



**Climate is what you expect;
Weather is what we get.”
Mark Twain**

October 2014

Environment Lethbridge

SAGE Meeting October 16th at 7 p.m. at the downtown Public Library. (We'll try for the third Thursday of the month for November, too).

Environment Canada's **EcoAction Community Funding Program** is accepting applications for funding until the November 1, 2014 deadline. <http://www.ec.gc.ca/ecoaction/>

The Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent is pleased to announce the third round of grants through its **Adaptive Management Initiative**: crownroundtable.org

A proposal for fee-for-service was presented to the Environment Committee of Council in Lethbridge in what many have called an epoch defining moment.

In their riveting presentation Mike Spencer and Braum Barber shared a brief history of the evolution of Environment Lethbridge since 2011, and the current governance model. Environment Lethbridge is designed to encourage a diverse and inclusive approach to promoting sustainability initiatives and sharing good quality information within the community of people, businesses and government institutions including our educational institutions.

The goals of Environment Lethbridge are environmental educa-

tion and communication; to consult on policy and planning processes; and to support sustainability initiatives in the community.

These goals are aligned with the City's Municipal Development Plan / Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (MDP/ICSP), which promotes improving water and air quality, reducing waste, reducing carbon-based energy consumption (and associated emissions), improving our urban footprint, and maintaining a healthy Oldman River valley and system of open spaces.

Direct benefits to the community are cost efficiencies for homeowners and business, attracting and retaining people and businesses to Lethbridge,

and working towards an environment in which our children and grandchildren can thrive.

Environment Lethbridge has proposed a fee-for-service agreement with the City of Lethbridge to provide community outreach and environmental education in the city; to establish benchmarks for air and water quality, energy consumption, and waste management, from which improvements can be monitored as indicators of local improvements in sustainability.

Environment Lethbridge believes that it is everyone's interest to be sustainable, and that Environment Lethbridge can provide a moderate voice focused on broad community interests.

Recreational Resort Approved near Police Lake

Despite the opposition of the Boundary Creek landowners, individuals and groups like SAGE, the Council of Cardston County approved by a vote of 5:2 a recreational resort for RV camping and facilities for 'family reunions'.

The additional activity will negatively impact the Outpost Wetlands Natural Area which is an important preserve for some species-at-risk in the province. It will also potentially diminish habitat

for wildlife and put greater stress on the headwaters of the Oldman River.

According to the Boundary Creek landowners, the developer is now free to apply for a development permit to build whatever they want that fits under either the 'Permitted Uses' or 'Discretionary Uses' guidelines of the Rural Recreation land use description.

The group said: "To say the least, this is a very disappointing outcome for the Boundary Creek landowners. We must now lick our emotional wounds, pay our legal bills, and somehow come to terms with having a large recreational complex in our serene agricultural community. We are also concerned that this decision may set precedence for the approval of other non-agricultural developments in the Boundary Creek area in the future."



In Memorium ...

(By Cheryl Bradley)

Tribute to Bill Brown (1926-2014)



Bill Brown, an active member of SAGE for over a quarter of a century, passed away on September 7, 2014 at the age of 87 years. He will be greatly missed.

Bill helped to direct the work of SAGE as Board member for twelve years (1994-2006) including holding the position of Chair (1994-1997) and Secretary (2004-2006). His volunteer efforts also benefitted other local environmental organizations, including the Lethbridge Naturalists Society, Lethbridge Fish &

Game Association, Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition and Southern Alberta Community of Environmental Educators.

Even in the last few years as his health was failing, Bill continued to follow environmental issues in our community, to advocate for environmental protection, and to mentor a new generation of environmental activists and nature appreciators.

Nature was an interest and passion for Bill beginning with his childhood as son of a gamekeeper on an estate in Scotland. He studied botany and horticulture at both the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh and the Birmingham Botanic Garden, interrupted by a stint in the navy near the end of the Second World War. In 1957 Bill immigrated to Canada to work for

City of Edmonton Parks and in 1961 moved to Lethbridge to become the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation. He remained in that position until 1987.

Bill's foresight established the framework for the amazing network of parks and green spaces our community enjoys today and advanced environmental literacy in Lethbridge. During his 26 years working with the City of Lethbridge, Bill oversaw development of the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre and designation of several urban river valley parks. He was instrumental in drafting the City's River Valley Redevelopment Plan which set a tone towards protecting the river valley environment from major developments.

Following his retirement from civil service, Bill's strong and impassioned voice for nature was heard often in our community. Putting his Toastmaster skills to good use, he served as Master of Ceremonies for several environmental events in Lethbridge and gave numerous presentations on environmental topics. He spoke at public hearings regarding Lethbridge parkland, environmental impacts of the Oldman River Dam, forest management planning in Cypress Hills Provincial Park, and expansion of ski hills in national parks. He developed briefs for SAGE on matters such as provincial water policy, national parks policy, integrating environment and economy in municipal planning, promoting development of wind power, and reducing use of pesticides. Bill worked on committees with a mandate to redesign the entrance to the Liz Hall Wetlands, plan a bridge bicycle trail across the Oldman River, mitigate adverse impacts of the Oldman River Dam, and expand a

network of protected areas in the prairies of southern Alberta. For four years he represented SAGE on the Board of Alberta Ecotrust, a role that allowed him input on decisions about funding environmental projects throughout the province.

Bill's accomplishments did not go unnoticed. In 1997 he received the Lethbridge Urban Wildlife Steward Award, recognizing his work towards protecting wildlife and its habitat in the City of Lethbridge. In 2008, friends and colleagues nominated him for an Emerald Award for his lifetime commitment as a friend and advocate of the environment.

My conversations with Bill in the later years of his life revealed an abiding love and enthusiasm for nature, pride in his accomplishments and that of his protégés, and profound disappointment that leadership is lacking at all levels of government with regard to environmental stewardship. Bill had a special twinkle in his eye remembering his work with the "ABC Team". Together with Tom Atkinson and Sylvia Campbell he drew on his knowledge of public policy and mobilized the community to successfully challenge development of a motel and expansion of a golf course in urban parkland. The city council of the day was surprised by the strong reminder of the community's commitment to parks and the need to consult on matters affecting public parkland.

With Bill's passing SAGE loses a staunch supporter and nature loses a strong advocate. SAGE and our community benefitted greatly from Bill's work.

Tribute to Peter Harris (1930 – 2014)

Peter Harris, a long-standing member of SAGE, passed away in early September at the age of 84. Peter was a consummate scientist, obtaining a PhD in Entomology at the University of London, UK, and immigrating to Canada in 1959 to work as a research scientist.

His entire career was with Agriculture Canada at research stations, first in Belleville, ON., then Regina, SK., and finally Lethbridge in 1993. His research focused on biocontrol of weeds using predator insects. Finding and proving effectiveness of a biocontrol agent can take as long as 20 years. Peter's inspiration was to find a non-polluting, low-cost and environmentally-friendly alternative to

chemical weed control. Together with students, technicians and ranchers he succeeded in experiments to control noxious weeds including St. John's wort, spotted knapweed, tansy ragwort and leafy spurge, species that invade native rangelands of western Canada and reduce productivity.

Peter lectured and published papers throughout the world. He was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1997 for "contributing substantially to our knowledge of weed pests and encouraging biologists to seek out new solutions to age-old problems". SAGE benefitted from Peter's support and inspiration.

What's a Wetland Worth?

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol.)

It wasn't much of a pond, a puddle in some minds. Most called it a slough, a somewhat demeaning term. It filled in the spring and slowly receded into a sea of fox-tail by late summer. The cattle wallowed along the edges and created monstrous hummocks, dangerous to walk on top of and treacherous to navigate otherwise.

As I remember it, as summer progressed a patina of duckweed and algae developed. Mosquitoes swarmed out of it, to be met with ferocious dragonflies, the helicopter gun ships of the insect world. There was an olfactory aura surrounding it, rich, earthy and often breathtaking. No cropland was harmed by its spreading waters; the loss of pasture was compensated by a shorter walk for the cows to water and a band of lush,

tall grass ringing the pond where the hidden water reached out for their roots. Willows created a near perfect doughnut, putting their roots into the saturated soil and aspen flanked them, in the drier upland. The dead aspen were light enough for a boy to move and assemble into a raft. Dead aspen is a sponge so the voyages were short and always culminated in wet feet, if not other body parts. I yearned for more buoyant material to undertake longer voyages of discovery.

Much of us is water, about 65%. It is said that people born on coasts are subject to an irresistible pull back to water. "The ocean has an old allure", they say, "to draw her exiles back". Since all life began in the primordial soup of ancient oceans its not surprising we have

some sort of genetic hard wiring to aid that allure. Even prairie born and raised people display that attraction to water. Whether it was hard wiring, desperation or intrigue, the pond drew me as a kid like no other part of the farm. It also drew the first wave of ducks, mostly mallard drakes, with the unmistakable metallic sheen to their heads. Every so often, in the early mists of morning, one could catch a glimpse of a deer drinking at its margins. A garter snake, surging out of the grass beneath one's feet, generally got the pulse rate racing. Swallows collected mud for their nests built under the eaves of the barn. There was a cacophony of bird song; wrens scolding, warblers proclaiming their perch was the best and a red tail hawk pair that vocally resented each intrusion

Interesting Links:

Shale Gas and Hydraulic Fracturing: Framing the water issue

http://www.siwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_Fracking_Report_web.pdf

Better Growth Better Climate

<http://static.newclimateeconomy.report/TheNewClimateEconomyReport.pdf>

REthining Energy

http://www.irena.org/rethinking/Rethinking_FullReport_web_view.pdf

Two Degrees of Separation: Ambition and reality, low carbon economy index 2014

<http://preview.thenewsmarket.com/Previews/PWC/DocumentAssets/344844.pdf>



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

into their neighborhood. Yellow birds, grey birds, brown birds and multi colored birds. I wasn't to learn the theory until much later, but I knew if I wanted to see wildlife, the pond was the place. We know now that riparian areas harbor a disproportionately large share of Alberta's wildlife and that is part of their allure.

Someone with a strong arm could throw a rock across it and at its deepest a person of medium height could have waded with impunity. However, to a small boy its size, depth and workings were unfathomable. It provided the auditory signal of spring, brought by chorus frogs. At our place, it wasn't spring, officially, until their trills were heard. Stealth and patience were required to observe the males with their impossibly inflated sac. An occasional great blue heron taught me those attributes. The transformation of egg clumps to tailed larvae to adults was an independent lesson in biology, but where did they go when the pond dried up? And what creatures made those other swamp noises? Investigation, tinged with a bit of fear showed the pond also had leopard and wood frogs. It was crouching at twilight to observe these other creatures that an orange sunset, reflected and framed in the water, found a permanent home in my memory.

So what is a wetland like that worth? Economically it's hard to put a price tag on it, although we are getting better at valuing the significant ecological goods and

services wetlands provide. Could we do without wetlands? No! Beyond all the things we now know that wetlands contribute, that pond provided me with an education, experiences, risks, inspiration, entertainment, connections and appreciation. It was like thousands scattered through central Alberta; most are now gone. How many did we need? As we are slowly beginning to appreciate, most of them. My pond is still there and it is priceless.

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist and an Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary

TDFEF Tree Days

The TD Friends of the Environment are celebrating their 'tree days' initiative where TD staff and communities plant trees in the urban landscape.

In a special report, *The Value of Urban Forests in Cities Across Canada*, TD highlights that "urban forests are the trees and other plants found on the streets, in our yards, in parks, and surrounding our major cities. These forests provide a multitude of benefits, enhancing the landscape, reducing pollution, and helping control heating/cooling costs. The greater Halifax, Montreal, and Vancouver areas together con-

tain more than 100 million trees, worth an estimated \$51 billion (Halifax: \$11.5b; Montreal: \$4.5b; Vancouver: \$35b). The return on trees is significant: for each dollar spent on maintenance, between \$1.88 and \$12.70 in benefits are realized each year, depending on the city."

These values are based on managing stormwater during wet weather and adding water to groundwater aquifers, urban air quality, energy savings (like air conditioning), energy emissions savings (like greenhouse gases), and carbon sequestration. Other benefits are the addition of habitat for wildlife and supporting biodiversity, reducing the heat island effect caused by large expanses of concrete in urban areas, noise buffering, and improving aesthetic and psychological well-being of urban dwellers.

This year over 8,000 volunteers across Canada are planting. In the past four years, TD Tree Days has planted over 135,000 trees and this year there are over 50,000 trees being added.

If you are interested in participating next year in Lethbridge, information is available at www.tdtreedays.com/en-ca/events/



A Geography of Blood: Unearthing memory from a prairie landscape (2012)

Candace Savage wrote *Prairie: A Natural History* which was reviewed and awarded the prestigious 5-wind turbine rating in the January 2012 SAGE newsletter.

In *A Geography of Blood*, Savage shares the story of how she ends up living in Eastend, Saskatchewan, but the story expands to envelop the fascinating history of the region.

The story begins with her research for *Prairie: A Natural History* which brings her to southern Saskatchewan for a holiday at a writer's retreat in Eastend. Events conspire to keep her in the town, which is interpreted by her to be a signal to slow down and listen. What she begins to hear is the past: the geological history of the region around the Cypress Hills—the great inland sea, the dinosaurs, the ice age, and the formation of the unique hills on the border of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The interest of Scotty, the local T Rex (fossilized remains, of course), soon gives away to a more recent history of the First Peoples as she 'discovers' teepee rings—some of which are thought to date back thousands of years.

And then, as her narrative approaches the present, she tells the story of the arrival of traders from the United States, the march west by the RNWMP, and the colonization of the prairies by European settlers. Her interest in this history is piqued by a sign near Eastend

that indicated: "Crazy Horse Camp" and the map caption that read "Legend has it that Chief Crazy Horse and a group of his followers camped here in 1876."

Savage weaves together the trading efforts of the Hudson Bay outpost at Chimney Coulee, as the buffalo vanished from the prairie. She describes the arrival of the police and the establishment of Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills on the site of a massacre of first peoples by not-so-nice traders.

After the defeat of the American cavalry at the Battle of the Greasy Grass, General Terry of the American army was assigned the job of forcing the Lakota onto reservations. Many fled to Canada hoping for compassion from the Great Mother, only to be disappointed. Leading Chiefs like Bear's Head, Iron Dog, Spotted Eagle, Medicine Turns Around, Sitting Bull and many others met an American delegation at Fort Walsh, and rejected their offers for 'fair treatment' if they agreed to settle peacefully on their assigned reserves.

The Cypress Hills became one of the last areas where the great herds of buffalo still roamed. This drew many of the nations of First Peoples as they pursued their traditional lives - but it soon became clear that change was coming.

As the buffalo became more scarce, there was little to curb their destruction. Savage writes: "My heart goes out to the young Metis hunter,

aged twenty-five and with a family to support, who explained in the mid-1960s that he couldn't stop running buffalo, no matter what the consequences. 'I must take my part,' he said, 'with all the other people who ... [are] killing the buffalo and getting rich.' Faced with our own failure to respond to climate change and an extinction crisis that now threatens twenty percent of all amphibians, mammals, and birds, we have little reason to believe that we would have chosen differently or better."

The Canadian government negotiated with the First People living in the region to select areas for reserves and promised to help them learn to farm so as to be able to sustain their livelihoods. Savage tells the story of government incompetence and of prejudice that leaves the First Peoples starving. To diffuse the discontent, the government scattered the groups around the province, leaving the Cypress Hill largely vacant, except for a small band that refused to leave.

A Geography of Blood was a very satisfying read - part biography, part history. It is the story of the land we call home ... sad, angering, beautiful, and even hopeful. Savage ends the book with the relationships she has developed with First Peoples who consider the Cypress Hills important in their various cosmologies.

