

GN Issues Committee 2016 Annual Report to the AGM March 28, 2017

The Issues Committee (consisting of GN members Martha Munz Gue, Marty Drut, Hugh Armstrong, Dave McKenzie, Tina Regehr, Dwayne Myers and John Slater) met on five occasions during the year; April 11, June 6, September 29, November 8 and December 12; with the last two being specially to discuss the preservation and management of wetlands. After the meeting on April 11th at the Family Leisure Centre (FLC), a walk through the Prairie Patch behind the FLC was conducted to view the diversity of the grasslands in preparation for drafting a submission to the City concerning the proposed Brier Run Development Plan which was completed on May 15th 2016.

The meeting procedure, after discussing an issue in committee, generally involved taking one or more of three actions: 1) make recommendations to the GN Board of Directors for further discussion and action; 2) 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; and/or 3) make appointments with City representatives, MLAs and/or MP to discuss the issue with them. In addition to holding meetings and arranging visits, the committee also conducted communication by email and phone.

In 2016, the priority issues that were discussed included:

1. Endangered Species and their habitat:
 - a. 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 27,000 plants) and Leafy Spurge (over 3,000 plants). Also, nearly 4,000 Baby's Breath plants were dug in two 100x100m control areas to further test that method of eradication. Further information is reported 2.a and b.
 - b. Wildflower surveys: in concert with the Alberta Plant Watch and Baby's Breath removal project, surveys were conducted in the Ranchlands Environmental Reserve. Also, surveys in the area of McCoy High School, McCutcheon Drive NW, Marlborough coulee and Seven Persons Creek were reported. Note, the Committee discussions of Wildflower Brochure and Butterfly Database are reported in 5a and b.
 - c. SARA Documents: The document concerning the SW Saskatchewan Multi-Species at Risk – South of the Divide was reviewed and briefing notes were prepared and submitted to the GN Board for consideration and submission to the Federal Government Department. Also, the SARA Recovery Plan 2016-2017 and Policies for twelve species on the prairies were discussed and letter drafted for the GN Board consideration and President's signature.
2. Invasive Species:
 - a. Baby's Breath: Besides helping with removal of plants in Ranchlands Environmental Reserve for the fourth year, the Baby's Breath eradication project in Police Point Park was continued for a fifth year to eliminate the invasive plant. About 180 plants were dug and/or sprayed with herbicide when necessary. Also, Baby's Breath plants were dug from along the trails in Northeast Crescent Heights (66 plants) and Southeast Hill (18 plants) as well as flagged and/or picked in Bier Run area.
 - 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 endeavour when time permitted.
3. Headwaters and Riparian Areas along the River and Creeks:
 - a. Riparian Health Assessment of the SS River: The second year of the MHIP project to record the current flora and condition of the riparian zone along the river was completed in Police Point Park and Medicine Hat Gold Course Reach, Ranchlands, Waste Water Treatment Plant, the Tangle

- and Downtown. Preliminary results of the project were displayed at the SEAWA Urban Sustainability Forum Nov 4th. The final database and report are being prepared by Marty Drut.
- b. Berm in Riverside NE: The City had an earth berm constructed in 2016 resulted in the removal of 100s of trees. Placement of other flood control infrastructure west in Riverside as well as Seven Persons Creek is still being determined. Study of the ecological effects of the berms on the flora and fauna will be an ongoing endeavour.
 - c. Riverbank Restoration: Due to the 2013 flood erosion of the river bank in Police Point Park; particularly near the sewerage pipeline crossing the river from Strathcona Island Park, the effectiveness of the using rock, earth fill, willow cuttings, mesh overlay and shrubs is being assessed. Rob Gardner gave an informative presentation to the Committee on Stream Management and riparian restoration followed by a tour of two locations along Seven Persons Creek to view different management techniques. Also, GN Club participated with the City in planting 2500 seedlings in Lions and Strathcona Island Parks to replace the trees removed with placement of the berms.
 - d. Trash Removal: GN conducted the Shoreline Cleanup of Lions and Strathcona Island Parks, removal of trash from Police Point Park, as well as the City wide cleanup of Bier Run.
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 the headwaters in the Castles, Livingston and Bow Valley should be foremost in our concern.
 - b. World Water Week: Associated with World Water Day March 22nd, a week-long display of relevant information and material was held at the City Public Library.
 - c. Storm Water Retention: Tours of the ponds in City's Southlands area were conducted to view their development and establishment of natural habitat. Following this, a meeting was held with the City to discuss the proposed Hamptons Phase 3 pond development. This led to further discussions and setting up a sub-committee to study in 2017 the environmental policies in the City's Municipal Development Plan.
5. Other Project Activities:
- a. Wildflower Brochure: A sub-committee (consisting of GN members Martha Munz Gue, Dwayne Myers, Rob Gardner and John Slater) along with Cathy Linowski from the Medicine Hat College, undertook the preparation of brochure to display the local wildflowers of Medicine Hat. During five meetings involving over 50 person-hours, a list of flowers was drafted and pictures gathered. This activity is continuing in 2017 with the hope of having the brochure available this spring on the GN Website as well as printed in hard copy with grants already received from the Medicine Hat Horticultural Society and the Alberta Native Plant Council.
 - b. Database of Butterflies, Dragonflies, Damselflies and Bumblebees: Dave McKenzie has spearheaded this project by conducting field surveys and reporting the occurrence of these insects. So far, he has logged over 200 hours performing this task. He anticipates that it will be necessary to conduct the surveys for at least five years to establish a meaningful database due to yearly and seasonal variations.
 - c. Presentation to UERAB: Hugh and John gave an overview to the Parks Advisory Board in September of the GN Programs and Activities; particularly Invasive Weed removal, trash cleanup of Parks, Riparian Health Assessment, Interpretative Programs, and Birding projects.

Other issues included 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.

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

Respectfully submitted by
John Slater; Chair of the Issues Committee