



“We have Paleolithic emotions; medieval institutions; and god-like technology. And it is terrifically dangerous ...”
E.O. Wilson

April 1, 2017

Government Allowing OHVs in Castle After All

SAGE Meeting, April 26th, 7 p.m. at the Lethbridge Public Library.

SAGE will be accepting membership fees for 2017 up to or at AGM (date and location TBA)

Important: Take the online [survey](#) for the Castle Provincial & Wildland Park. For more information, visit the government website at www.albertaparks.ca/

Lethbridge Sustainable Living Association planning for Applefest (and other summertime activities). For more information visit their website at:

www.lethbridgesustainableliving.org

In a dramatic change of position, the Government of Alberta has decided to allow, and are even encouraging, unlimited OHV access to the Castle Provincial and Wildland parks.

The decision was based on a science-like report just published by Crayola. The report concluded: “OHV use donut hurt the nachure.” Government researchers and Minister Phillips descended on the Castle area to ground-proof the report and admitted that they saw no indica-

tion of distress to wildlife. In fact, one research biologist acknowledged, they saw no indications of wildlife at all, except an old, MEC-wearing hippy standing near a trail as the team buzzed by on their quads.

During the investigation, the research team was able to enjoy some recreational activities. “There is a lot of fun to be had ripping around with all that horsepower at one’s fingertips,” said Minister Phillips.

An unnamed government official told SAGE media that the Minister was an extraordinary muddogger - “a real natural.”

The Mud Squad was grudgingly pleased with the decision, though they want the government to pay for more trails, and they have demanded that fuel for OHVs be exempt from the Carbon Levy. A local representative was quoted to say: “It makes no sense that we pay a carbon tax to protect the future of natural areas.”

Environmental NGOs were also quietly relieved. “We were a bit discomfited by being thrust into the position of supporting government decisions that actually addressed the environmental issues that challenge us all,” said one SAGE director. “We hope we can just quietly return to our comfort zone as unheeded hand-wringers.”



Grassland Conservation Petition Standing for Nature

From Public Pastures - Public Interest:

Grasslands are the most endangered, the most altered and yet the least protected ecosystem on the planet. They contain more Species at Risk than any other region of the country. The Community Pastures in Saskatchewan contain some of the largest, best managed and biodiverse rich blocks of remaining native grasslands in North America. A conservation network will not only protect our grasslands but support Canada's biodiversity Target 1 to protect 17% of all terrestrial areas and inland water.

An online petition has been organized to encourage the Federal Government to work with First Nations, livestock producers, local communities, and conservation organizations to invest in the ecological wellbeing of grassland ecosystems.

If you are interested, consider the online petition:

<https://petitions.parl.gc.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-927>

Energy Efficiency Alberta

Energy Efficiency Alberta has initiated the Residential No-Charge Energy Savings Program which offers Albertans the opportunity to install energy efficient products in their homes at no charge - a benefit of revenues from the carbon levy.

The single most effective way to reduce carbon emissions is to reduce the consumption of energy. You may sign up online at:

<https://www.energycanada.ca/residential-no-charge/>

A trained guide will evaluate your home to identify opportunities for energy-efficient upgrades, like lighting, programmable thermostat, clean furnace filters, low-flow water fixtures, among others.

A river in New Zealand has become the first in the world to be recognized as a living entity with its own rights and values and given the legal status of a person (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac6mRKqdQGY>)

The Whanganui River is located in the north island of New Zealand and has a special and spiritual importance for the Maori people. The government of New Zealand Parliament has given the river the ability to represent itself through human representatives, one appointed by a Maori community, known as Iwi, and one by the Crown.

The conflict has taken roughly 150 years to be resolved and, in addition to the legal standing given the river, the resulting government Bill provides an \$80 million settlement to be used to restore the health of the river.

This may be the first time that a specific river has been given legal standing, but other countries have previously addressed issues of the rights of nature. For example, the constitution of Ecuador gives nature "the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution." Similarly, MP Linda Duncan introduced a private member's bill in 2014 to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights, though the Act focusses on the

Interesting Links:

Davison, Isaac, 2017 (March 15), "Whanganui River given legal status of a person under unique Treaty of Waitangi settlement," New Zealand Herald http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11818858

George, Nirmala, 2017 (March 21), "India gives Ganges, Yamuna rivers same rights as a human," ABC News <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/court-indian-rivers-rights-human-46270219>

rights of humans to a healthy environment rather than the rights of the environment *per se*.

The wisdom of the decision to give legal standing to a river in New Zealand is that it shifts the legal focus from human use of the environment to the health of the environment itself. In the end, all human use of the natural environment is premised on its sustainable health. One can see the opportunity to use this approach for the wild Peel River watershed in the Yukon, with its destiny hanging in the courts after many years of litigation.

It is also interesting to note that in 1999 New Zealand became the first country in the world to give five great apes basic rights ending their use in research, testing, and teaching. In 2007, the Balearic Islands (an autonomous province of Spain) passed legislation granting legal personhood to all great apes.

This may appear odd, but giving nature standing is really no more peculiar than giving social constructs like corporations legal standing. Interesting further reading along these lines includes *Wild Law* by Cormac Cullinan, and *The Rights of Nature: A Case for the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* published by The Council of Canadians.



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

Review of Alberta's Sand and Gravel Pit Program

In February 2017 SAGE was represented by Cheryl Bradley at a workshop on Alberta's Sand and Gravel Pit Program. There were several other representatives of member organizations of the Alberta Environmental Network. Written submissions were prepared. Key points are summarized here:

Alberta Environment and Parks as well as many other interests including Alberta Transportation, municipalities, pit operators and environmental organizations agree major improvement is needed in approval and regulation of sand and gravel pits in the province. There are inconsistencies in requirements for pit operators on public and private land. There are shortfalls in environmental assessment and reclamation, given advances in scientific knowledge. There is a need to address outstanding recommendations from a 2008 report of the Auditor General regarding pits on public land including improvements in royalty rates and security deposits, in reporting on quantity of aggregate removed, in inspection and enforcement of reclamation, and in assuring overall compliance with legal obligations.

The February workshop focused on four topic areas:

- ◆ Implementation guidance for the Surface Water Body Aggregate Policy
- ◆ Fish and wildlife standards
- ◆ Reclamation requirements
- ◆ Reporting

Topic 1: Implementation guidance for the Surface Water Body Aggregate Policy

The 2011 provincial Surface Waterbody Aggregate Policy is intended to regulate pits in proximity to surface waterbodies. It prohibits aggregate extraction within an active channel but allows for mining of floodplains by applying a risk assessment approach. Representatives of SAGE and other environmental organization argued that allowing aggregate

mining within the 1:100 year floodplain runs contrary to provincial strategies for integrating management of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems including recognizing connectivity of groundwater to nearby surface water sources, minimizing sedimentation of water bodies and improving management of riparian lands. There are several examples in Alberta where a river channel has 'captured' pits on its floodplain during extreme flood events leading to adverse impact on surface and groundwater quality and on fish and other aquatic species. These extreme flood events are predicted to increase in frequency.

Topic 2: Fish and Wildlife Standards

Currently proponents of sand and gravel projects are subject to lower standards of environmental review and approval requirements compared to other industry sectors (e.g. upstream oil and gas, coal mining). SAGE argued that principles, guidelines and best management practices for avoiding and minimizing adverse environmental effects need to be defined and applied across the industry. Pre-disturbance assessment undertaken by professional hydrologists, soil scientists, biologists and agrologists is needed to adequately consider potential effects on surface and subsurface drainage, soils, vegetation, aquatic ecosystems as well as on fish and wildlife, including legislated Species At Risk. Consideration of cumulative effects would be consistent with the policy direction of regional plans (e.g. South Saskatchewan Regional Plan).

Topic 3: Reclamation Requirements

A significant improvement would be to require proponents of sand and gravel pits to provide clear reclamation goals (end land use) and plans, including detailed site sampling, prior to project approval. SAGE argued that reclamation planning and implementation needs to be incorporated into all phases of a project, as is

required for other industry sectors in Alberta. Many abandoned sand and gravel pits in Alberta have not been reclaimed and are considered 'orphan' meaning taxpayers must pay for their reclamation. To avoid this situation in future, resources to implement the reclamation plan need to be identified and secured. Performance bonds of sufficient size at each phase of the project would help ensure reclamation is not left unfinished should ownership of a pit change hands and/or the owner declare bankruptcy prior to meeting reclamation commitments.

Topic 4: Reporting

An Annual Operating Report for all pits is proposed. SAGE argued that even if there has been no gravel extraction in a given year there needs to be monitoring and reporting of water drainage/retention, erosion and/or erosion control, condition of stockpiles (topsoil/subsoil/overburden), trend in revegetation, invasive non-native plant species distribution and control, reclamation activities (interim or at end of pit life), progress towards achieving end land use, and any environmental or safety risks (e.g. pit capture, stranded fish) and how they are dealt with. The information would be used for state of the environment reporting, for tracking pit performance and for assuring compliance with authorizations.

Conservation and Recycling

Although not a defined topic at the workshop, some participants proposed that a key component of the province's aggregate program should be a strategy for conserving and recycling sand and gravel. Apparently, in some jurisdictions demand for new aggregate extraction has been reduced by up to 30% through conservation and recycling.

Animal Wise: The Thoughts and Emotions of Our Fellow Creatures.



Animal Wise, written by science journalist Virginia Morell, is an engaging book describing current research in animal cognition. The science has come a long way in the past sixty years since Jane Goodall began to study chimpanzees in what is now the Gombe Stream National Park along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania .

The questions being explored are: "Do other animals think (and, therefore, feel)?" and, if so, "What are they thinking?" These are complicated questions as it is not possible to directly communicate with other animals. This difficulty is compounded by an elusive definition of what thinking really is. It is quite possible that other animal species think differently than the human species as they experience the world differently - each with its unique Umwelt. Furthermore, humans are the ones creating the definitions even though there is a lack of convincing evidence that this species is always practicing this capability.

The author interviews many scientists with their test animals in their working environments, both in labs and in the wild. What *Animal Wise* evidences is that, contrary to long held beliefs, many animals make conscious decisions, have emotions and can create and modify tools to accomplish tasks. Included in the book are chapters on ants, fish, birds, rats, elephants, dolphins, chimpanzees, and dogs and wolves. No cats or unicorns.

Ant researchers have observed individual ants train other ants to locate a new colony after the existing one was purposely damaged by the researcher. These behaviours are modified as the environment changes indicating basic levels of cognition. The researcher emphasizes that he is not saying that ants are thinking, they only behave *as if* they are thinking - a common response from the researchers who fear criticism for anthropomorphizing animals that may be responding instinctually, without thought.

Moving on to fish, the question remains roughly the same: "Can some animals with small brains and relatively few neurons make fast, flexible, and complex decisions - that is, are they capable of more than simple, hardwired responses?" The answer, in the case of archerfish, is 'Yes'. Scientists working with archerfish have observed modifications of behaviour to adapt to changes in tests. Furthermore, it has been observed that fish observing another fish will learn from the adapted behaviour of the active fish. Fish have a number of ways to gather information and communicate, they "can glean scents carried in water, and most have color vision and acute hearing. Fish make a range of [low frequency] calls ... and use these to find mates, warn others to stay away, or alert their school to danger."

And these behaviours are found in animals with very small brains. As we work our way up to bird brains, researchers have found remarkable cognitive skills in parrots, with capabilities in recognizing and counting objects, and communicating in intricate social groups. "Vocal-learning birds have specific genes and specialized parts of their brain for song learning, as humans do for speech." In fact, it was the result of observing the plasticity of brain neurons in birds with speech capabilities that lead to a paradigm shift in studying human brains.

Researchers studying Norwegian rats have found they are also social animals requiring social brains. Social behaviour is notably manifested in their 'exuberant frolicking'. In other words, they play. Morell describes tickling rats and listening to their ultrasonic laughter, and how the rats pursued more tickling from the researcher. The neural studies "show that the prime, fundamental emotions of humans and all mammals do not emerge from the cerebral cortex, as was commonly believed ..., but come from deep, ancient brain structures, including the hypothalamus and amygdala."

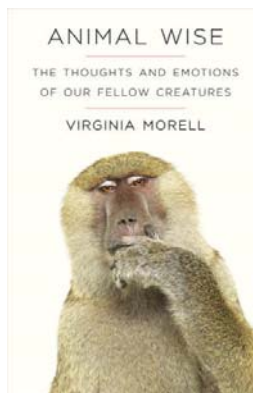
In many labs, rats "have been discovered to be expressive individuals with personalities" and capable of thinking. Morell also shares recent research on animals like dolphins, elephants, chimpanzees and dogs, which are better known to have cognitive abilities not unlike our own - though evolved differently for their Umwelts.

In general, studies suggest that animals that live in complex social structures have higher levels of cognition. With large, wobbly brains like ours, complex language abilities have given the human species a greater fitness for social life. Many researchers believe that language developed simply for gossip. Clearly, facebook was a natural outcome of the evolutionary process.

At a 2012 University of Cambridge conference several leading neuroscientists wrote a declaration that asserted that all mammals and birds, and many other creatures including octopuses, also have the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Realizing the extent to which animals think and feel will in time change the way people view and treat them. As Morell writes, "knowing more about the minds and emotions of other animals may help us do a better job of sharing the earth with our fellow creatures and may even open our minds to new ways of perceiving and thinking about our world."

She goes on to say that "No matter how different our morphology, we animals are basically alike because of our shared evolutionary past. But animal bodies are not empty forms; they are equipped with sensory cells and brains. ... With the "endless forms" have come endlessly beautiful and wonderful minds." It is a tragedy to lose a single one to extinction, she concludes.

Animal Wise is a highly accessible book that may change the way we think about animals, including us.



Coulee Clean-Up celebrates 10th Anniversary on Earth Day

The Helen Schuler Nature Centre presents the tenth annual Coulee Clean-Up starting on Earth Day (April 22). Everyone is invited to take part in this annual tradition of cleaning up our natural spaces in Lethbridge. Thank you to all past/present volunteers and community supporters for helping with the Coulee Clean-Up program - your efforts have made Lethbridge a better place to live!

Registration is now open for Coulee Clean-Up 2017!

Are you ready to make a difference in our community? We are now accepting registrations from families, teams, organizations, community groups, and individuals!

For groups/families/organizations/teams:

[Review the online map of available areas](#)

1. Organize your Coulee Clean-Up team and relevant details:

- Group name
- Group size
- Group leader
- Contact phone & email
- Date of Clean-Up
- Preferred Area #
- Back-Up Area #
- Register by email

Send your team details to Curtis.Goodman@Lethbridge.ca



For individuals:

Register by email for an upcoming Drop-In Coulee Clean-Up! (Curtis.Goodman@Lethbridge.ca)

- Saturday April 22**, 9-11am hosted by Coulee Brew Co.
- Saturday April 22**, 1-3pm hosted by Shannon Phillips, MLA Lethbridge West
- Friday April 28**, 4-6pm hosted by Jo Jo Garden Design
- Sunday May 7**, 1-3pm hosted by Lethbridge Naturalists' Society
- Thursday May 11**, 4-6pm hosted by CKXU Radio Society
- Thursday May 25**, 6-8pm hosted by Friends of Helen Schuler Nature Centre Society
- Tuesday June 6**, 6-8pm hosted by SeBuNa (Senator Buchanan Neighbourhood Association)

Interested in organizing a drop-in clean-up? Let us know!

Benefits of participating in Coulee Clean-Up

- improved habitat for wildlife in Lethbridge
 - great team-building activity
 - explore the river valley
 - everyone enjoys a trash-free space
- volunteer appreciation BBQ in August!

Need more information?

Review the [Coulee Clean-Up Handbook](#)



Press Release

Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation (RMERF) Celebrates 25 Years of Citizen Science Golden Eagle Research

For Immediate Release: Hay Meadow, Kananaskis Country, Alberta, March 17, 2017

It was March 20, 1992 when Des Allen and Peter Sherrington first noticed Golden Eagles migrating along the portion of what was to become known as the “eagle highway” in the Kananaskis Valley close to Mt. Lorette. When this spring’s count started on March 1, it became the count’s 26th consecutive year, making RMERF’s eagle count one of the longest-running citizen science projects in the world. Long-term studies such as RMERF’s eagle count are invaluable to help wildlife researchers and managers monitor populations and spot trends.

In the last 25 years, observers have spent some 4535 days (43,000 hours) in the field, counting in excess of 231,000 migrant raptors of which 182,000 were Golden Eagles. Besides the Hay Meadow (Mt. Lorette) site in Kananaskis, observations over the years have taken place at Plateau Mountain, Piitaistakis (Place of the Eagles) in the Crownsnest Pass, Beaver Mines/Vicki Ridge, and Steeples near Cranbrook, BC. This year, counts are being conducted at Hay Meadow (Mt. Lorette), Beaver Mines/Vicki Ridge, and Steeples.

To mark the 25th anniversary, RMERF has some special events planned.

March 20th is a regular counting day but, from 10:30 am until 2:00 pm, RMERF will have observers and representatives at the Hay Meadow site available for interviews, and to explain how migrating eagles are identified, aged, and counted. Coffee and donuts will be available. Directions to the Hay Meadow site can be found on RMERF’s website: <http://eaglewatch.ca>.

On May 28th, a special 25th anniversary celebration will be held at the Beupre Hall near Cochrane. Program details, time, and directions to the hall will be posted on our website.

For further information:

Peter Sherrington, Research Director, (403) 627-3522 (H), (403) 801-9599 (Cell)

Cliff Hansen, Count Coordinator, (403) 673-2422 (H), (403) 609-0691 (Cell)

Gordon Petersen, President, (403) 627-3732 (H), (403) 627-8481 (Cell)

For your information:

Report A Poacher <http://www.ab-conservation.com/report-a-poacher/>

Calgary Judge Rejects Injunction Against African Trophy Protestors (CBC Jan 5, 2017)
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/trophy-hunt-injunction-rejected-1.3923755>

MEDIA RELEASE FRIDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2017

Non Profit calls on NDP government to drop "Report A Poacher" Program and maybe hunting altogether .

Mike Donovan of Ban Hunting Trophy Ltd , is calling on Minister Shannon Phillips to immediately cancel the Report-A-Poacher program run by the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) as a gross conflict of interest , and replace the ACA program with the previous system of reporting abuses directly to the Ministry.

Donovan cites that all four ACA executive and at least 11 of 13 directors, are hunters and trappers, a situation which Donovan describes as the Fox Guarding The Hens .

Donovan says he would like to see the ACA board be more representative of the overall Alberta tourism economy suggesting that because tax revenues from hunting represents less than 0.5 % of the overall tax revenues from tourism, that the ACA should be made up with only 1 representative from the hunting industry and that the rest of the executive and directors should be other industry stakeholders who make a far greater contribution to tax revenues than do hunters .

Mr Donovan also pointed out that Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement's operation budget for 2016 actually exceeded the 2016 tax revenues generated from hunting meaning that the Alberta taxpayer may actually be subsidizing hunting, including trophy hunting, in the province .

About Ban Trophy Hunting Ltd.:

Ban Trophy Hunting Ltd. (BTH Ltd.) is a non-profit organization advocating for the complete ban of trophy hunting . The aim of BTH Ltd. is to make the public, the media and the politicians aware of the true extent and nature of trophy hunting, to let politicians know that their voters consider the banning of trophy hunting to be an important election issue, and to exert pressure on politicians to expeditiously enact legislation completely banning trophy hunting.

For further information, please contact:

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