

Southern Alberta Group For Environment

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NEWSLETTER

March-April, 2005

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Announcements

SAGE April Meeting

7:30 p.m., Thursday, 7 April 2005

Fish & Game Hut, 9th Ave and 10 St S., Lethbridge

The Board agenda includes updates on ongoing activities and discussion of new SAEG initiatives. Anyone interested in helping to set direction or in getting involved in association activities is welcome. Refreshments provided.

Alberta Environment Conference 2005

April 20-22, Shaw Conference Centre, Edmonton

The conference will profile key environmental initiatives, activities and policies of government departments and agencies. Visit www.environment2005.com for more information and to register.

Notes and Updates

SAEG is now SAGE – Southern Alberta Environmental Group (SAEG) will now be known as Southern Alberta Group for Environment (SAGE). The decision was made at a Special General Meeting on March 3 following consultation with members and discussion of pros and cons. Primary reasons for approving the name change are to have a more memorable acronym for public communications and to avoid confusion with SAAG, Southern Alberta Art Gallery. Name association with wisdom, sweet-scented native plants (prairie sage, sagebrush) and provincial species at risk (sage grouse, big sagebrush) also were reasons for supporting the name change.

SAGE Revised Bylaws Approved – Although they had served the association well since 1984, SAGE's bylaws were badly in need of updating. New bylaws, drafted by the Board, were approved, at a Special General Meeting on March 3rd, 2005. Key changes include:

- An 'honorary members' category will be added.
- The membership year will run from January to December. This now matches the fiscal year.
- The annual general meeting will be held in March.
- Terms of officers will be two years with a maximum of three consecutive terms.
- There will be two standing committees - a nominating committee and a membership/communications committee. The Board may appoint other committees to advise it.

The new association name, revised bylaws and an audited financial statement are being filed with the Corporate Registry of Alberta.

Tribute to Jim Burness – Jim Burness passed away on February 16, 2005 at the age of 86 years. With his passing SAGE has lost a long-standing member and supporter. Over the years, Jim brought many gems of wisdom to our meetings stemming from his concern about fairness and justice. We extend condolences to his family.

SAGE Appointments – Much of SAGE's work occurs through participation by members in multistakeholder processes. Recent appointments are as follows.

- Economic Development Lethbridge (EDL) - Sylvia Campbell's two-year appointment to EDL is coming to an end. Klaus Jericho, who participated on the Beef Evaluation Advisory Committee, has been nominated as the new SAGE representative. Thank you Sylvia for a job well done.
- CASA Confined Feeding Operation (CFO) Working Group - Ann Baran is representing SAGE on a working group of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance to define an air quality strategic plan for CFOs in Alberta. The first meeting occurred Jan 28. Cheryl Bradley will be Ann's alternate.
- Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) – Cheryl Fujikawa was elected to the OWC Board of Director's at the first annual general meeting on March 3. Cheryl has served on the interim Board for the past six months. Cheryl Bradley continues to serve as co-chairman of the Urban BMP Education and Communications Group.
- Council of Canadians' Water Activist Forum – Nicola Miller will attend this weekend gathering in Orangeville, Ontario on April 1-3. Participants from across Canada will share strategies, define key issues and continue building a national water activist network.

SAGE Display at Home and Garden Show 2005 a Success

– Over 23,000 people attending the 2005 Home and Garden Show in Lethbridge on March 16-19 had an opportunity to visit a display by SAGE. The display provided information on reducing use of pesticides and light pollution. Over 200 individuals signed a petition requesting that the City of Lethbridge cut light pollution in public spaces. As well, numerous membership brochures were distributed. SAGE shared space with the Earth Day Committee's One Tonne Challenge and the Oldman Watershed Council's urban stormwater education program, both initiatives which SAGE supports. Credit for the success of the event goes to Rena Woss and Jim Mawhinney who created the display, to Sylvia Campbell who coordinated volunteers, and to over 20 SAGE members who took turns doing two-hour shifts at the booth. The consensus is that it was a successful undertaking and SAGE should consider doing it again next year.

Deleted: management framework

Wind Farms Not Totally Green – Because they are a renewable, non-polluting source of energy, windmills are generally considered ‘green’ and supported by environmentalists. There are now 330 wind energy turbines located in 15 Alberta projects, and several more projects are proposed for the next year. Alberta, at 275 megawatts of installed capacity, now provides over half of Canada's wind-powered electrical capacity.

A proposed wind farm by Ontario-based West WindEau Corporation next to Cypress Hills InterProvincial Park is the first to raise major questions about the environmental footprint of the wind energy industry. Concerns are being raised among local landowners, Alberta Parks and environmental groups including Grassland Naturalists and Alberta Wilderness Association.

Concerns are that native grasslands of international environmental significance will be adversely affected by the network of roads required to build and service the dozens of 110-m high windmills scattered over a township (100 km²) of public and private lands. As well the outstanding scenic viewscape from the top of the hills will be marred. Another concern is the impact of safety lights atop windmills on the area's dark-sky preserve status.

Each windmill could net a leaseholder or landowner thousands of dollars and bring tax revenue to municipalities. On the other hand, adjacent landowners could see their property values fall.

Government agencies responsible for managing public lands leased for grazing do not have a policy in place to deal with proposals for windmills. Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, on the other hand, does have a policy that wind power facilities are not a permitted activity in protected areas, including parks, heritage rangelands and natural areas. Terms of conservation easements on private lands also do not allow wind farm development.

A rigorous environmental assessment and a process for public involvement in decisions, especially on public lands, is being requested by parties concerned about proposed windmills near Cypress Hills InterProvincial Park.

Feds Push Reducing Vehicle Emissions – Half of every Canadian's greenhouse gas emissions come from driving. A federal program – the Personal Vehicles Initiative – provides motorists with helpful tips on buying, driving and maintaining their vehicles to reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Visit <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/personal> for tips.

For example, if you are in the market for a new vehicle, you can learn about the most fuel-efficient vehicles for the 2005 model year. Topping the list with over 50 mi/gal are three hybrid vehicles – the Honda Insight (4.0L/100km), the Toyota Prius (4.0L/100km) and the Honda Civic Hybrid (4.9L/100km). The site also promotes proper tire inflation and putting a stop to engine idling.

The federal government is close to reaching a voluntary deal with car makers that will see them cut greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles by 5.3 million tonnes by 2010. Reductions would occur through measures such as developing and using fuel efficient technologies, producing more alternative fuel vehicles, and launching advertising and education to encourage Canadians to buy fuel-efficient vehicles.

Decade of Water for Life 2005-2015 – On World Water Day, 22 March 2005, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Water for Life Decade. The goal, by 2015, is to halve the proportion of people in the world who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water and who do not have access to basic sanitation. The UN advocates a true valuation of water that includes not only economic but also social equity and environmental values. “Water resources need not be a source of conflict. Instead they can be a catalyst for cooperation” said Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General. For more info visit <http://www.unesco.org/water>.

Water as Universal Public Good (submitted by Nicola Miller) – Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attending the Alternative World Water Forum in Geneva on March 20 are calling for a global tax on water, a global public water utility and a “world water parliament” to ensure every human on the planet has a right of access to potable water. The NGOs call for water to remain a public good and are opposed to privatizing water resources as has occurred in some countries. Participants said the World Bank should stop requiring the privatization of water as a condition for granting loans.

Grizzlies Need Your Support - In 2002, Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee and its Scientific Subcommittee recommended that the grizzly bear be listed as a threatened species under the provincial Wildlife Act. A second, independent scientific panel, also appointed by the provincial government, confirmed the recommendation to list grizzly bear as a species at risk. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has not acted on the recommendations.

Since then, population estimates have been updated based on the best available science, now putting the grizzly bear population at only 700 bears (500 on provincial lands) versus the estimate of 1,000 used by the ESCC in making their recommendation. An 11-year study of grizzly bear populations in the Eastern Slopes indicate “dangerously low” survival rates of female grizzlies. Humans were the cause of 627 of 639 bear deaths recorded in the Central Rockies Ecosystem from 1971 to 1996. The Alberta Government, however, continues to allow grizzly bears to be killed for fun through a recreational hunt.

In early March, nineteen well-respected scientists, including former members of the Scientific Subcommittee, sent a letter urging Premier Klein to list the grizzly bear as a threatened species under the province's Wildlife Act. This step is needed not only to protect grizzly bears but also to protect the integrity of the provinces' Species at Risk Program. Please send a letter expressing your views to Premier Ralph Klein, Government of Alberta, premier@gov.ab.ca with a cc to Honourable David Coumts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, livingstone.macleod@assembly.ab.ca. Encourage him to officially list the grizzly bear as a threatened species.

Interdisciplinary frameworks that incorporate multivariate causality, non linear feedback, and individual-based decision making are critical to research that explicitly incorporates humans in ecosystems. Ecology for a Crowded Planet. Science May 28 2004, p1252 (provided by Klaus Jericho)