

# Partners in Preservation

## A Volunteer Newsletter



*Enjoy Alberta Parks!*

Spring 2008: Issue #16

### **Marl Pond Trail - 25 Years**

**By: Patsy Cotterill**

2008 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area. Wow, how fast a quarter-century has flown!

Wagner Natural Area was set aside as a protected area in 1975, in recognition of its wonderfully biodiverse complex of open sedge fens and marl ponds. But it wasn't until early 1983, with the incorporation of its volunteer steward group, the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS), that attention was turned to improving the Area's accessibility to the public and developing educational and interpretive programming opportunities. By the summer of 1983 clearing of an interpretive trail, to be named with unanimous consent, the Marl Pond Trail, had begun in the west-central portion of the natural area. If I remember correctly, Terry Thormin, then president of WNAS, Natural Areas Program staff and Julie Hrapko, Curator of the Botany Programme at the Provincial Museum, were responsible for choosing and flagging the route of the trail. It was designed to provide, in a 1.2 km loop, a representative sampling of Wagner's varied habitats: willow thicket, mixed deciduous-coniferous forest, black spruce forest, open and

shrubby fens and marl ponds, a wet "successional" meadow and drier upland fields. The Alberta Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation (ARPWF) provided a grant of \$15,000 for construction of the trail, with smaller contributions coming from Labatt's Breweries and Northwestern Utilities. ARPWF's sponsorship is acknowledged on the main sign marking the trail head.

The minutes of WNAS' 11th meeting on August 24, 1983, recorded: "Trail:

- access construction is finished
- the trail has been cleared by volunteers for about 403 m
- John Rintoul will be hired for 4 days to lay 200 m of the penroad/gravel trail
- Pat Seymour has people at the Devonian [Botanic] Garden who may be available at the end of September/early October to build boardwalk sections
- the boardwalk section [to cover the most sensitive fen areas] will be laid and postholes drilled in winter
- Terry Thormin, Alice Hendry and Peter Lee will be on the Trail Construction Committee"

Covering part of the trail with a permeable geotextile called Penroad, overlain by gravel, was necessary to allow drainage of the considerable overland flow that took place. (Those years in the 1980s were wet!). The



*Marl Pond Trail Sign*

boardwalk was required for travel across areas of fen and marl pond, and it too would be installed during the winter.

Work on the trail continued throughout 1984. The trail was to be a self-guiding one, with numbered posts interpreted by means of a trail guide. WNAS members walked the new trail, throughout the seasons, selecting points of interest for interpretation, where the posts would be situated.

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To call any Alberta government agency toll-free from anywhere in Alberta, dial 310-0000, then the 10-digit number, or hold for operator assistance.

## Plan for Alberta's Parks in the Works

Submitted by Erin Mikaluk, Public Affairs Officer

The development of a plan to ensure Alberta's provincial parks remain protected, yet accessible to Alberta's growing population is now underway. Once in place, the Plan for Parks will help set direction for Alberta's provincial parks system over the next ten years.

Over a decade of previous Government of Alberta research on parks and protected areas was reviewed to feed into the plan, including input gathered at the recent Land-use Framework consultations and the results of annual provincial parks visitor surveys. Public opinion research and discussions with key stakeholders, municipal park authorities, and First Nations individuals conducted last fall will also be considered as the Plan for Parks is crafted.

"Alberta's parks belong to everyone and we want to make our parks system the most publicly-responsive system in Canada," said Bill Werry, Deputy Minister of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. "This means listening to and involving those who care the most about our parks in decisions that impact the future."

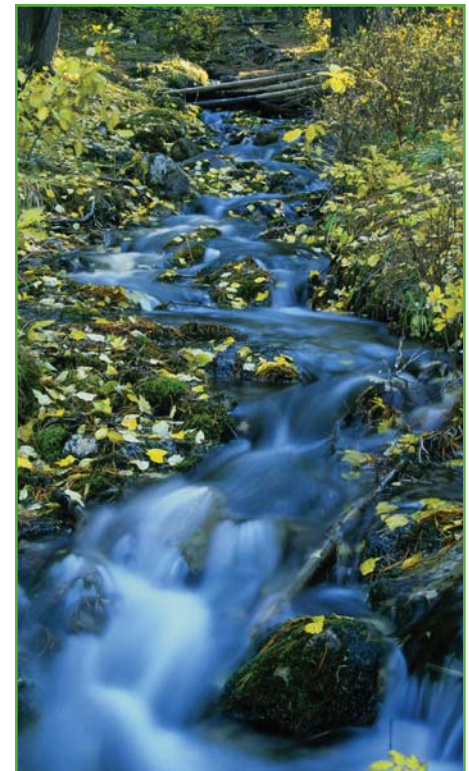
Park visitors will have an opportunity this summer to share their ideas on improvements, changes or additions they'd like to see in Alberta's provincial parks as part of a new public responsiveness strategy.



Enjoying Alberta Parks

The Plan for Parks is the result of a March 2008 mandate issued by Premier Stelmach to Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation Minister, the Honourable Cindy Ady.

New information about the Plan for Parks will be posted online as the process moves forward at [www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p](http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/p4p).



## Change is in the Air at Alberta Parks

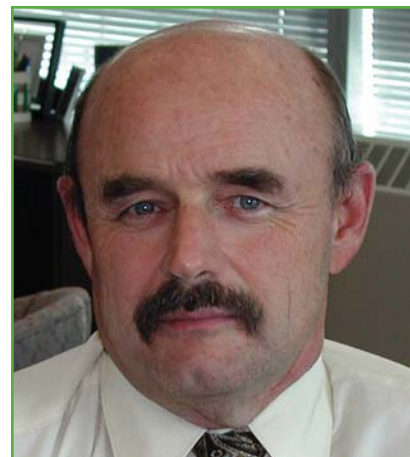
Submitted by Erin Mikaluk, Public Affairs Officer

The month of May is an important time for Alberta Parks – it means gearing up for a brand new summer season and the millions of visitors who eagerly await it.

But, as we spring into summer, the weather isn't the only thing that is changing for Alberta Parks. We have a new Minister, Deputy Minister, and even a new department name. Consider this your quick introduction to some of the new faces at Alberta Parks.



*Minister Cindy Ady  
Tourism, Parks and Recreation*



*Deputy Minister Bill Werry  
Tourism, Parks and Recreation*

### The Leader of the Pack

The Honourable Cindy Ady, new Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, is no stranger to promoting the great things this province has to offer. As the previous Associate Minister of Tourism Promotion and the returning Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Shaw, she's helped increase the profile of tourism and sport in Alberta. Minister Ady has been a prominent community advocate and volunteer in leading the charge to build a number of schools in Calgary. And, with a home bordering on Fish Creek Provincial Park, she's also a frequent visitor to parks.

Now, she's busy expanding her knowledge and getting to know all she can about parks across the province. An avid water-skier and outdoors woman, Minister Ady plans to tour Alberta's provincial parks this summer with her husband and four boys.

### Best Supporting Role

Supporting the Minister in her efforts to promote Alberta is the new Deputy Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Bill Werry. Already, Bill has traveled the province and spoken to nearly 80 per cent of all permanent parks staff about his plans for the future, which include Alberta Parks being the most responsive parks jurisdiction in Canada.

Prior to this new role, he was the Assistant Deputy Minister for the Parks, Conservation, Recreation and Sport Division; and with over 30 years experience working in executive roles with parks, recreation, sport, tourism, social services and Aboriginal relations, Bill has a firm understanding of parks and what it takes to engage the public.

### What's in a Name?

Together, the Minister and Deputy Minister will lead the newly formed Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, a ministry that will promote the province as a world-class tourism destination. It's a ministry that will bring increased attention to Alberta as a province filled with spectacular parks, natural beauty and exceptional quality of life opportunities. And, with Albertans' desire to protect the environment and increased demand for outdoor recreational activities, this is one change that will define Alberta's parks as a key part of what it means to be Albertan.

**Alberta**  
Tourism, Parks and  
Recreation

**Submitted by Patsy Cotterill**

By the spring of 1985 John Rintoul was reporting to the monthly WNAS meeting that “considerable work has been done on the trail by Land Management staff [then from the Department of Energy & Natural Resources], for example, grading, placing of culverts and painting of tree scars, with funds coming from government sources but with WNAS acting as the contractor”.

Paul Cooper of the University of Alberta Devonian Botanic Garden built the boardwalk sections. By June, 1985, trail posts had been tamped into place and numbered, thanks to WNAS, staff of the Natural Areas Program and a fencing crew courtesy of the Alberta Environment Employment Program. Facilities consisting of two privies were situated in the northwest corner of the main field. Dave Person of WNAS took on the task of installing a box at each end of the trail to serve as dispensers for the trail guides. A draft trail guide booklet was being field-tested.



*Wagner Boardwalk*

Spring 1986 saw a further flurry of activity as WNAS and government staff geared up for a trail-opening ceremony that morphed into a general natural area-opening ceremony, with political speeches and expressions of gratitude to our various financial sponsors and

supporters of the trail and natural area. A picnic shelter went up in record time at the north end of the main field.

Dick Dekker, a local naturalist and graphic designer, was engaged to design the trail guide in its final, publishable form. Much of the text had been drafted by Patsy Cotterill, with considerable input from other WNAS members; Terry Thormin, Edgar Jones and Chris Miller created the illustrations. 500 copies of a “special commemorative issue” were printed off in time for the official opening on June 7, 1986. This first edition had a brown, heavy-stock cover featuring our signature view, a sinuous boardwalk crossing a marl pond amidst coniferous trees.

Needless to say, maintenance and development of the trail has continued to occupy much of WNAS’ volunteer time. Repairs to the boardwalk are a continual chore, as the supports sink into the marl and the surface becomes uneven. Guardians of the physical infrastructure of the trail in particular have been Dick and Pat Clayton, Irl Miller, the Jenkins family, and Alice and Andy Hendry. Every month of the year a designated “monthly monitor” includes in their reconnoitre of the natural area a walk of the trail to check for changes and damage (and enjoy a quiet sit-down on any of the three commemorative benches that have been installed along the trail).

Natural environmental changes along the trail necessitated some

tinkering with the trail posts and a new edition (on buff-coloured stock) of the trail guide in 1999. The simpler, winter guide to the trail has also been reprinted.

Over the years, we have been fortunate in suffering very little vandalism to the trail and the site in general. We practice weed control at various points along the trail and cordon off the various informal trails that visitors create in pursuit of photogenic flowers or a more penetrating gaze into the amber water of the beautiful marl ponds. One serendipitous development over the years has been a natural one: the appearance of many yellow lady’s-slippers in the meadow areas at the north end of the trail where there were none before.



*Orchid - Yellow Lady's Slipper*

One could say that, metaphorically speaking, our beloved trail is a thread that winds through the lives of WNAS members and everyone else who visits the Natural Area frequently, binding us together. Nevertheless, after 25 years we are finding it is time to invite others to join, and perhaps to succeed, us in providing tender loving care to the Marl Pond Trail, and in looking for new opportunities to appreciate the experience of nature it offers.

# Stewardship Program Planning Initiative Update

Submitted by Doug Marvin, Head, Stewardship Services

## Mildred's story

The air was crisp as the sun broke through the aspens on its way to warming the earth for another spring day. I sat quietly listening to the songbirds calling. In this very reflective moment I was a child again, playing in these woods that my grandfather William Henry Stephens pioneered as the first Forest Ranger in Alberta. He told me that in 1899 this area officially became the Cooking Lake Forest Reserve. But that didn't really mean too much to me until he was gone and I was the one that needed to tell the stories of why this land is so important.

Every day as I look out north across Wanisan Lake and view the hills of the Reserve I feel the fascination of the history of Alberta's first forest reserve established to protect the valuable timber for the settlers of the Northwest Territories.

My name is Mildred (Stephens) Stefiszyn and the history of this area is very much a part of who I am. As a founding member and

Past President of the Friends of Blackfoot Society I feel a passion to share the facts and stories of the rich history of this area. I am thrilled to volunteer my time to help protect and care for the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area. I have been connected to this land my whole life. To have the ability to help others discover the wonders of "my woods" makes me very proud of my heritage.

## Alberta Parks - Connecting People to the Natural World

The Stewardship Program Plan is being drafted as an internal document to guide stewardship program development in Alberta Parks over the next ten years.

Mildred is only one example of the thousands of Albertans we partner with to achieve our stewardship goals. I have used Mildred's story to illustrate how we understand and value the work of our volunteers. Our volunteers are great examples of people connected to the natural world.

As many of you know, we have been reviewing our existing volunteer programs with the end goal to develop a plan that helps us reach our stewardship goals. We needed to do this plan to react to how quickly things are changing in Alberta. There are many new and different opportunities and challenges that we wanted to understand.

How will this affect you? Our goal is to work with you, our staff and new volunteers to continue to provide great opportunities for the stewardship of Alberta's parks and protected areas. In the spirit of open dialogue, I encourage you to call or email me with any of your questions. The new plan is being reviewed internally right now and our target is to start implementation over the next three years. The Stewardship Program Plan will organize how we can best engage the staff and the public in a culture of knowledge, caring and action toward a sustainable future.

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**Submitted by Colleen Cole, Coordinator, Conservation Services**

Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) Conservation Volunteers program engages people in the conservation of Canada's biodiversity while providing a meaningful, hands-on educational experience in ecologically significant natural areas. Conservation Volunteers help NCC achieve its goals by assisting with projects that maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the lands we steward. NCC staff does not have the capacity to achieve all this work without the help of our dedicated volunteers.



*Weed Pull, Waterton 2007 ~ NCC*

We have 15 events planned so far this season throughout Alberta, from May until August... and we need your help! Come lend a hand doing everything from bird and plant surveys to weed pulls to fence removals to help keep wildlife habitat diverse and functional. And enjoy tours of some of the most scenic spots in Alberta while learning from knowledgeable local naturalists.

Here are two of our featured events. Register for these and more on our website at [www.conservationvolunteers.ca](http://www.conservationvolunteers.ca).

## **Rare Species at Spirit Rocks**

**Date:** Friday, May 30, 2008

**Closest Town:** Rimbey, AB

Calling all birders and botanists!



*Spirit Rocks Nature Sanctuary*

Spirit Rocks Nature Sanctuary is a 200-acre (81-hectare) island of natural habitat amidst an expansive agricultural region. Because of its diversity of plant communities, which include Plains Rough Fescue grasslands, White Spruce forests, and spring-fed riparian areas, this land is particularly important to native bird and plant life. Come help us search for Pileated Woodpeckers, Mountain Bluebirds, rare orchids such as the Yellow Lady's Slipper, and other sensitive species for the Red Deer River Naturalists' May Species Count. The day will include a tour of the property describing the area's natural history. Bird and/or plant identification skills would be beneficial for this event.



*Columbia Spotted Frog ~ NCC*

## **On the Road to Recovery**

**Date:** Thursday, June 19, 2008

**Closest Town:** Waterton/  
Cardston/Pincher Creek, AB

Take in the view as you relax in a wildflower-rich meadow bordering Waterton Lakes National Park and learn about the magnificent area surrounding you. Watch for the rare Columbia Spotted Frog and the Sandhill Crane, both of which make their home on this NCC property. Then, help us remove invasive plants like thistle and blueweed along an abandoned road to prevent their spread into surrounding natural habitats. This event takes place during the week-long Waterton Wildflower Festival, which features educational courses on wildflowers, ecosystems, and more; plus art exhibits and workshops on photography, painting, and drawing. Help us stop these alien plants from ruining biodiversity, and then stick around for the festival.



*Waterton Park Front by Bob Lee*

To register, visit NCC Conservation Volunteers at [www.ConservationVolunteers.ca](http://www.ConservationVolunteers.ca), or contact Colleen Cole, Volunteer Coordinator at Nature Conservancy of Canada at 1-877-262-1253, x 3547.

14<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Songbird Festival

May 31<sup>st</sup> & June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008



at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation  
in Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park

*Come and celebrate the wonders of spring migration!*

For more information, call 780-849-8240 or email [info@borealbirdcentre.ca](mailto:info@borealbirdcentre.ca)

[www.lslbo.org](http://www.lslbo.org)

*Volunteer Opportunity* - Peter Lougheed Provincial Park

*Canada's Parks Day 2008*



# WANTED

## SHEPHERDIA CUTTERS

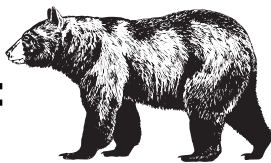
CAMPGROUND + BERRIES = BEARS



+



=



**Help protect our bears! By assisting Conservation Officers with removal of Buffalo Berry (Shepherdia) from campsite, day use and facility areas, you are helping to protect the bears in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park.**



**Removal of this favorite food source for bears from high human use areas will help minimize and prevent human conflict with wildlife.**

Canada's Parks Day is a national celebration, held annually to focus on the important role national, provincial, territorial and municipal parks and historic sites play in our lives. It was first celebrated in 1990. This summer, join Canadians from sea to sea to sea to celebrate the importance of our parks and historic sites. This year Parks Day will take place on Saturday, July 19.

Check out [www.ParksDay.ca](http://www.ParksDay.ca) to find an event near you.

# PARCS

CANADIAN PARKS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL CANADIEN DES PARCS

For more information call 403-591-6313

# Mark Your Calendars!

2008 Volunteer Conference



*Celebrating Our Volunteers!*



*Explore the diversity of Alberta's northwest region, by joining us at the 2008 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference in Grande Prairie.*

*September 12, 13 & 14th*  
**Grande Prairie**

**AlbertaParks.ca**