

# Partners in Preservation

A Volunteer Newsletter



AlbertaParks.ca

Spring 2010: Issue #18

## Big Lake Environment Support Society

### Miles Constable President, Big Lake Environment Support Society

The Big Lake Environment Support Society, the official stewards of Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, honoured their founding member, Dr. Fin Fairfield, on October 19, 2009. A short ceremony was held in the lobby of the St. Albert City Hall, with speeches by the Honourable Ken Allred, MLA for St. Albert,



Plaque Presentation (left to right Ken Allred, Fin Fairfield, Miles Constable, Len Bracko)

Len Bracko Deputy Mayor of St. Albert and BLESS President Miles Constable. A plaque prepared by Parks Division was presented by

Mr. Allred and Mr. Constable and a desk display was presented by Mr. Bracko. The plaque has been installed at the BLESS observation platform on the shore of Big Lake.

BLESS has been very active over the 18 years it has been in existence, with construction of a shelter and the observation platform near Big Lake. BLESS was instrumental in the designation of Big Lake as a Special Places 2000 site and as an Important Bird Area. BLESS was awarded the Emerald Award for excellence in environmental stewardship in 1996. They operate a summer educational program for children in St. Albert. They started Clean Up the Sturgeon Day that has now been taken over by the City of St. Albert. BLESS started the Riparian Edge Enhancement Project that was quickly taken over by the city as a means of improving river edge habitat along



Plaque of Dr. Fin Fairfield

the Sturgeon River. They set up a solar-powered web camera. Probably most importantly, BLESS was a part of the environmental wave that helped to form Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. All of this came from Dr. Fairfield's initial desire to form an environmental group to help preserve the Big Lake wetlands. From small acorns do mighty oaks grow.

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# The Venturers Society of Calgary and the Friends of Fish Creek

## Mike Depper

Program Coordinator/Team Leader, Venturers Society of Calgary

The Venturers Society of Calgary was established in 1986 and began operations in the Bragg Creek area of Kananaskis Country. In 2000 the Venturers launched a program at Fish Creek Provincial Park. In 2002, funding was secured to construct a base operations building, including a lunch room at the East Shop Maintenance Yard.

Venturers works with Persons with Developmental Disabilities to fulfill our mission of "...ensuring the Physical, Emotional, Intellectual and Spiritual development of the

Interprovincial Park. Each team consists of five participants and a Team Leader. Currently, all the participants are males, ranging in age from twenty to sixty-three years old.

The Memorial Bench Program with the Friends of Fish Creek is a major project for us. Each year, in the spring and fall, we do bench maintenance—starting with a through cleaning, including graffiti removal. The stain finish is touched up as required, litter is picked in the area (man there are a lot of cigarette butts out there),



participants through meaningful participation in communities, by enabling our participants to experience the wonders of our natural areas, and by recognizing their many contributions." Overall, there are now eight teams in existence; two at Fish Creek, two based out of the Elbow Falls area, two at Burby's Fire Hall at Bragg Creek and two at Cypress Hills

grass and weeds are removed from the shale pad, and finally, the shale pad is raked and smoothed. There are approximately eighty-five benches in the park, so this requires a substantial time commitment. In addition, a few new benches are installed each year. Although the limit for the number of benches in the park has reached its maximum, some of the

first benches installed in 1999 are now coming up for renewal. Sites are freed up as some donors do not continue their contract past the initial ten year agreement.

The Venturers also assist the Friends with several other projects such as tree wrapping for beaver control, collecting recycling from the office, and lending a hand for lots of “if you guys have time” requests.

Our association with the Friends

is only one component of our program in the Park. Through a cooperative agreement with Fish Creek Provincial Park, the Venturers are involved in snow clearing at selected sites, wood cutting and splitting, recycling of bottles, cans, metal, tires, and bicycles, removal of tree forts and unauthorized camp sites, trail care, sign installation and a host of other tasks. We work closely with Rudy Szymanek and Rob Hummel from Parks Maintenance and generously thank them for

their assistance over the years. Jim Stomp, the Site Manager, is also very supportive, and it is great to be able to have a permanent home and assist the park with their needs.

The next time you see our group out in the park, stop and say hello. Nothing makes the gang feel better than chatting with people and hearing that the work they are doing is worthwhile.

## Partners in Preservation Volunteer Newsletter—Calling All Submissions!

Partners in Preservation is always looking for great articles and photos. To streamline our administration, please follow these guidelines.

- Articles should be no longer than 500 words, and include title and author.
- If including a photograph, please provide a brief description of the image, including names, activities, location and photographer by full name. We prefer having the original photo or slide, and will return them to you if you provide a return address.

Here are the requirements if you are submitting in digital format:

- Do not send photos as a GIF or in PowerPoint, MS Word, PDF, etc.

- Send photos as a TIF or a JPG.
- Ensure all slides/photos are scanned at least 300 dpi resolution.
- If scanning a slide, please enlarge by at least 500%.

NOTE: The Editor retains the right to edit or refuse submissions (article or photo).

Articles and photos can be submitted to:  
[parks.volunteer@gov.ab.ca](mailto:parks.volunteer@gov.ab.ca)

or mailed to:  
Partners in Preservation  
Visitor Services Branch,  
Parks Division  
Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation  
2nd Floor, Oxbridge Place  
9820– 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J6

We would love to hear your story!



Grotto Canyon

# All About Amphibians

## Alex Mueller Seasonal Conservation Officer

Tonight I'm checking frog traps and tomorrow morning I'll be checking bear traps. Quite the juxtaposition of duties! I don't think that too many people find these two items in their job description.

In fact, the frog job has to do with my volunteering in the Researching Amphibian Numbers in Alberta (RANA) project, and I picked a great evening for my first time.

Following a week-long hot and dry spell, the previous night had seen some rain fall and clearly all the frogs, toads and salamanders in Kuhn's pond thought "it's now or never," and decided to make a break for it. So they jumped, scurried and slithered away from their birthplace up the wet slope to look for a winter retreat under rotting deadfall or a pile of leaves in the surrounding forest.

But on their way they ran into a wall. Like anyone hitting a wall, they determined to get past it, but not being the best climbers they sought a way around it. They made steady progress along the wall until unfortunately for them; they fell into a deep, dark hole. At least on this particular night they had lots of company down there, but also unfortunately, it was the type of company that sometimes eat each other.

RANA is a province-wide program that aims to establish long-term amphibian population and distribution patterns while

increasing public awareness of the importance of amphibians and their wetland habitat.

This is the 12th field season of amphibian pond surveys and pitfall trapping in Kananaskis Country, conducted by a 100% volunteer team.



Boreal Toad

The weather and natural cycle variations that affect amphibians are such that only long-term monitoring truly allows scientists to understand the trends that are revealed over the years, hence the importance of keeping this survey going. "Because of the lack of long-term data, conclusions pertaining to the stability of the population and range of the species in the province are tentative, at best" says an SRD report on long-toed salamanders.

Many species of amphibians throughout the world have declined in abundance, and in some cases become endangered or extinct. Although they have seen the dinosaurs come and go (weathering over 300 million

years to evolve into 6,000 singular species as diverse as any group on earth), they are among the hardest hit by today's changing landscapes. Loss of habitat, pollution, increased ultraviolet light, pathogens, predators, and a changing climate have all contributed to their declining numbers. Amphibians have a skin so thin that it is permeable to gases. Their simple lungs are not sufficient on their own for breathing. The main disadvantage of this characteristic is that the animals lose a lot of water: their skin is always wet. To stop their bodies from drying out they must live where the air and the ground are humid. The second disadvantage is that their porous skin makes them very vulnerable to contamination by environmental pollutants. Acidic precipitation falling as snow can be very damaging when it melts in the spring and sends a wave of highly acidic water into breeding ponds possibly damaging amphibian eggs.

When we did our training for this monitoring project with Lisa Wilkinson, Species at Risk Biologist with Sustainable Resource Development, she explained that we would wear gloves when handling the animals—not for our protection but for theirs! On a buggy summer evening when it would be tempting to apply insect repellent to ourselves, we could actually do a lot of damage. DEET exposure kills

a salamander in two minutes! In fact two of the three different species we caught in our pitfall traps, the long-toed salamander and the boreal toad are listed as 'Sensitive' by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

Amphibians have two separate phases in their life. The first is their aquatic tadpole stage followed by their more terrestrial adult stage. They are separated from the reptiles (snakes, lizards, and turtles) by the following factors: their skin is not scaly, the eggs have no shell, and fertilization occurs externally. Some amphibian species also have some interesting characteristics. Our rarest resident at Kuhn's Pond, the boreal toad can live at up to 3,000 meters of elevation. Only the male is vocal, and they have toxins which irritate the mouths of their predators. The long-toed salamander has a similar feature; an orange-yellowish stripe down its back that advertises 'Don't eat me, I taste bad.' But that doesn't stop them from eating each other, as they are cannibalistic.

The salamander's striped tail serves more than one purpose: not just as arsenal but... pantry too! The granular glands in the tail can store fat for the salamander to use as food during hard times, as well as serve up a sticky poison to any predator that tries to take a bite! Garter snakes are one of the most common predators of terrestrial salamanders, and scars on the tails of captured salamanders suggest that this defence is effective against small predators like shrews and birds.

However a few times we found salamanders missing a limb so clearly the defence mechanism is not 100% effective.

Possibly the most interesting of our three captured species was the wood frog. In the winter it freezes solid. No heart beat and no respiration. In the spring it thaws out just in time for spawning when the males struggle so hard among one another to hold onto the females, they often die of exhaustion.

On one of my nights on duty we found over 260 amphibians in the 16 pitfall traps around the perimeter of the pond. They had fallen into these after walking along the wall made of drift net fencing. One trap had over 100 alone, mostly young-of-the-year



Mike Robinson weighs and measures a long-toed salamander 'from snout to vent' (nose to anus)

wood frogs on their first departure from home.

In the trap they had been kept cool from below by moist sponges and protected from above by a shield which prevented them from being exposed to the sun. In teams of three or four, volunteers took all the amphibians out, identified, weighed and measured them,



Kristy Wakelin, Coleen Reed and Mike Robinson at work on the survey

then finally released them on the opposite side of the fence so they could continue on their journey.

Subsequent evenings were a little less hectic with fewer amphibians caught and I had the time to admire the small bodies of these overlooked but important creatures.

It was a successful summer with close to 800 amphibians caught in 19 traps on 38 evening sessions between August 15th and September 22nd.

16 people volunteered a total of 167 hours to this project, an impressive number indeed! I really enjoyed being part of it and it is gratifying to know that there are many great opportunities such as this in the Bow Valley, where education and contribution go hand in hand.

I would like to give special thanks to Colleen Reed for introducing me to the program and to Sandra Code for all the help that she provided our group, organizing schedules and gathering our data sheets to be passed on to the biologists.

All photos by Alex Mueller

# Volunteer Journal

## Sharon Kimmel BCBC Volunteer

My husband Wayne and I have been camping around Alberta for many years. Wayne is an avid fly fisher and I am an amateur birder. Over the last few years we have talked often about volunteering as campground hosts in a provincial park. This year we finally filled out an application form and sent it in. When we heard from Brad Marshall, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Parks Division, offering us a position at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation on Lesser Slave Lake, I was thrilled! Here was a unique opportunity for me to learn so much more about birds and see songbirds during fall migration. Wayne had hoped for a spot that would offer more stream fishing, but was very eager to see Lesser Slave Lake, so agreed this was the spot for us. Brad introduced us by email to Chris Dodds, Visitor Services Supervisor, Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park. Both Brad and Chris explained that our volunteer duties at the Boreal Centre would be very different than those of campground hosts. After talking by telephone to Sue Walsh, whose family were repeat summer volunteers at the centre, I had no doubts. Sue sang the praises of the staff and the centre and assured me that we would love the experience. Our volunteer commitment at the centre would be from July 30 until Sept. 9, 2009.

We had never been to Lesser Slave Lake before. The drive from Edmonton north was a treat in itself. What a beautiful, green, lush

landscape. After we arrived and got our trailer set up, Bill Walsh and son Michael took us on an orientation tour of the centre and the provincial park. Wow, so much to see and learn! We were feeling very nervous about what skills we might have to offer.



Wayne helping visitors with bird mask craft

The staff was so welcoming. Patti Campsall, Executive Director of the Centre, Charity Martin, Information Officer, and Chris Dodds were all quick to assure us that they could find lots of volunteer jobs for us. One of the first was to make a least fly catcher hat for Chris to wear for a performance at the amphitheatre at the Marten River campground. We were less than keen... neither of us being very creative and both really doubting our abilities to produce anything stage worthy. But, we holed up in the basement with a baseball cap, a glue gun, some foam, spray paint and a picture for inspiration and two long days later we emerged with what to us was a pretty sad example of theatre costuming. Everyone acted as though we did



Sharon sewing

a fine job indeed. Chris did wear it for performances, but we are aware that we haven't been asked to produce more costumes!

Other volunteer tasks have been much more successful from our point of view and very enjoyable. They have included posting weekly event notices in the surrounding park and regional locations, working at the front desk and kiosk, greeting visitors to the centre and showing them around, working with children on various activities, proof reading articles, posters and letters, preparing The Nest for new occupants, accompanying interpreters on walks, participating in shows at the



Fly fishing at sunset; photo by Wayne Kimmel

amphitheatre, taking photographs, almost capturing dragonflies, sewing bags for the banding lab,



organizing the storage areas, packing up the equipment in the amphitheatre and sitting in on brainstorming sessions re: future programming.

There have been many highlights for us over the 6 weeks. We accompanied Cori Klassen,

Boreal Educator, on our first trip to the banding lab. What a wonderful opportunity to see banders Richard Krikum and Nicole Linfoot in action. They are so knowledgeable and good at explaining the banding process. I was thrilled to see tiny songbirds up close. Wayne's had his first kayaking experience with Tim Landon, Seasonal Interpreter, fly fishing for walleye. Wayne caught one big enough to keep and we enjoyed a delicious dinner the next evening. We walked along the Trans Canada Trail and along the shore of this amazing lake. We were able to share our experiences with our friends from Calgary and Victoria...all who came to visit and see the centre. We got to know the other people who work out of the Lesser Slave Provincial Park and the Boreal Centre, the maintenance

staff, the Conservation Officers... all so friendly and ready to answer questions and share experiences. We enjoyed interacting with the many interesting people, from near and far, visiting the centre.

But by far, the biggest highlight for us has been the opportunity to work with and get to know the most welcoming, collaborative, knowledgeable, hard working and fun filled staff ever. We were always made to feel like we were part of the team. So much so, that we hope to come back next May and June so we can see birds in breeding plumage, help prepare for the annual LSLBO Annual Songbird Festival, and help with school programs offered at the centre. Thanks everyone for a great volunteer experience.

## 2010 Events

### 2010 Volunteer Conference

Join us at the 2010 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference as we celebrate our volunteers!  
September 10, 11 & 12  
Sherwood Park, Alberta

### Host Campout 2010

Calling All Hosts—Current, New and Retired.  
The 2010 Host Campout is scheduled for April 30–May 2.  
For more information or to register contact Brad Marshall at (780) 427–9017 or Brad.Marshall@gov.ab.ca



Heading for the beach at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park

# National Stewardship & Conservation Conference

## C. Mowat Volunteer Steward

Alberta has been very fortunate to host two stewardship conferences this year: the National Stewardship & Conservation Conference, in July, and the more recent 2009 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation sponsored me as a volunteer steward for the Wagner Natural Area Society to attend the National Stewardship & Conservation Conference. This is the only national conference of its type to bring together Canada's stewards to discuss emerging issues and solutions for strengthening stewardship across Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The conference was excellent and proved to be an eye-opener for many participants. Held at the University of Calgary, it was attended by a wide-ranging and rich mix of people from across Canada: young and old, women and men, farmers and agri-businessmen, researchers, and representatives from industry and community-based stewardship organizations. There were also delegates from municipal, provincial and federal governments, First Nations, and conservation-oriented land trusts.

The conference looked at the many challenges faced by individuals and organizations working in land stewardship.

Topics included (as a sample):

- the need for stronger connections between all stakeholders
- the positive role of land stewardship in developing stronger connections within communities
- the need for action...now!... and the need for more research to act
- the importance of individual actions as the foundation for change
- the critical role of information in fostering behavior change and action
- the value of creatively seeking and developing partnerships of all kinds
- building longevity-of-effort and longevity-of-result within the conservation movement and within stewardship organizations, at all levels
- critical funding needs
- how to sell ideas and develop 'issue campaigns'
- how to get from 'promise' to 'practice' in terms of public policy
- models for conservation/conservation approaches in other parts of the world
- the need for a comprehensive evaluation of human activities assessing the benefits,

limitations, costs and risks in terms of environmental, social and economic impacts; a "full cost accounting" to be used in decision making.

One of the key elements of the conference was the sharing of 'lessons learned'; often also resulting in sharing of laughter. As one speaker put it "Progress now. Perfection later."

Many speakers underlined the importance of 'collaborative stewardship'. These partnerships can:

- foster education and understanding,
- open up new possibilities for conservation,
- gain needed resources,
- build consensus and support within the larger community, and
- enhance the strength and longevity of local stewardship efforts.

Some organizations felt that the **durability of solutions** in their own projects, was created by taking a goal-driven approach, using creative flexibility in finding partners and common ground wherever it existed, and by being inclusive; i.e. finding ways to involve anyone who wants to help out. As another steward noted "People give to people. We've learned that relationships and trust are critical."

Though many issues were discussed, the overall message or tone of the conference could be summed up in a few statements:

- the importance of each person's freely-given efforts
- much more can be achieved through broad and inclusive partnerships
- we can be much stronger through joint action, and
- keep the faith.

If opinion polls are to be believed, the environment is no less important to Canadians in difficult economic times than in good times. Ultimately, many communities, landowners, and stewardship initiatives benefit when all of our ongoing actions collectively move us towards the solutions to our land conservation and stewardship concerns.

For those who would like more information, video and text copies of many of the conference presentations are available on the

post-conference website. (See footnote below).<sup>2</sup>

## Footnotes

- 1. 2009 Stewardship Conference.** Wetlands Alberta website. <http://wetlandsalberta.ca/news/2009/jun/11/2009-national-stewardship-conference>
- 2. Strengthening Stewardship - Investing in Every Step, Stewardship & Conservation in Canada 2009, July 8 to 11, Calgary, 2009.** Select one of: 'Videos of Plenary Sessions', 'Posters', or 'Presentations'. Post-conference website. <http://www.stewardship2009.ca/default.cfm>

## 2009 Volunteer Award Recipients



Back Row: Robert Peake (on behalf of Ken and Pat Hatt), Arol and Frank Longhurst, Leonard and Eleanor Rondeau and Gertie Meyer  
Front Row: Nicole Dancey (on behalf of Medicine Hat College) and Don Cockerton

Eight individuals and one organization received recognition for their volunteerism, stewardship and hospitality at the annual Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference on September 19.

The year's conference, with the theme Sacred Landscapes - Caring Spirits, celebrated the connection between land and people. Albertans were honoured for dedicating their time and talent in preserving, protecting

and enhancing provincial parks as a legacy for future generations. Awards in four categories were distributed, based on nominations received from Albertans, parks staff, volunteers and partners. 2009 Provincial Award Recipients:

- Campground Host Hospitality Award: Leonard and Eleanor Rondeau
- Campground Host Hospitality Award: Frank and Arol Longhurst
- Campground Host Hospitality Award: Ken and Pat Hatt
- Staff Lifetime Volunteerism Achievement Award: Don Cockerton
- Outstanding Individual Steward Award: Gertie Meyer
- Outstanding Group Steward Award: Medicine Hat College (Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership Program)

# Sacred Landscapes—Caring Spirits

## 2009 Alberta Parks Volunteer Conference

### Vaughn Hauser

#### Project and Program Director, Friends of Fish Creek

This year's Alberta Parks Annual Volunteer Conference was well worth attending. Thanks to the dedication and hard work put forth by organizers, the weekend-long event ran very smoothly and kept all who participated well provided-for.

Some attendees spent the beautifully warm weekend of September 18-20 camping at Park Lake Provincial Park, while the rest of us stayed at the Lethbridge Lodge Hotel and Conference Centre in Lethbridge; this event's host hotel. This was my first stay



in Lethbridge and I very much enjoyed the cozy accommodations with the gardens, the Cotton Blossom Lounge, and the sound of running water just below my balcony room. The food and service were very good, and 120 volunteers attended. The Friday evening started out with dinner, followed by a superb example of long term dedication and hard work from the Alberta Birds of Prey Centre "A 25 Year Case History in Volunteerism." Colin

Weir presented and spoke of his experiences, and how his long term dream and vision have come full circle. Colin also brought his fine feathered ambassadors to meet a very inquisitive audience, providing all with a fantastic end to the evening.

The next day we were up early for breakfast and a trip out to the very unique and awe-inspiring Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. The temperature climbed to a balmy 41°C in the mid afternoon as I stood mesmerized by petroglyph and pictograph etchings on the rock walls. All the etchings speak to a time in history when the stories of the Blackfoot people were reflected as artwork. I also observed the etchings of our earliest Albertan graffiti artists that also decorated the sandstone walls of the great rocks.

From etchings to spray paint, I guess graffiti also existed then. Earlier in the morning, those in my group began with a hike down the Hoodoo Interpretive Trail. We then proceeded to join another park interpreter in a Blackfoot tipi to learn about the design, construction, and significant meaning surrounding the Blackfoot culture, and how important the tipi was to their way of life on the prairies. For those that were up for more of a hike, the Police Outpost hike was the other option.



At the end of our day we all played in the Writing-on-Stone Interpretive Centre. The diverse cultural, natural, and historical interpretations found there could have amused us hours. That evening offered an awards banquet with great food, great service, and most importantly, the volunteers were honoured for their commitment, hard work, and time put forth over the years.

Sunday, the last day of the conference, started off with rain. But we were all engrossed in the presentations held throughout the morning session. From invasive plants to eco-based partnerships, a steward workshop and host chat, we were all kept busy right up until lunch. By 1:30 in the afternoon we were all on our journeys back home. Some of us drove, but those who did not want to drive were provided with a chartered bus to and from Lethbridge via Canmore, Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer. All in all, this weekend was well worth the trip.



# Public Feedback and Consultation

We want to know what you think!  
Your feedback will help us to  
better manage Alberta's parks.

To ensure everyone has an  
opportunity to be heard, there  
are several ways to provide

feedback—through the online  
input link; via email; or, if you  
prefer, by regular mail. Also, feel  
free to speak with our staff when  
you're visiting a park and share  
your thoughts!

We encourage all Albertans to take  
an active role in planning the future  
of Alberta's parks. Remember -  
your opinion matters!

## Links

[Feedback.AlbertaParks.ca](http://Feedback.AlbertaParks.ca)  
[tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/](http://tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult/)



Geocaching in Cooking Lake—Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area