



MH Interpretive Program
Managed by **Grasslands Naturalists**
Based in **Police Point Park, Medicine Hat**
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Annual Report - 2016
Summary For Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Annual General Meeting, March 28, 2017
by Corlaine Gardner, Chief Park Interpreter

The Interpretive Program continues to provide high quality, year round programming for Hatters and their visitors. We provide displays, events, special school programming, and community involvement.

The Grasslands Naturalists have a contract with the City which covers just over half of the costs for all the things we do. This means that we are Naturalist employees. We do not work for the City. The contract specifies that the Interpretive Program provides programming that is neither a platform for City or GN opinions. Over the years, we have developed a credibility that allows us to be trusted to answer questions and provide clear information, as well as inspiring appreciation for our **prairie heritage**.

2016 was another good year. We have a solid base of visitors, and there are always a few more people discovering what we do here, and how to find us or get involved in other ways. The variety of programming, including displays which change regularly, gives returning and new audiences more reasons to visit. We also take our events offsite, and contact people in different parts of the City. Our attendance figures continue to be in the 36,000 range. That includes about 46 public programs, which involved over 10,000 people. Our curriculum based school programs and our work with community groups such as day camps, day cares, associations, and special interest clubs reached over 6,000 mostly children in about 300 groups. We also helped about 100 other groups or classes plan their own self guided events .

We also continue to reach out through newspaper, cable tv, and social media. People often comment on the articles or videos that they have seen. Sharing our messages can happen in many ways.

Our staff, besides me, for 2016 included long term Park Interpreters Marty Drut and Valerie Martins, part time Lisa Bey, intern Morganne Wall, student Kyle Grimm part time early in 2016, and Summer Interpreter Brenda Powder. Our bookkeepers have been Louise Sjøvold and now Lisa McMow.

Our funding is based on the contract with the City, which provides the outline of our responsibilities and more than half our annual budget. It is up to us to find enough money in other ways to be able to provide all the services that we do. We charge for some things. Schools pay for our programs, but the amount we charge does not cover all our costs. Schools face challenges funding field trip because of very high transportation cost, not because our programs are expensive. Sometimes we go to the schools and work in their school yard or nearby natural areas. We travel much more cheaply than a whole bus. We also work with teachers to coordinate the visit of several classes to the Park at one time so they can share bussing costs. We recognize that schools and other non-profit groups are on tight budgets too, and we are very willing to work with them to meet shared goals.

Rentals can also bring in some funds, especially when the weather cooperates. Our equipment rental rates are kept quite low so that it is not a barrier for any family. We would rather have people come back several times rather than only try it once.

Our Nature Store also contributes to our income. Our dedicated volunteer, Dee Armstrong is gradually taking over management of the Nature Store. We carry books and other items related to our mandate, and we like to be able to use the things in the Store as conversation starters.

Donations are another source of funding. Overall, donations are meagre and disappointing. During our big events, hundreds of people will spend an entire afternoon taking part, and most don't put anything in the donation box.

We do have a few special donors and we really appreciate their ongoing support.



We have some ongoing partnerships and sponsors which help us plan ahead. The Kiwanis Club of Medicine Hat sponsors the Kiwanis Family Day with both funds and many volunteers. The Kinsmen Club helps out financially with the Easter Program. Our ongoing partnership with the Library allows us to provide several StoryWalks each year.

With the relatively recent participation of Grasslands Naturalists in a Casino, GN is now able to absorb some costs which will also help our budget. Hugh Armstrong, as chair of the Fund Raising Committee has been hard at work writing grant applications.

Grants are a major source of funds. I apply for many different ones each year. Some are turned down, and some are approved. If we are able to receive funding from almost half of the grants that I apply for, I think we are doing well. It may seem like grants are easy money, but a lot of work goes into all of the applications, and a few are approved.

One of the highlights of 2016 was our Volunteer Upgrading Project. We were fortunate to receive a \$10,000 grant from FCSS (Family and Community Support Services) to update our volunteer program. With this grant, we were able to keep Lisa Bey working to update our whole volunteer system. We now have better records of our valuable volunteers; there is a monthly newsletter; we have WCB coverage for volunteers as well as staff; nice new uniform shirts for staff and volunteers; we have had police checks for many volunteers; and were able to offer first aid training too.

Another highlight was the visit of Minister of Culture and Tourism Ricardo Miranda. We had applied and received a grant from his Department to present our cooperative Alberta Culture Days at the Police Point Park Fall Festival. We worked with Miywasin and Unisphere to hold a festival including lots of ethnic food and a Metis kitchen party. Minister Miranda chose to attend our event as one of a few that he could attend around the province. He was enthusiastic and appreciative.



Overall, 2016 was another successful year for the Interpretive Program. It could not continue to be successful with out the support of Grasslands Naturalists, and our Club should be very proud.

