



**"No sooner do we sit down to enjoy our acquisitions, than we find them insufficient to fill up the vacuities of life."**

**Samuel Johnson**

**November 2013**

## **Rally Against Oil & Gas Drilling Within City Limits**

**No SAGE meeting in November.**

**Draft Surface Water and Air Quality Management Frameworks South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Stakeholder Discussion Session** November 22, 2013  
9:30am - 3:30pm @ Lethbridge Lodge. RSVP [akaiser@islengineering.com](mailto:akaiser@islengineering.com)

**Kainai Lethbridge Earth Watch** is organizing a petition against drilling within the City limits. If you are interested in participating, contact KLEW at: [www.klew.org](http://www.klew.org)

The Kainai Lethbridge Earth Watch (KLEW), LPIRG, and Idle No More hosted a rally against drilling for oil and gas within the city limits of Lethbridge. The event was held at Galt Gardens on October 19th with upwards of 200 people in attendance.

Four speakers provided different perspectives on the impacts of oil & gas exploitation. Dr. Jim Byrne and Dr. Bryson Brown from the University of Lethbridge presented the larger concerns of the impacts of continuing to burn fossil fuels that contribute to global warming and climate change. They cited some conclusions from the recent comprehensive [IPCC report](#), as well as the [International Energy Association report](#) that suggests that two-

thirds of the current oil & gas reserves in the world must stay in the ground to avoid average global temperature increases greater than 2°C.

The current efforts to hydraulically fracture oil & gas bearing reservoirs result in, they said, significant greenhouse gas emissions and risks contaminating both air and water. This is due to the nature of the cement used to prevent migration of gas and chemicals to the surface or to underground aquifers as the wells age. There are also health and safety concerns from drilling so close to large populations of people.

The two professors also suggested that it is time for the city, the province, and the

country to begin to adopt energy security strategies like renewable energy technologies, reduction of energy consumption, and greater efficiencies.

An Idle No More speaker, Lori Brave Rock, engaged the rally by describing their efforts both locally and nationally to protect the health of the natural environment. She listed the federal Acts that have been emasculated by the current federal government, drastically reducing environmental protection in Canada. She encouraged all people to work together in this common cause.

Greg Weadick and Bridget Pastoor told the crowd that they did not support drilling within the city limits, and that they were listening. Then they left.

## **Environment Lethbridge Update**

A steering committee for Environment Lethbridge has spent the past three years developing a strategic plan and a draft governance document. The process has included a series of facilitations by the City of Lethbridge, a skilled consultant, and an expert from the provincial government. Interim reports have been provided to the Environment Committee of City Council and at a Community Issues Committee meeting with the mayor and council.

Partnerships have been forged with the Industrial Association

of Southern Alberta (IASA), the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, Lethbridge College and non-profit organizations. Environment Lethbridge has also had a presence at the Home & Garden Show last spring and, more recently, the Green Expo.

The next step for Environment Lethbridge is to secure funding for an executive director who will expand partnerships in the community, and lead the organization to fulfill its mandate.

The recent election of Chris

Spearman as the next mayor of Lethbridge is an encouraging result for an open-minded discussion regarding the value-added activities that Environment Lethbridge can provide to the city.

Funding might come from a fee-for-service model, in which Environment Lethbridge would provide consulting services to establish environmental benchmarks or provide communication services for environmental initiatives. Funding might also come from the Federal Gas Tax Fund which allocates substantial

amounts of money to Lethbridge in order to pursue infrastructure and community capacity building to provide "cleaner air, cleaner water, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions".

It is expected, early in the new year, that Environment Lethbridge can begin to support environmental leadership. Though the previous Council may have considered the group a 'special interest group', Environment Lethbridge will be working in the interests of all citizens, as the health of the environment is for everyone.

## A Letter to the Future

(Courtesy of Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., written January 2012)

How many of you have children, are contemplating having children in the future, associate with the children of others, or think children are our future? If you remain unmoved at this point, were you a child in the past, secure in the notion that adults were operating with your best interests at heart? I hope I've achieved some level of solidarity amongst you, on the subject of responsibility for future generations.

I don't have children but I have a grandnephew Alex and a grandniece Monica. They are young and will inherit Alberta in a decade or two. I spend a lot of time pondering their future. Based on my years of travel over the length and breadth of Alberta, my observations and those of my colleagues, the research findings of many and trend analysis I tend to worry about their future. I think it is paradoxical to continue on this growth trajectory and still profess we want a bright future for our children. I have penned a letter to them as an

act of contrition, to help them understand their future, if the trends continue. I hope I don't have to send it.

*Dear Alex and Monica,*

*To you, my grandnephew and grandniece, I apologize for the world you inherit from my generation. My generation lived better than we could afford but you got stuck with the bill for our excesses.*

*I can remember clean water that didn't require straining and filtering and chemical manipulation to make it potable. As I remember, there was also lots of it but we conspired to drain, dredge and otherwise speed it on its way, out of our backyards and lives. We fought first with water; now you are faced with the prospect of fighting over what remains.*

*The sky was blue, and blue on just about any given day. It didn't take an article of faith to breathe in a lungful. In fact it was a pleasure, but one we*

*didn't appreciate. No, it seemed we Albertans would rather drive than breathe and the air of our cities darkened with the result.*

*We reveled in large bank accounts, individually and provincially with the administrative and geological luck of petroleum and coal underlying our feet. Did we save some for you? Not much. No, we were fearful some alternative would eclipse its use so we liquidated it as quickly as we could manage. We blindly mined your future and you are stuck with the cost of a quick liquidation.*

*We invested in starter castles that ever spread like mushrooms around cities and towns and throughout the rural landscape. We commuted, often for hours, in vehicles slightly smaller than our houses, and just as fuel efficient. We complained about the high cost of living, but like drug addicts it was really the cost of living high.*

*The soil that attracted your great,*

### Interesting Links:

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Draft

<https://www.landuse.alberta>

FAO's Food Wastage Footprint: Impacts on Natural Resources

<http://www.fao.org/>

Biofuels: Garbage to Gold (Alberta Venture)

<http://albertaventure.com/2013/10/garbage-gold-biofuels/>

Global Warming Interactive Calculator

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/interactive/2013/sep/27/climate-change-how-hot-lifetime-interactive>



**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)**

*great-grandparents lies buried now, under asphalt and concrete. What was left became too expensive to farm and was transformed into golf courses and equestrian facilities. Perhaps you could block off a few rooms in those now drafty mansions and excavate some asphalt from the long driveways to heat them. That would expose some soil to grow things again. We forgot that the basis of society is soil and the ability to grow things.*

*We lived in a province that should have been called "denial".*

*You have every right to hate us for our wastefulness, our lack of foresight, our greed and our thoughtlessness. Some tried to remedy this; their efforts were laughed at, their concerns were marginalized, their modest gains mocked. The name calling; ecofreak, environmentalist, the word often spat out as an epithet and the ever popular "tree hugger". Maybe you can still find a tree to hug in western or northern Alberta. Concerned people used the courts, the institutions, politics, education and the marketplace to try and affect change. But they were up against powerful interests whose sole pursuit was profit.*

*Beware of the pursuit of profit that externalizes most of the costs to society and the environment. That form is malevolent and because of it the banquet of consequences is now set for you. I wish I could have done more. All I can do now is to remind you not to repeat our mistakes (that's one we failed miserably at despite all of the evidence in front of us). Ironically, there were ample examples from elsewhere in our world and a long history of societal collapse because of degradation of natural resources. But we failed to heed those warning signs. I hope generations following*

*you applaud your wisdom, innovation and foresight. My generation was apparently bereft of most of these qualities. Erect no statues in our honor; we don't deserve them.*

*We were called the "baby boomers"; in time the strength of our generation would influence politics, music, consumerism and, unfortunately, the health of Alberta. History may reflect we were an aberration, a cohort of people too inwardly focused, too arrogant and too narcissistic for the good of this place.*

*We inherited a land from our parents and grandparents that was still rich in possibilities, opportunities and integrity. What we didn't inherit was their thriftiness, their understanding of community and cooperation and, their sense of limits. In my era we called it stewardship but we were too obsessed with wealth generation to understand the implications and the responsibility the word entails. We thought the frontier of Alberta's pioneers would satisfy all of our needs and, unfortunately all of our wants too. We didn't know (or wouldn't accept) the frontier was gone; because it existed only in our minds we continued the headlong, heedless rush to get our "share". Regrettably we did get our share and yours too.*

*We ended up rich but with the type of wealth that comes without understanding, especially what the price was to acquire it. We cut and plowed and dug and drilled and built and paved like tomorrow would never come. We used up most of the inherent possibilities and fouled what was left with our footprint. We said we were doing this for you; so you would have the chance to revel in the wealth we had accumulated. That was the excuse for our perverse moral justification for selfishness. As it turns out, it was the wrong measure of wealth.*

*I wish you could have seen the flash of a trout in crystal clear water, a splash of liquid sunshine. We cleared the forests, especially the old growth portion which held and stored most of the water trout depended on. Sediment from the roads, trails, fields and cut blocks clouded the water and smothered the gravels. We built more and accessed more for business and pleasure; in the end there was no refuge left where trout could escape hook, heat or mud.*

*The sight of a grizzly as it materialized at a bend in the trail terrified and excited us. It was the symbol of wild country, more elusive than a wisp of wind but a powerful metaphor for integrity, space and possibilities. We carved up the landscape with our roads and our activities until the remaining islands could not meet the needs of those majestic beasts.*

*Old growth forest was anathema to our economic "wisdom" and as it disappeared, shrouded with the arboreal lichens that typified its ancientness, so too did the woodland caribou. They were derided by some as a species evolutionarily unfit because they couldn't change quickly enough to survive in the landscape as manufactured by us. On reflection, maybe it was us who were evolutionarily unfit.*

*I wish you could have heard, on a calm spring morning on the prairie, sage grouse on their strutting, or as some called them, "booming" grounds. They were a symbol of prairie, like grizzlies were of mountains. But we couldn't bear to leave big tracks of "old growth" prairie alone. Sitting there, on that calm spring morning, you probably would have also heard a chorus of frogs. They were the audible harbinger of spring*

and their presence was a litmus test for atmospheric and aquatic health. The silence you hear now should fill you with dread about your health.

*I wish you could have rolled in grassland dominated by rough fescue. It was Alberta's provincial grass but I expect now it is like the California grizzly, emblematic of our failure to appreciate what it meant. It had only taken rough fescue about 15000 years to figure out how to survive in the face of fire, flood, drought and grazing. We came along thinking we knew better and replaced it with stuff that didn't know drought, didn't cure well and could only produce well with lots of rain. Been getting much rain lately? I think not, given the trend in climate even as we recognized it. With fervent hubris we thought we could restore fescue, after we'd ripped up the landscape. We discovered we knew lots about disassembling but precious little about putting things back together again.*

*Lastly I wish you could experience space and quiet and solitude. Reflecting on what Wallace Stegner, a prescient writer of a generation before me, said, "Something will have gone out of us as a people if wild spaces disappear, if we drive wildlife to extinction or zoos, if we pollute the last clean air and dirty the last clean streams and push roads through the last of the silence so that never again can we see ourselves as separate and individual in the world, part of the natural world and competent to belong to it." I'm sad you'll never find this antidote for noise and clutter and crowding.*

*There isn't enough money to turn back the hands of time to a world with fresh water, clean air, productive soil, rich biodiversity and space. That stuff can't be purchased; it can only be stewarded and passed on in*

*good condition to the next generation. My generation's folly was to think that money could substitute for all these essentials. We were wrong. I'm sorry!*

*Your (not so) Great Uncle, Lorne*

What letter will you write? What will your legacy be and how will you be judged?

Is my letter alarmist, engaged in hyperbole; is it too sardonic, unduly pessimistic, or overly cynical? No! These things have happened, are happening now or could happen in the foreseeable future. In fact, the future has already arrived. We don't acknowledge its arrival because it isn't evenly distributed just yet.

Perhaps a dose of reality about those things that are important will focus our attention on the task at hand. Robert Francis said, "It wasn't too long ago that my ancestors starved if they made a mistake by following their instincts to draw sustenance from the natural world. Now, if my instincts lead me astray, my grandchildren or perhaps their grandchildren will starve." That is the cost of a misstep now in our planning for Alberta's landscape and resources.

My instincts tell me we have exceeded some thresholds in Alberta, are advancing quickly on others, have no real remediation plan and are dealing with unrealistic expectations for returns from Alberta's landscape and resources. If we can agree on that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. If we can't agree, we will simply add more tunnel until the light goes out. The public and shareholders may want it all but that Pollyannaish world doesn't exist. With time and explanation, most people will accept lower rates of return on their investments and lower salaries if these come with

assurances of water to drink, air to breathe, food to eat and a place to live with ecological integrity.

Alternatively, we could wait and see how many of these essentials we are able to buy as they become scarcer, and let the marketplace decide the outcome. The harsh reality is change isn't necessary; survival isn't mandatory. No future is inevitable; but taking the future for granted, that it will mirror the past is a gamble of monumental proportions and risk. One can only hope that raising children inspires and motivates us to think of the future and the risk those children face through inaction, greed or denial.

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

## Congratulations

SAGE congratulates Kelsey Prenevost, president and CEO of Kyoto Fuels Corp. for their recent commissioning of a biofuel facility in Lethbridge.

Kyoto Fuels is a versatile facility that will be able to produce up to 66 million litres of biofuel each year from a variety of feedstock, from oil seed to animal fat

## Rogue Primate: An exploration of human domestication. (1994)

John Livingston was one of a group of influential environmental philosophers from York University in the faculty of Environmental Studies. The group included Raymond Rogers and Neil Evernden (whose book, *Natural Alien*, was previously reviewed in a SAGE newsletter).

There seems to have been a change over the past twenty years in the focus of environmental texts. Contemporary writing, arguably, is focused on human impact *on* nature, whereas earlier texts were focused on human impact *within* nature (including human nature). I say this because as I was reading this book I kept wondering if *Rogue Primate* could be written today. We have so abstracted nature that it no longer has existence outside of our conception. In other words, as Raymond Rogers has said, "Social forms, and the values and relationships associated with those forms, move from an embedded invisibility, to temporary discussibility (fracture and dislocation), and finally, to disembedded invisibility, at which point they are no longer recognizable because the relations on which they depend have changed." This book was written during a period of 'temporary discussibility', and the social forms discussed seem now to have become invisible to us.

The gist of what Livingston was able to discuss is that our self-domesticated species has domesticated Nature. "One feature of the domesticated condition is of particular importance: the absence of ecological place for the species, its separation from Nature. Indeed, were it not for human domestication there would be no 'Nature,' no 'other,' no concept of wildness. There would be no one and no reason to conceive of them" (p.36).

Livingston argues that the human species has domesticated the earth in its own self-domesticated image through the processes of agriculture and pastoralism. These processes "have been the scourge of ground cover, topsoil, and watersheds; both have simplified, homogenized, and monoculturalized vast areas of the planet; both have displaced and destroyed whole populations, communities, and biotas" (p.54).

By way of example, the author discusses our concepts of conservation and 'rights' of Nature. Rights, he says, "must be seen and understood for what they are: artificially institutionalized technical surrogates for naturally evolved mutualistic, participatory compliance and reciprocity. Even in human affairs, rights are prostheses for "rightness" (p.175). The so-called 'rights of nature' indicates that nature has been domesticated.

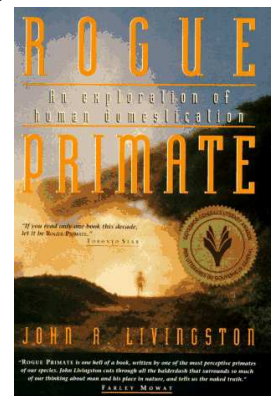
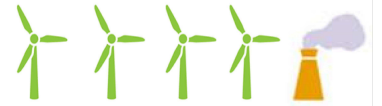
Livingston expands this thesis by saying conservationist perspectives "precludes the possibility of any non-quantifiable worth residing in that phenomenon – even to itself. Its value becomes purely instrumental. If such value cannot be shown, and in practice even if it can, the non-human is permitted to continue to exist solely at the human pleasure. Since resource conservation does not allow worth (to itself) to inhere in Nature, it can protect Nature only as the human estate, in which case it is no longer Nature but rather an extension of the human apparatus. However argued or presented, resource conservation is a wholly proprietary, human-chauvinist concept."

Livingston traces the emergence of terms like 'appropriate technology', "which was perilously close to being internally contradictory" to 'sustainable development', "a full-

blown oxymoron. What these slogans seem to say is 'How to plunder Nature and get away with it.' A cultural and ideological imperative, which only a domesticate deprived of ecological sensibility [we humans, that is] could have conceived in the first place"(p.59).

By way of comparison, "Wilderness is not acquired through covenant or dispensation. Wilderness *is*, and has been, from the beginning. It is not merely an evolved phenomenon; it is a quality of being, and a precondition of having become. As such, it is beyond the reach of rationality; it is previous, and transcendent. It has no missing parts, either through mutation or amputation. It requires no prosthetic devices, no fixing, no reordering, no moral overlays. Wilderness requires no organizational intervention, even of the purest and highest democratic sort. Wilderness is whole. It is the antithesis of the domesticated human state, uncontaminated by power, claims to power, or the need for power" (p.172).

It is, then, our self-domestication that indicates our lack of wholeness - our 'lack of ecological place', as Livingston describes it. Giving nature 'rights' and the conservationist ethic, he suggests, are twisted forms of domination, of the domesticating nature itself. The calculus of our system of valuation allows us to plunder the earth, as wilderness ceases to exist. The social forms causing this have become invisible, as we are left fighting for conservation and the 'rights of nature'.





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

Box 383 Lethbridge AB T1J 3E9

September 25, 2013

To: Hon. Diana McQueen,  
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

From: Braum Barber  
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)

Re: **Management of the Oldman River headwaters.**

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Recent environmental reviews of the state of the headwaters of the Oldman River, inclusive of the Castle and Crowsnest rivers, indicates 86% of the area is judged to be at moderate to high risk. This challenges biodiversity maintenance in the region, as well as ensuring downstream water users (and drinkers) sufficient protection in water quality.

The state of the watershed, as we have come to it today, is the result of a combination of individual decisions by the Alberta Government on land uses as far ranging as ski hill development, to logging, to motorized recreational use. None of these decisions, it seems, took into account previous ones, or the additive effects of one piled on another, often on the same land base. Nor was there a deliberate attempt to set thresholds beyond which developments, especially logging, would not be approved. Now we are at a precipice looking down at a landscape that has lost a high degree of ecological integrity.

The government's response to this officially induced dilemma appears to be to wait for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan to solve all of the cumulative errors of the past. Surely the ESRD has the expertise, the means, and the will to start dealing with many of these issues now, without another prolonged period of intransigence.

Some issues that deserve attention include:

- Climate change predictions that indicate the region will experience more rain and less snow, along with greater variability in precipitation amounts. Rather than cutting more of the forest and decreasing the canopy cover, which we will need to intercept more rainfall and moderate runoff conditions, the ESRD should be decreasing the amount of logging. Has your department determined what the effects of climate change will be and do you have a strategy in place to adapt to the changes?

- Road density figures for the headwaters are orders of magnitude higher than are recommended to keep fish and wildlife populations viable. The network of roads and trails, with high traffic from OHV users contribute to declining water quality. It is evident that a reduction in the number and extent of these roads and trails would benefit the watershed. Will you commit to a timely plan and implement action on the closure, reclamation and restoration of roads and trails to bring the access network down to below critical thresholds?
- There seems to be too much emphasis on one-dimensional economic development, especially logging, without the benefit of a more comprehensive evaluation of the ecological impacts and the economic benefits of a healthy headwaters to Albertans. Will you commit to a vastly expanded monitoring system that measures water quality and provides a sense of whether the current rules are sufficient to protect our headwaters? Isn't it time to do an independent analysis of the economic costs and benefits of logging in the headwaters of the Oldman watershed?

Rethinking management of the headwaters of the Oldman watershed should begin immediately if we are to deal with the backlog of issues and negative cumulative effects of prior land uses. Otherwise, if we postpone action until the costs are very much higher, the solutions will drift more out of reach and the chance of success will be less certain. Effective management is required for success, and success is crucial for future generations of Albertans.

Your response and plan of action on these points would be appreciated.

cc. Bridget Pastoor, MLA, Calgary East  
Greg Weadick, MLA, Calgary West  
Gary Bickman, MLA, Cardston-Taber-Warner  
Dr. Richard Starke, Minister Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation