

## **GN Issues Committee 2015 Annual Report to the AGM March 22, 2016**

The Issues Committee (consisting of GN members Martha Munz Gue, Marty Drut, Hugh Armstrong, Dave McKenzie, Tina Regehr, and John Slater) met on three occasions during the year; March 14, May 4 and Dec 14. After the meeting on May 4<sup>th</sup>, a walk through the Marlborough coulee behinds John's house and along Seven Persons Creek was conducted to record the wildflowers.

The procedure, after discussing an issue in committee (or in of nine sub-committees) generally involved taking one or more of three actions: 1) make recommendations to the GN Board of Directors for discussion and action; 2) make appointments with City representatives, MLAs and/or MP to discuss the issue with them; and/or 3) write a letter and/or brief which was signed by the President of the GN and sent to the appropriate contact responsible for the issue at hand. In addition to holding meetings and arranging visits, the committee also conducted communication by email and phone.

In 2015, the priority issues that were discussed included:

1. Endangered Species and their habitat:
  - a. Greater Sage Grouse and silver sagebrush in SE Alberta: The Federal Government applied the Sage-Grouse Protection Emergency Order to SE Alberta and SW Saskatchewan on February 18, 2014. The 2013 Amended Sage-grouse Recovery Strategy was reviewed. Articles in the MH News and Prairie Post reported that some ranchers in SE Alberta are unsure of the full extent of the PEO in their area but another rancher in SW Saskatchewan said that it is not an issue yet so business as usual. The Calgary Zoo is having some success with captive breeding of Greater Sage Grouse. Joel Nicholson, Alberta Wildlife Officer, gave informative presentation at the GN General Meeting Nov 24 on the recent Sage Grouse count and recovery activities including plans for further translocation of birds from Montana in 2016 to 2020.
  - b. PFRA Land at Onefour Research Station being phased out: Discussed the importance of retaining the Station for Sage-Grouse wildlife refuge and captive breeding, as well as UofA enfoldng Onefour into its grasslands research suite of venues.
  - c. Highway 41 South Upgrade: Still included in Alberta Transportation Plan. GN states the importance of limiting the expansion of Hwy 41 through or west and south of Cypress Hills to help protect the critical habitat for Sage Grouse and Pronghorn Antelope.
  - d. Tiny Cryptantha in the Ranchlands Environmental Reserve: To protect the area and help with the recovery of TC, GN volunteers participated in the removal by picking the tops of the invasive plants Baby's Breath (nearly 15,000 plants) and Leafy Spurge (over 400 plants). Germination tests of the Baby's Breath seeds at the Medicine Hat College showed over 80% viability. Further information reported 2.a and b.
  - e. Wildflower surveys: in concert with the Alberta Plant Watch and Baby's Breath removal project, surveys were conducted in the Ranchlands Environmental Reserve. Walks in the area of Marlborough coulee and Seven Persons Creek were also reported.
2. Invasive Species:
  - a. Baby's Breath: Besides helping with removal of plants in Ranchlands Environmental Reserve for the third year, the Baby's Breath eradication project in Police Point Park was continued for a fourth year to determine the best method to eliminate the invasive plant. Over 300 plants were dug and/or sprayed with herbicide when necessary.
  - b. Leafy Spurge: Removal of this weed was continued in Ranchlands Environmental Reserve and in East Ross Glen Coulee but not in Police Point Park, due to the spreading of the plant by the 2013 June flood. However, the City Parks Dept did undertake some selective spot spraying of Leafy Spurge in the Park.
  - c. Wormwood Sage and Dame's Rocket: Removal of these invasive plants from Police Point Park is an ongoing endeavor when time permitted.

3. Headwaters and Riparian Areas along the River and Creeks:
  - a. South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP): Protection of the headwaters in Cypress Hills and Rocky Mountains and the riparian areas along the River and Creeks is particularly important to provide wildlife habitat and mitigate flooding as evident by the devastation of the flood in June 2013.
  - b. Berms in Harlow area and through Lions and Strathcona Parks: Construction of the earth berms was completed in 2015 resulted in the removal of many 100s of trees. Placement of these flood control infrastructure and their ecological effects on the flora and fauna are still being assessed.
  - c. Riparian Health Assessment of the River: The MHIP applied for and received a grant to conduct field work to record the current flora and condition of the riparian zone along the river; particularly the berms. After a training session by Alberta Cows and Fish Society in Police Point Park, crews were sent out to evaluate the riparian health in the Harlow area, Lions and Strathcona Parks, Riverside area and Police Point Park.
  - d. Riverbank Restoration in Police Point Park: Due to major erosion of the river banks; particularly near the sewerage pipeline crossing the river from Strathcona Park to Police Point Park, reconstruction of the riverbanks were undertaken using rock and earth fill and placement of willow cuttings, mesh overlay and shrubs. Effectiveness of the technique will be assessed in the coming years. Protection of the riverbanks in Strathcona Island Park using rock riprap and placement of mesh has begun.
  - e. Trash Removal: GN continued to participate in the City wide cleanup as well as removal of trash from Police Point Park but not in Lions and Strathcona Island Parks because of the berm construction work.
4. Water Quality and Conservation:
  - a. South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP): Our personal health as well as that of wildlife is dependent on the quality of our drinking water. Therefore, care and conservation of our headwaters should be foremost in our daily life.
  - b. World Water Week: Associated with World Water Day March 22<sup>nd</sup>, displays of relevant information and material were held at the Public Library and College Library. Also, a tour of the City Water Treatment Plant was arranged, and a film "DamNation" was shown at the Public Library.

Other issues included discussion of pesticides affecting honey bees and pollinators; reducing use of plastic bags & bottles; alternative transportation; renewable energy such as wind & solar power; tree wrapping; climate change, and conservation and protection of critical habitat.

Possibilities for future work of the Issues Committee:

1. Take field trips to endangered spaces. e.g. Ranchlands, SE Alberta, along the river and creeks.
2. Establish a regular communication with the Mayor, aldermen and City Departments, and Alberta Government relevant ministers and local MLAs.
3. Continue participation in activities such as: 1. Riparian health assessment, 2. Removal of invasive weeds from prairie coulees and grasslands (including Ranchlands), Wildflower surveys.
4. Continue collaboration with SEAWA and Unisphere concerning water management and Alberta Land Use Framework affecting the South Saskatchewan River Basin and surrounding SE Alberta area.

The committee looks forward to input and participation by other GN members concerning the issues mentioned above as well as any other issues.

Respectfully submitted by  
John Slater; Chair of the Issues Committee