



Happy New Year
January 2012

**"Many people look forward to the New Year
for a new start on old habits."**

Unknown

Next **SAGE** meeting
Thursday, January 5th at
7 p.m., Fish & Game Hut.

Native Plant seeds from
the Galt Museum garden
designed by June Flanagan
available for sale.
Galt Museum (403) 320-
3954

Park Place Achieves Highest Green Standard

The Park Place shopping centre has achieved a BOMA BESt Level 4—the highest green designation available for commercial buildings in Canada.

A [Level 4 BOMA](#) Building Environmental Standards (BESt) requires that buildings achieve over 90% of the original Go Green Plus assessment, and the building must meet all of Go Green

BESt Practices.

Park Place is only the second shopping centre (without a renovation) in Canada that has achieved this level of environmental practice, and one of just a handful of buildings in [Alberta](#).

The shopping facility has made impressive advances in energy, water and waste reduction, as well as the monitoring of

emissions and management of the indoor environment. These efforts have been premised on good tenant communication, environmental education, and a long term commitment to doing what is best for both business and the environment.

Park Place will be pursuing a BOMA Excellence Award and an Earth Award this spring.

Kyoto Fuels Receive ecoEnergy Grant

The Government of Canada announced that it will invest up to \$31.14 million over six years in Kyoto Fuels Corporation as part of the federal ecoEnergy for Biofuels program.

Kyoto Fuels is completing the construction of its Biofuel facility this winter and is expected to commission the plant

by this spring. The facility is designed to use a wide variety of feedstock to make biodiesel, from vegetable oil to animal fat. The biodiesel may be blended with petroleum diesel in an effort to make transportation fuels more renewable and to lower emissions.

The province of Alberta

mandated a 2% biodiesel content in April of 2011. The 66 million liters per year capacity of the Kyoto Fuel facility will contribute to this demand.

The Government of Canada is investing up to \$1.5 billion to increase the capacity of biofuel production in the country. A [recent study](#) suggests that over 1000 per-

manent manufacturing jobs and 14,000 indirect jobs have been created in this sector. The net economic benefit was estimated to be \$2 billion each year.

We wish Kyoto Fuels all the best in this coming year, and applaud their efforts at creating low-impact renewable energy for transportation.

Riparian Gravel Pit Application Declined

The Municipal District of Willow Creek has decided against an application by Tollestrup Construction for a gravel pit along the Oldman River north of Fort Macleod.

The application did not meet the discretionary uses allowed for the land, including development on the floodplains of the river. A 1989 report was referred to in the decision as relating to

'Environmentally Significant Areas in the Oldman River Region.' The area was noted for its 'various and diverse trees, such as the Cottonwood and Balsam Poplar, birds, wildlife, and rare plants' that have been designated nationally significant.

Evidence submitted by the Oldman Watershed Council highlighted 'the importance of riparian lands

and potential impacts to groundwater and surface water interaction'. Dr. Rood from the University of Lethbridge provided evidence on the impacts to the dynamics of floodplains.

This ruling will provide a positive example to other regions when considering the impacts of resource extraction in environmentally sensitive areas.

Second Thoughts for Nuclear Power in Alberta

Bruce Power announced on December 12th that they will not proceed with their plans to build four one-gigawatt nuclear reactors in the Peace River region.

The planned nuclear power plants have been heavily criticized based on number of arguments including

the earthquake stability of the site, excessive water demand from the Athabasca River, as well as the end-use of the power including export and the expansion of tar sands exploitation.

The project was first encouraged by the provincial government

through a biased public consultation that was designed more to 'teach' Albertans about the merits of nuclear power than to obtain perspective. The province was planning to build transmission lines to the designated site, but this plan was recently suspended by Premier Redford.

Some Interesting Articles & Research:

Alternative Water Futures in Alberta: Parkland Institute

http://parklandinstitute.ca/research/summary/alternative_water_futures_in_alberta/

Who will Control the Green Economy: ETC Group

<http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/5296>

Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities: Wilderness Association

<http://www.albertawilderness.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

Prairie: A Natural History (2004, updated 2011) (Book Review)



Candace Savage's *Prairie: A Natural History* is a beautiful publication with an assortment of photographs, maps, and field sketches interspersed through clear and sometimes poetic prose.

The book begins by placing the prairie in the middle of our world. Savage says "There are people who think of the prairie as boring, and it is hard not to pity them." Certainly, by the end of the book, there would be few who would disagree.

But the book is about the grass: "some 140-odd species, in 41 genera, naturally occur in the Great Plains grasslands. That's twelve dozen distinctly different native grasses! Some of them, like the magnificent big bluestem, or turkey food (so called for its large, three-lobed seed head), grow up to 10 feet (3 meters) tall. Others, like the stick-in-your-socks specialist needle-and-thread grass, seldom exceed 3 feet (1 meter) in height. At the low end of the scale are species like the diminutive blue grama, which grows close to the ground and rarely raises its elegant, eyebrow-shaped seed heads more than a few hand widths above the soil."

Candace Savage explores the prairie from the geographic history that sculpted the land, and a natural history of the species that

have inhabited the region from the trilobites of the Cambrian, through the reptiles of the Mesozoic Era, up to the modern epochs that saw the emergence of the 'empire of grass'.

Weather has had a profound impact on the development of the prairie, particularly the annual rainfall which diminishes as one travels west. Savage describes the successful life cycles of plants, insects and animals that have found a balance in what she describes as a 'climatic roller coaster'. She describes a native grass from Alberta that "typically achieves maturity in a matter of weeks, fitting its life cycle to the abbreviated growing season of the northern plains. But a clump of the same species from Missouri or Oklahoma is programmed to take its time, pacing its activities to the more leisurely schedule of southern climes." Each page of the book is astonishing as she explores the wonders of nature.

Then we go underground, to see the roots and the organisms that inhabit the soil. To give an impression of the density of grass root-systems, Savage relates an effort to excavate one-half of a square yard of tall-grass prairie in Nebraska. The researcher extracted about 250 kilometers of fibrous roots.

Almost all prairie plants depend on mycorrhizae, a fungal cell that infect root systems and feed on the stored sugars. The fungus produces a network of threads that penetrate into the surrounding soil feeding water and nutrients back to the plant. And that's nothing compared to the work of the dung beetle!

Savage talks about the species that inhabit the prairie and their place in the balance of the ecosystem. She explores the importance of water in the region, prairie woodlands, and then the impact of agriculture.

The book concludes with a long-range forecast that is both a warning and call to action. "In a century when the natural world is slowly dying all around us - when wildness has been pushed to the margins—the wide open spaces of the Great Plains are a landscape of hope. Here is an ecosystem that has experienced the full onslaught of modernization in one brief historical instant and that, though battered and torn, still inspires us with its splendor."

This is a really great book. Thanks Deb G. for recommending it to me.

