecotone Group Exhibition at (www.saag.ca) SAAG February 9th at 8 p.m.

Breeding Ecology of Northern Pintails in Prairie Landscapes, (<http://www.lethlib.ca>) Lethbridge Public Library, noon to 1 p.m., February 5th.

Supporting Sustainable Food: Panel & Reception (www.cowsandfish.org) Tuesday, February 12, SAAG

Locally Sourced Dinner & Conversations (lethbridgelocalfood-forum.eventbrite.com/) Friday, March 8, Lethbridge College, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. followed by dinner.

Idle No More on the Environment

Bill C-45 is the second omnibus bill presented by the Government of Canada under Stephen Harper. The omnibus bill is a wide-reaching document that changes legislation in as many as 64 acts and regulations.

Notably, the omnibus bill changes the *Navigation Protection Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act*. These two and the *Indian Act* have been the focus of the Idle No More movement across Canada.

With the changes to the *Navigation Protection Act*, pipelines, bridges, dams, and power transmission infrastructure projects will no longer need to prove that they won't damage waterways, unless that waterway is listed under the Act (including 97 of 32000 major lakes and only 62 rivers in the country).

The *Navigation Protection Act* was designed to protect navigation, but also "the economic and health benefits provided by the water itself. [So] that development does not negatively affect water supplies, fish and fisheries, and natural water purification and filtration services" ([Ecojustice](#)).

The *Environmental Assessment Act* builds on the momentum of the first omnibus bill to further weaken the legislation by reducing the number of projects that would require assessment.

First Nations argue that "The changes proposed in this omnibus bill would further weaken Canada's environmental laws, remove critical federal safeguards, and reduce opportunities for the public to have their say about major

industrial projects that could threaten the air, water, soil and natural ecosystems on which all Canadians, and our economy, depend" ([Ecojustice](#)).

It is clear that the Government of Canada has decided to pursue export-focused projects exploiting non-renewable resources to boost the GDP in the short term at the expense of long-term prosperity which is based on a resilient environment. Bill C-45 continues the work of the first omnibus bill in which the *Fisheries Act* and the *Hazardous Materials Information Review Act* were undermined. The one-two punch has greatly diminished environmental legislation, once used to steward a sustainable environment, clean water and healthy oceans for all Canadians.

In court, the ERCB has asked to be removed from Ernst's lawsuit arguing that the regulator has 'no duty of care to protect a citizen's groundwater.' This begs the question as to who does have this duty of care.

Despite widespread opposition and growing interest in the Ernst lawsuit, the industry persists in expanding this type of exploitation. The ERCB continues to modify regulations, recently asking for public feedback on fracking. Rachel Notley has been quoted as saying: "The new fracking directives are just another example of how this government panders to industry by letting them participate in the directive's development behind closed doors. Asking Albertans for their input now, is more akin to a PR stunt than real consultation."

Environment Lethbridge at Council

Environment Lethbridge presented the Strategic Plan and Memorandum of Agreement to city council on January 14th.

With roughly 60 people in attendance, almost all were in support of a two-year funding grant to hire an executive director and operate an office. The cost per household would be less than the energy savings of replacing an incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent (and you would have paid for the bulb).

The Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Association of Southern Alberta both presented and had concerns about Envi-

ronment Lethbridge increasing regulations and bureaucratic red tape for business and innovation. There were also concerns about the governance model and inclusivity.

The Environment Lethbridge presentation showed that both the Chamber and IASA were included in the proposed board composition and that the organization was to be open, inclusive and intended to overcome barriers - not to create new ones.

Environment Lethbridge is expected to be on a Council agenda in February for final consideration.

Fracking on Trial

After years engaged in the process of suing EnCana, Alberta Environment and the ERCB for the (alleged) contamination of her well water, Jessica Ernst's lawsuit made it to court in early January.

The incident occurred nine years ago during a period when EnCana was extensively hydraulic fracturing a shallow coal formation in the Rosebud region. This well-stimulation technique has been linked to earthquakes, surface water contamination, and groundwater contamination around the world. In Alberta, a year long investigation by the ERCB acknowledged the contamination of water aquifers and a surface blowout due to fracking.

Letter to the Lethbridge Herald

Dear Editor

Re: City Council meeting on the proposed Environment Lethbridge (EL) council held on January 14, 2013.

The issue of correct environmental conduct by citizens or industry was not questioned. Our level of consumption, solid waste management, transportation demands and utility energy uses are impacting our life daily. There is ample science based information that our present level of consumption is not sustainable. Therefore, achieving it should not be our goal. All life processes are energy based. The wise use of energy is the issue.

The Standing Senate Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources (July 19, 2012) also tells us that "energy pervades all aspects of our lives and is a key element of our social fabric".

Energy impacts our environment, energy is our economy, they can not be distinguished.

To manage our energy driven society needs information on energy acquisition, energy uses and their impact on the economy, climate, health and food supply. This information has to be integrated into city planning projects such as location of schools, industry, food outlets and bridges. City Hall does not have the benefit of such information. Acquiring it is modern business.

Acquiring project-relevant, science-based information, understanding it and explaining it to the citizens and City Council requires high level of expertise. This expertise would reside in EL. Good information costs money.

Planning for the long-term is City Hall business. This requires that EL is an integral part of City Hall

business. EL would also provide input to provincial energy and environmental regulations. Collaboration from our local academic and research institutes and industry is expected.

Informed planning is urgent as our problems are piling up daily, as we grow and consume. "The future is fraught with peril if we do not get it right" (Senate Committee)

Klaus Jericho
(Energy Collegium and Southern Alberta Group for the Environment)

One might also be interested in a January 31st Herald Op-Ed by Cosmos Voutsinos of the Energy Collegium seriously trying to undermine the potential of Environment Lethbridge. We appreciate Klaus having a more optimistic and collaborative viewpoint.

Interesting Links:

Cost-minimized combinations of wind power, solar power and electrochemical storage, powering the grid up to 99.9% of the time
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378775312014759#>

National Climate Assessment <http://ncadac.globalchange.gov/>

Tyee's Climate Change Crash Course (in 6 parts) <http://thetyee.ca/>



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

The Legacy: An elder's vision for our sustainable future (2010).

If you thought that the past few months of book reviews were a little heavy, here is one that might put a little spring into your step. In this book, 'Dr. Doom and Gloom' offers his legacy lecture, reflecting on his life trying to make us all aware of the world we live in and the many challenges we face. Now in his seventies, David Suzuki offers an elder's perspective on life - how we live it and what makes it worth living.

What makes most of Suzuki's books so engaging is his ability to tell a story without sacrificing content, and his ability to provide factual information without losing focus on the larger picture. *The Legacy* is very much a story. It is the story of his concerns for nature (and humanity within it) and his visions for a better future. I can think of no other author that can tell it like it is without losing a vision for something better - maybe there is a little Dr. Doom, but there is certainly no Dr. Gloom.

Like many economists and environmentalists over the past couple of decades, Suzuki recognizes the limits to growth. Like Herman Daly, Suzuki sees two irreconcilable perspectives: the expansionists or 'growth-people' believe that there are no limits to population growth or economic growth as the market will send the proper signals to substitute a scarce resource for another resource or a technology.

The ecological economists, on the other hand, recognize resource limits and advocate for some form of steady-state economy that provides the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time. Our inability to recognize limits to growth allow us to over-consume natural resources and over-use the ability of nature to absorb wastes generated. Suzuki says, 'by focusing on growth, we fail to ask the most important questions, like "How much is enough?" "What are the limits?" "Are we happier with all this growth?" and "What is an economy for?"' (p.48).

Suzuki expands on our economic measures like GDP, which only measure economic activity while masquerading as a measure of well-being. The GDP is, perhaps, the single most misused number in economics. He quotes economist Clifford Cobb: "*Much of what we now consider economic growth, as measured by GDP, is really the fixing of blunders from the past and the borrowing of resources from the future*" (p.52); and then Robert F. Kennedy: "*The [GDP] counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage ... Yet [it] does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play ... It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that*

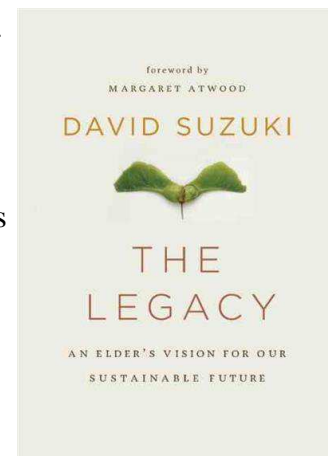


which makes life worthwhile."

And this is Elder Suzuki's point: What makes life worthwhile? He does not find it in economic output. He finds it in nature; he finds it in love; and he finds it in a loving relationship with nature: "We need love to realize our full human potential. ... We need sacred places where we go with veneration rather than to seek resources or opportunity" (p.83).

Suzuki also finds life in the place where we are. He quotes Marcel Proust: "*The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new lands but in seeing with new eyes*" (p.92). He offers stories of his family while growing up in British Columbia and Ontario, and his formative experiences in nature leading to life-long joy and wonder as a scientist. Like Kalle Lasn, Suzuki believes: "Abandon nature and you abandon your sense of the divine. More than that, you lose track of who you are."

The Legacy is a book rich in detail, clear in composition, and resonant in its breadth and depth. The Legacy resonates with optimism: that we can find a way to rediscover balance in our world. Suzuki is truly an Elder, and *The Legacy* is wisdom.





**A leading voice for a healthy and
environmentally sustainable community**

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

January 16, 2013

To: Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB)

From: Braum Barber, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

RE: Feedback – Regulating Unconventional Oil & Gas in Alberta

In the spring of 2011, SAGE submitted a number of concerns about the impact and regulation of exploiting non-conventional oil & gas resources, particularly in southern Alberta and the Kainai land. Our concerns included the growing intensity of drilling / well spacing; surface disturbances caused by noise, dust, traffic, and to wildlife and local ecologies; the use of scarce fresh water in the region; contamination of water aquifers; surface impacts to air quality (fugitive emissions and flaring) and water contamination; and the handling and disposal of toxic fluids (through deep-well injection or as solid waste).

Our recommendations were to establish water and air quality baseline data and evaluation before exploitation; set higher standards for well casing and cementing materials and techniques; establish more stringent geological evaluation to identify formation stability including natural faults and fractures; set limits on the pace and scale on exploitation in order to monitor effects over time; implement monitoring, analysis of, and response to cumulative effects; and mandate sufficient bonds to cover the costs of remediation and compensation for damage over the long term.

We are very pleased to see a significant effort by the ERCB to address many of these concerns in the past few years with new directives, and particularly the latest regulatory framework as outlined in the discussion paper, *Regulating Unconventional Oil & Gas in Alberta*. Highlights include the play-focused regulation involving multiple operators with an acknowledgement of

the need to evaluate regional cumulative effects and to establish or meet regional thresholds and outcomes. This is consistent with approaches being considered through watershed management planning under the *Water for Life* Strategy and regional planning under the *Land-use Framework*.

A key point missing is planning to avoid surface disturbance of areas that are of high value for maintenance of biodiversity including intact and fully functioning native prairie and parkland ecosystems, connecting corridors for species migration, and isolated habitats that retain diverse communities of native species. Minimizing surface disturbance by “identifying and pursuing opportunities to coordinate with disposition holders that are not in the oil and gas industry on sharing of roads and already disturbed surface sites” is key to reducing the industry’s footprint in native ecosystems not designated as high value for conservation.

Consultation with local communities and other legitimate interests early in project planning is key to integrating a variety of land uses and effectively addressing a variety of environmental and social concerns. Continuing this consultation through to abandonment of the project will help to ensure desired environmental and social outcomes are achieved.

We are pleased to see a requirement for “monitoring and reporting of groundwater and surface water, including a baseline assessment and ongoing monitoring and reporting of changes in quantity and quality, to ensure that outcomes are achieved” and for “a description of the hydraulic fracturing fluids typically used”.

We appreciate the focus on life-cycle wellbore integrity to avoid fugitive emissions that are not uncommon at the end of a well’s productive life and to ensure we do not leave a legacy of liabilities for future generations. Advances in completion technologies will also reduce the risk of contamination during production and stimulation techniques like hydraulic fracturing.

SAGE encourages the ERCB to continue to demonstrate a proactive approach to addressing the risks of this rapidly developing sector of oil & gas exploitation, and we encourage greater efforts in coordinating the monitoring of air and water quality and impacts to natural ecosystems by establishing baseline data as a component of provincial policy initiatives.

Furthermore, we continue to recommend a cautionary approach to the rate of development of new plays, with extensive geological evaluation and intensive monitoring to detect and mitigate negative effects to the environment.

SAGE supports improved regulatory oversight of developing unconventional oil & gas resources. With respect to monitoring and compliance we note that ERCB will “develop a performance monitoring process to assess the achievement of regulatory outcomes”. This document however lacks mention of how compliance will be assured. We encourage that more explanation of the compliance aspect of the new regulatory approach be provided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Pastoor', with a stylized, flowing script.

cc: Bridget Pastoor, MLA Lethbridge East
Greg Weadick, MLA Lethbridge West
Minister Diana McQueen, Minister Environment & Sustainable Resource Development