



**“Economic advance is not the same thing as human progress.”**

**John Clapham**

**September 2012**

## **Advancing the Idea of ‘Environment Lethbridge’**

### **Next SAGE meeting:**

Thursday, October 4th at the Fish & Game Hut.

### **Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup**

at Helen Schuler Nature Centre, September 22, 2 to 4 p.m.

Watch for SAGE’s proposal on the **Shell Fueling Change** website.

**Water Sustainability in Canada’s West**, October 1st, see OWC website for registration.

A steering committee representing businesses, environmental groups, and educational institutions in the city has worked for the past year and a half to develop a strategic plan for Environment Lethbridge. This organization would act as an arms-length council facilitating communication and best practices within the city.

The vision is to create “An organization, Environment Lethbridge, which works with the City of Lethbridge and the Community to provide insight and direction toward environmental sustainability in policy, planning and education.” The main goals are to promote Lethbridge as a leader in environment sustainability by provid-

ing a cooperative process for the flow of information, advice and expertise between the Community and the City of Lethbridge regarding environmental sustainability.

First initiatives will be to establish a ‘storefront’ office to provide a means of collecting and sharing information on environmentally sustainable practices and programs, and to encourage community awareness of environmental issues, challenges, and opportunities in the region.

Once established, Environment Lethbridge would collaborate with the City of Lethbridge and the community on sustainability initiatives to engage individuals, groups

and businesses in making Lethbridge more sustainable in the future. The organization would also act as a resource for the creation of policy and incentives to achieve realizable sustainability goals.

The strategic plan has been presented to the City of Lethbridge Environment Committee, and will be presented to City Council at a community issues committee (CIC) meeting in September. A fee-for-service type of relationship will be advanced to provide initial funding for dedicated staff who will execute the strategic plan. Watch for the CIC and show your support at City Council.

## **Billion Dollar Green Challenge**

Lethbridge College has joined the [Billion Dollar Green Challenge](#) with an investment of \$250,000. This challenge ‘encourages colleges, universities, and other nonprofit institutions to invest a combined total of one billion dollars in self-managed green revolving funds that finance energy efficiency improvements.’

The funds allocated are considered ‘revolving funds,’ as expenditures are expected to be returned through cost sav-

ings in energy utilities. The goals of the challenge are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by fostering a culture of resource efficiency, expand financial resources for future projects, establish best practices for educational institutions, and to provide research opportunities for faculty and students.

To date, there are 44 institutions involved in North America, with a total commitment of \$88 million,

## **Allocating Alberta’s Water**

[Water Matters](#) has released a new study on the allocation of water in Alberta. The paper argues that the province faces “serious and growing risks from increasing water demand driven by population growth and the expansion of water-intensive land-uses, declining water supplies and quality, and increasingly impaired aquatic ecosystems.”

A series of recommendations address the need for policy options and mechanisms for reallocating water to the environment, including a re-

view of current licensing agreements and acknowledgement of science-based values for instream flow needs (IFN).

Water users and license holders were interviewed for their feedback on water issues and management opportunities. Comments suggested a comfort with the existing system, a distrust of government decisions, and an understanding that more has to be done to ensure the health of the rivers.

## What's Behind the Back-Door of CETA and TPP Trade Negotiations?

There has been a background buzz for that past couple of years of expanding trade deals, one between Canada and the European Union, and the other with the Pacific region.

CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) is being negotiated between the federal and provincial governments and the European Union (now in its 10<sup>th</sup> round of talks). Specifics of the agreement are uncertain as the participants have been bound to confidentiality. Though the specifics of the agreement cannot be disclosed, this has not prevented federal ministers from recently touring the country to express why it will be good for Canadians – fortunately, there is no reason not to trust our governments to work in our best interests.

Some of the concerns being raised about proposed CETA rules revolve around the restrictions to 'subnational' trade – that is, procurement, services and trade that occur within the country. 'Made in Canada' content requirements would be challenged, as would 'Buy Local' policies that discriminate against EU suppliers. Procurement, job creation, and trade could no longer be

targeted to specifically foster local or national economic goals, or sustainability initiatives. For example, efforts to facilitate innovation, promote social goals, support food security, provide local services like water and wastewater treatment and distribution, or address environmental problems would no longer be allowable under the trade agreement.

Many see a strong correlation between the direction of the CETA negotiations with the recent federal government assault on the Wheat Board and a broad spectrum of environmental laws and regulations. Expanded rules on patents will allow biotechnology, pesticide and seed companies to restrict the rights of farmers to save, reuse and sell grain - and they are more vulnerable as they act as independent marketers. Furthermore, the new trade rules will make it much more difficult to enact stricter environmental regulations in the future (a situation aggravated by the recent emasculation of law and regulations that protect the environment).

In the past two years, dozens of municipalities, non-government organiza-

tions, and school boards have passed resolutions expressing concern about the impact to 'subnational' decision-making, procurement regulations, and the delivery of public services. Many have asked for a 'clear and permanent exemption' from the trade agreement.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is an agreement with the United States and eight other countries around the Pacific Ocean. Some find it curious how little Canada gains from the terms of the TPP, and suggest that this agreement is a back-door mechanism to force regulatory changes within the country. In entering the negotiations, Canada agreed to adhere to the terms already established by the process, and that the terms of the agreement will remain secret until concluded. The two main targets of the agreement appears to be the strengthening of corporate control of intellectual property, and restricting current agricultural supply management practices on dairy, eggs, and poultry products.

It is clear that Canadians will not know the extent and impact of these trade negotiations until they are ratified.

### Interesting Links:

Grass to Xeriscape Cost Benefit Analysis and Qualitative Study

[oldmanbasin.org](http://oldmanbasin.org)

The Impact of Wind Power on Household Energy Bills

<http://thegwfpf.org/images/stories/gwfpf-reports/hughes-evidence.pdf>

Public Awareness and Acceptance of Carbon Capture and Storage in Canada

[IPAC-CO2 Research Inc](http://IPAC-CO2_Research_Inc)

**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 Creation: An appeal to save life on Earth (2006)

Famed Harvard professor, Edward O. Wilson has written extensively on nature, ecology, and human impact on the biosphere. *The Creation* is his latest appeal to raise awareness on the importance of sustaining the ecosystems upon which human life relies: "the fate of Creation is the fate of humanity."

*The Creation* is written to an imaginary pastor with the hope of bridging "the two most powerful forces in the world today": science and religion. Nonetheless, the book is written for everyone.

Wilson begins by describing the sheer destructive power of our species on the ecosystem: "We have, all by our bipedal, wobbly-headed selves, altered Earth's atmosphere and climate away from the norm. We have spread thousands of toxic chemicals worldwide, appropriated 40 percent of the solar energy available for photosynthesis, converted almost all of the easily arable land, dammed most of the rivers, raised the planet sea level, and now, in a manner likely to get everyone's attention like nothing else before it, we are close to running out of fresh water. A collateral effect of all this frenetic activity is the continuing extinction of wild ecosystems, along with the species that compose them. This also happens to be the only human impact that is irreversible" (p.29).

Expanding on species loss: "With the global species extinction rate now exceeding the global species birthrate at least a hundredfold, and soon to increase to ten times that much, and with the birthrate falling through the loss of sites where evolution can occur; the number of species is plummeting" (p.84). Wilson decries the 'zoo-and-garden' option of preserving species, arguing that nature is far too complex for it to be preserved piecemeal. For him, "living nature is nothing more than the commonality of organisms in

the wild state and the physical and chemical equilibrium their species generate through interaction with one another: But it is also nothing less than that commonality and equilibrium" (p.32). The sixth mass extinction that we are imposing on Earth, Wilson calls the Eremozoic Era – the Age of Loneliness.

One of the conflicting messages of the book (and one of environmentalism in general) relates to the difference between nature-in-itself and nature-for-humankind. For example, compare Wilson's definition for living nature as the 'commonality and equilibrium' of organisms (above) with the definition of environmental damage as "any change that alters our surroundings in a direction contrary to humanity's inborn physical and emotional needs" (p.27). Similarly, Wilson asks "But what is Nature?" and he offers: "The simplest possible answer is also the best: Nature is that part of the original environment and its life forms that remains after the human impact. Nature is all on planet Earth that has no need of us and can stand alone" (p.15).

So, it seems, Nature is what is outside of human influence - it is what is left over after we have consumed, converted, and polluted in our efforts to sustain and entertain our population. I think this perspective is common enough, but it belies the message being delivered to the pastor, whose religion is being accused of viewing nature as serving the needs of humankind. To be clear, there seems to be a struggle between in Wilson's argument between a 'deep' green perspective (in which nature includes the human species and has an intrinsic value) and a 'shallow' green perspective (in which nature has value *for* the human species).

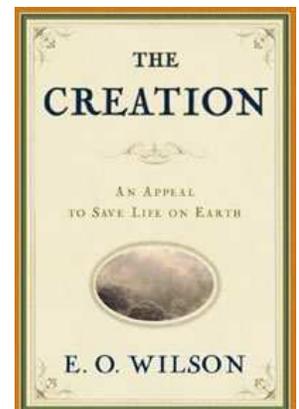
Along these lines, Wilson cites a study that concluded "that in order to put a protective umbrella over the twenty-five hottest spots [for species diversity] on

the land ... would require one payment of about \$30 billion. The benefit, if the allotment is joined with wise investment strategy and foreign policy, would be substantial protection for 70 percent of Earth's land-dwelling fauna and flora" (p.98). Similarly, to "regulate a reserve network covering 20 – 30 percent of the ocean surface would cost between \$5 billion and \$19 billion annually" (p.99). In other words, before you can say 'collateralized debt obligation' we could protect a majority of the species on earth within their ecosystems.

The fact that we don't do this begs the question on how we value nature. From a deeper green perspective, we would understand that conservation is simple prudence - as quoted, "the fate of Creation is the fate of humanity." But from a shallow green perspective, the question would be: "What do we get for that investment?" Imposing our system of valuation on Nature in this way (precisely, by giving it a monetary value) implies that Nature is *for* us to use, and the price we pay has to be worth it (for us). Putting a value on nature frames the discussion from a 'resourcist' perspective, as opposed to a more conservationist perspective.

*The Creation* is a wise book written by a learned person for the worthy goal of aligning the powerful influence of religion with the insights of science - particularly as it relates to the perseverance of Nature as a whole (including us). His personal development and experiences in biology are engaging and softens an otherwise blunt exposition.

Three and a half wind turbines means it is a solid book.





ALBERTA

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

*Office of the Minister*

AR 48897

August 2, 2012

Mr. Braum Barber  
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)  
Box 383  
Lethbridge, AB T1J 3E9  
[braum.barber@lethbrige.college.ca](mailto:braum.barber@lethbrige.college.ca)

Dear Mr. Barber:

Thank you for copying me on your letter dated June 28, 2012, regarding the Government of Canada's Bill C-38. Premier Alison Redford has also reviewed your comments and asked me to respond on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

I assure you this government is first and foremost committed to protecting our environment, while ensuring responsible resource development. Alberta has a proven track record of delivering a strong regulatory system that allows for progress while protecting our air, land, water, and biodiversity. The Government of Alberta is working with the federal government to ensure our environment and resources are protected and managed well into the future.

The proposed changes to the federal environmental assessment program have the potential to strengthen Canada's current rigorous environmental requirements and legislation and move towards a more effective and efficient approach to environmental assessments. No matter what happens with the Canadian program, every project within Alberta will continue to undergo a strict approval process backed by our *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*. Our approval process is open and transparent, allowing for ample public input to ensure every project maintains our strict standards, mitigates impacts, and meets Alberta's needs.

Public engagement is an important component of our policy structure. Consultation by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development regarding potential impacts on Rights and Traditional Uses is carried out in accordance with *Alberta's First Nations Consultation Guidelines*. We are committed to working with our First Nations partners and Albertans, and we will listen to their concerns and make the best possible decisions for our province.

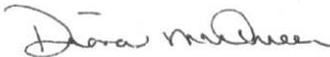
In the past, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada have worked collaboratively to align our processes and, where possible, reduce or eliminate overlap and duplication through the *Canada-Alberta Agreement For Environmental Assessment Cooperation*. The Government of Alberta is looking forward to continuing this relationship and reviewing the proposed federal legislative changes.

The Government of Alberta fully recognizes the environmental challenges associated with development in the oil sands region, and we are shifting to a cumulative effects management system that seeks to balance economic development with environment and natural resources protection at a regional level. Completion of the regional plans is one of this government's priorities.

Our commitments to enhancing environmental monitoring and implementing cumulative effects management will be strengthened further as we move to a single regulator for Alberta's energy sector. The project will eliminate duplication among the work of multiple jurisdictions and streamline stringent environmental regulation processes, allowing us to focus effectively on our environmental and sustainable resource development priorities.

Although the world will continue to rely on fossil fuels for some time to come, the Government of Alberta takes our environmental and humanitarian responsibilities seriously and we are working to improve how fossil fuels are developed and used. We will continue to be at the forefront of effective and groundbreaking environmental and resource management policy. I am confident we will deliver a better Alberta by building on the strength and passion that Albertans have for developing our natural resources responsibly, while protecting our air, land, water, and biodiversity.

Sincerely,



Diana McQueen  
Minister

c: Honourable Alison M. Redford, QC  
Premier



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

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

August 9, 2012

To: Mayor Dodic and Lethbridge City Council

From: Braum Barber, SAGE

Re: Environment Lethbridge

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Please accept this letter in support of the Environment Lethbridge Strategic Plan. This plan aligns directly with the City's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan / Municipal Development Plan (ICSP/MDP) in the effort to "ensure that Lethbridge is a leader in environmental stewardship, innovation and active leadership." This organization offers to foster Sustainability, alongside the existing broad-based organizations dealing with economic and social development in the community, including the Lethbridge Sports Council, the Allied Arts Council, and Economic Development Lethbridge.

The Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE) endorses the vision of an organization in Lethbridge that would provide insight and help define direction toward environmental sustainability policy, planning and education. If we are to continue to build the social and economic resilience of Lethbridge in the future, it will be important to cultivate a cooperative process of communication between the Community (business, industry and citizens) and the City of Lethbridge regarding environmental sustainability. Quality educational materials that are regionally appropriate could be developed to provide clear direction for the Community on topics including waste management, energy efficiency, alternative transportation, alternative energy technologies, water conservation and xeriscaping. Environment Lethbridge would also provide value-added work in communication, policy development and implementation, and advocacy for City and Community initiatives.

We are very excited about the prospect of establishing a collaborative and effective organization in Lethbridge that would help facilitate efforts to sustain our collective prosperity and the health of the ecosystem of which we are a part.