



Newsletter/Bulletin

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Webmaster: Shawn Martin • Email: smartin@gartnerlee.com

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Cover Photo: Biologist former CSEB president Patrick Stewart (right) and biological technician Gail Corkum of Envirosphere Consultants sample surface sediment from the Strait of Canso, Nova Scotia in 2004. Sampling was part of an Environment Canada study of long-term impacts of a pulp and paper plant on the benthic marine environment in the area. The sampler, an 0.2 m² Van Veen grab, is in the background.

Submitted by Patrick Stewart, Envirosphere Consultants Limited, Halifax, NS.

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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE 2006

President: Shawn Martin
(Work) 780-831-7331; (Fax) 780-831-7337
(E-mail) smartin@gartnerlee.com

1st Vice-President: Brian Free
(Work) 780-427-7765; (Fax) 780-422-4086
(E-mail) brian.free@gov.ab.ca

2nd Vice-President: Natalie Helferty
(Work) 416-460-2460
(E-mail) nhelferty@rogers.com

Secretary/Treasurer: Jacquelyn Spry
(Work) 902-497-8456; (Fax) 902-883-8969
(E-mail) sprytech@ns.sympatico.ca

Newsletter Editor: Gary Ash
(Work) 780-930-8666; (Fax) 780-483-1574
(E-mail) gash@golder.com

Immediate Past-President: Patrick Ryan
(Home) 709-334-2962
(E-mail) patrickr@mun.ca

Membership: Gary R. Ash
(Work) 780-930-8666; (Fax) 780-483-1574
(E-mail) gash@golder.com

*Term of Directorship

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

Atlantic:
Patrick Stewart (2009)*
(Work/Fax) 902-798-4022
(E-mail) enviroco@ns.sympatico.ca

Québec:
Claude Delisle
(Work) 514-729-3142;
(E-mail) cedelisle@courriel.polymtl.ca

Ontario:
Natalie Helferty (2007)
(Work) 416-460-2460
(E-mail) nhelferty@rogers.com

Grant LaFontaine (2008)
(Work) 416-695-3390
(E-mail) grant.lafontaine@sympatico.ca

Manitoba:
William Paton (2006)
(Work) 204-727-9783; (Fax) 204-727-1000
(E-mail) patonw@brandonu.ca

Doug Ramsey (2008)
(Work) 204-477-1848; (Fax) 204-475-1649
(E-mail) dramsey@seacorcana.com

Saskatchewan:
Joseph Hnatiuk (2009)
(Work) 306-751-0120; (Fax) 306-585-0614
(E-mail) hnaj@sasktel.net

Jeff Hovdebo (2007)
(Work) 306-780-8107; (Fax) 306-780-8722
(E-mail) hovdeboj@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Alberta:
Brian Free (2003)
(Work) 780-427-7765; (Fax) 780-422-4086
(E-mail) brian.free@gov.ab.ca

British Columbia:
Tim Slaney (2010)
(Work) 604-473-5342; (Fax) 604-294-4664
(E-mail) tim.slaney@amec.com

Territories:
Anne Wilson (2010)
(Work) 867-669-4735; (Fax) 867-873-8185
(E-mail) anne.wilson@ec.gc.ca

REGIONAL CHAPTERS

Newfoundland & Labrador
Contact: Pat Ryan
(Home) 709-334-2962
(E-mail) patrickr@mun.ca

Québec
Contact: Claude Delisle
(Work) 514-340-4962; (Fax) 514-340-5918
(E-mail) cedelisle@courriel.polymtl.ca

Ontario
Greater Toronto Area Chair:
Wendy Thomson
(Home) 905-723-9217
(E-mail) wendy@exworld.org

Vice-Chair: Grant LaFontaine
(Work) 416-695-3390
(E-mail) grant.lafontaine@sympatico.ca

Manitoba
Contact: Douglas J. Ramsey
(Work) 204-988-0512; (Fax) 204-988-0546
(Cell) 204-792-3492
(E-mail) dramsey@seacorcana.com

Saskatchewan
Chairperson: Robert Stedwill
(Work) 306-566-3587; (Fax) 306-566-3428
(E-mail) rstedwill@saskpower.com
Vice-chair: Jeff Hovdebo
(Work) 306-780-8107; (Fax) 306-780-8722
Treasurer: Brent Bitter

Alberta
Contact: Sheri Dalton
(Work) 780-479-9262; (Fax) 780-474-1933
(E-mail) sdalton@concordia.ab.ca

British Columbia - Pacific Chapter
Acting Chair: Vacant

Secretary: Diane Urban
(E-mail) dkurban@idmail.com

Treasurer: Jeff Matheson
(Work) 604-685-0275; (Fax) 604-684-6241
(E-mail) jmatheson@eba.ca

Membership: Vacant

Chapter Webmaster: Ajay Pradhan

Territories
Contact: Anne Wilson (2010)
(Work) 867-669-4735; (Fax) 867-873-8185
(E-mail) anne.wilson@ec.gc.ca

CSEB NEWSLETTER 2006

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The Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists Newsletter is a quarterly publication. The Newsletter keeps members informed of the Society's activities and updates members on the current affairs and advances in the field of environmental biology. This publication draws together the widely diverse group of Canadian environmental biologists through a national exchange of ideas. Members are invited to contribute papers, photos or announcements that are of a national biological and environmental interest. Letters to the editor are welcome. This is a volunteer non-profit organization and we rely on your participation to make the newsletter a productive forum for ideas and discussion.

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LE BULLETIN de la SCBE 2006

Vol. 63, Numbre 3 L'Automne 2006

Le Bulletin de la SCBE est une publication trimestriel de la Société Canadienne des Biologistes de l'Environnement. Le Bulletin informe les membres des activités de la Société sur événements courant ainsi que les progrès qui font en sciences de l'environnement. Par un échange d'idées au niveau national, cette publication intéresse un groupe très diversifié d'environnementalistes Canadien. Les membres sont invités à contribuer des articles, photos (noir et blanc) ou des messages qui sont d'intérêt nationale en sciences biologiques et environnementales. Les lettres à l'éditeur sont bienvenues.

Tout la correspondance d'affaires, y compris les abonnements, les changements d'adresse, les exemplaires retournés et les formulaires: CSEB National Office, P.O.Box 962, Station F, Toronto, ON, M4Y 2N9. **Les lettres à l'éditeur:** Gary Ash, Editor, courriel: gash@golder.com

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The Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists**CSEB OBJECTIVES**

The Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists (CSEB) is a national non-profit organization. Its primary objectives are:

- to further the conservation of Canadian natural resources.
- to ensure the prudent management of these resources so as to minimize environmental effects.
- to maintain high professional standards in education, research and management related to natural resources and the environment.

OBJECTIFS de la SOCIÉTÉ

La Société Canadienne des Biologistes de l'Environnement (SCBE) est une organisation nationale sans but lucratif. Ses objectifs premiers sont:

- de conserver les ressources naturelles canadiennes.
- d'assurer l'aménagement rationnel de ces ressources tout en minimisant les effets sur l'environnement.
- de maintenir des normes professionnels élevés en enseignement, recherche, et aménagement en relation avec la notion de durabilité des ressources naturelles et de l'environnement, et cela pour le bénéfice de la communauté.

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NATIONAL

President's Report

President's Message November 12, 2006

Regretfully, we were not able to organize a Conference for 2006. As a volunteer organization, we struggle with getting adequate support to organize and host a conference each year, and this year we were not able to put forward the required momentum in Winnipeg as planned.

Although we will not be having a conference, we will go forward with an AGM on December 5, 2006. We will not be meeting in person; rather we will have a conference call and a PowerPoint presentation. Please check the website for call-in details and a copy of the presentation for download by November 30.

The Board of Directors met on October 5 via conference call and recommended moving the conference to Halifax for 2007. We are planning to meet regularly throughout the year to ensure that we have a great conference next year.

Please check out the website (www.cseb-scbe.org), as it has undergone another major update. I would like to profile members of the Society and hope members will send me information and photographs they would like to see on the site. I'm also happy to announce that we will be offering online renewals of memberships in 2007 through the website and PayPal. The site will be updated as soon as the membership secretary sends out this year's renewal forms (you will need your membership number to renew!).

I look forward to chatting with everyone at the AGM!

Shawn Martin, President (2006-2007)
Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists. ■

BIZARRO

by Dan Piraro



Atlantic News

We're With Bush on This One

By Patrick M. Ryan, CSEB Past President

October 11, 2006 Editorial by The Telegram, St. John's, NL

It's a strange day indeed when U.S. President George W. Bush appears to be a greater ally of conservation than Canada's own Department of Fisheries and Oceans. DFO, after all, lists as "our vision" a goal of ensuring "the sustainable development and safe use of Canadian waters." But late last week, DFO Minister Loyola Hearn announced that this country would not support a ban on deep-sea bottom trawling at the United Nations, a ban that both Bush and the European Union have supported. In his statement announcing Canada's intention not to support the ban, Hearn went so far as to describe those who did as environmental extremists, a label that would seem almost ludicrous when applied to Bush.

The bottom-trawling ban, which would apply to the high seas and not to fishing within Canada's 200-mile economic zone, has been opposed from within DFO because support of a high-seas fishery ban might add fuel to calls for a bottom-trawling ban inside the economic zone as well. Canada does almost no deep-sea bottom trawling, but certainly feels the effects of the virtually constant trawling on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks.

You would think that the removal of scores of foreign bottom trawlers from just outside the 200-mile limit would be something that the federal Department of Fisheries would be leaping at. But no – instead, Canada is opting for the status quo.

In refusing to support the ban, Hearn has argued that the proper place for conservation is in the hands of regional fisheries management agencies. In other words, he suggested that the Canadian government believes the proper place for the discussion of conservation issues is the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization.

Last time we looked, Hearn was not the Spanish minister of fisheries, nor the Portuguese minister of fisheries. But he is making remarkably similar arguments – unless he intended this all as a joke, the humor of which completely eludes us.

NAFO has a sterling record of providing decades of lip service to the goals of conservation, while in reality allowing member countries to set their own fishing quotas regardless of science. For Hearn to now suggest that a United Nations ban on deep sea dragging is a mistake would certainly lead anyone to question whose interests he serves – it's abundantly clear that it's not the interests of conservation.

Strangely enough, this country will be partners with Spain in opposition to the ban, a partnership we will no doubt cherish as deep-sea over fishing – virtually without penalty – continues off our shores. In one of those wonders of new-speak, Hearn says "Canada's new government will continue to lead the world through its example of being a nation that fishes responsibly."

If we're so darned responsible, why are we so afraid to do the right thing?

New government? Old ideas.

Nova Scotians Warm Up to Endangered Turtles

(Project shows rare turtles and humans can co-exist)

By Andi Rierden

(Article reprinted by permission, Gulf of Maine Times)

When I caught up with Brennan Caverhill this past July in Pleasant River, Nova Scotia, he told me he hadn't seen Ela, the turtle, since the wee hours of a mid-June morning. Under a starry sky, Caverhill found her clawing away the gravelly earth on the side of an old railway bed. "Ela always lays eggs between one and three in the morning, and it can take her up to seven hours to finish" he explains.

After she loosed several rubbery eggs and covered up the hole as if nothing had happened, she trundled down a bank then vanished into a lush stand of marsh brush - never to return to her nest. For his part, Caverhill placed a screened wooden frame over the turtle's nest to prevent predators and off-the-road-vehicles from destroying it before the eggs hatch. The design allows sunlight to warm the nest and incubate the eggs. If all goes well, sometime in September or October, Ela's hatchlings will dig their way to the surface. At that point, Caverhill and volunteers will measure and mark those under the nest screens before releasing them.

The newborns will foray into a perilous and uncertain world. It is estimated that one percent of Blanding's turtles survive to adulthood. About the size of a Canadian toonie, most are eaten by raccoons or birds, or are killed while crossing roads to reach waterways. For years, researchers in Nova Scotia have been trying to change those odds. Caverhill is among a team of biologists and volunteers working within and outside the boundaries of Kejimikujik National Park trying to save the endangered turtle from extinction. Inside the park, the strategy includes familiarizing the public with Blanding's turtle habitat, helping people recognize them in the wild and getting vehicles to slow down on roads near areas where the turtles nest by using signs and speed bumps to prevent young turtles from being run over. Another park program rears hatchling turtles for two years before releasing them back into the wild in hopes of increasing their likelihood of survival.

Caverhill's research focuses on one of two known populations beyond the park boundaries. He also works full-time on outreach and stewardship within the community. Nova Scotia zoologist Sherman Bleakney found the province's first Blanding's turtle in 1953 living near Kejimikujik Lake. Over the course of time, researchers discovered two separate and distinct populations outside the park near the Pleasant River and McGowan Lake. Totalling less than 300 adult Blanding's turtles, the populations constitute the northern edge of the species' North American range. These turtles are also genetically and behaviorally distinguishable from Blanding's turtles in other parts of Canada and the United States.

Most likely, Caverhill says, the freshwater turtles colonized here during a warm period after the last glaciation, some 5,000 years ago. Then about 3,000 years ago, the land bridge connecting Nova Scotia to New Brunswick was flooded and became salt marsh, preventing further colonization. Following that, the climate cooled, restricting the species to this small area in south central Nova Scotia where the mean annual temperature is higher than in any other region in the Maritimes. As vestiges of when Nova Scotia was still connected to the main land, researchers deem these "relict populations."

The turtle was listed in Nova Scotia as threatened in 1990 and endangered in 2000.

To find the turtles, researchers use sardines and soy oil to lure the reptiles into netted traps. Once captured, they're measured, weighed and given small identification notches on the rim of their shells. Many of the adult turtles, like Ela, have been fitted with radio transmitters, which weigh a fraction of their body weight. Those turtles in turn, have led researchers to where other turtles live.

On this day, Caverhill carries his radio receiver attached to a directional antennae, which can pick up pulses from Ela's transmitter from up to two kilometers away. We begin our search down the railway bed through a marshland at the foot of a grassy drumlin. Thick with meadowsweet, sweet gale, pickerel weed and sedges - vegetation Blanding's thrive on, Caverhill knows this lush and sheltered landscape well.

Since of spring of 2002, when he was a graduate student at Acadia University, Caverhill has been documenting the distribution, movements, behavior and habitat use of the Pleasant River Blanding's turtle population. While the park and McGowan Lake populations have varying degrees of government protection, Pleasant River is a farming community with private landholdings. To make headway into the community, he rented a room in the home of Winnie Allen, a life-long resident and supporter of Caverhill's outreach project. Her home overlooks the very same marshlands where Caverhill and his colleagues have spent years researching.

"Winnie introduced me to her friends and family and pretty soon the word got out about the turtle project," Caverhill says. Before long, many residents were eager to tell him where and when they spotted turtles, and a few have become fervent volunteers. Some have hosted and protected nests on their land.

A few locals, though, found Caverhill, and his mission to protect an endangered species, a threat to their way of life. In one instance, a couple of teenage boys, convinced that this young biologist was out to prevent them from riding their dirt bikes along the railway bed, scribbled profanity on a bridge crossing the Pleasant River. The graffiti mildly translated into "To heck with the turtles."

At the same time, ATV riders and young bikers who use a nearby sandpit have avoided and protected caged turtle nests. Now, when he meets kids on dirt bikes, Caverhill says, "I talk to them mainly about their bikes, cars and things that they're interested in. Then I'll talk about the turtles. You see more results when you aren't confrontational".

"The thing is, though, I'm genuinely interested in just about everything. Whether it's dirt bikes or when Winnie talks about canning or knitting."

As part of his outreach project, Caverhill sets up his turtle booth at county fairs, speaks with school children and local groups and has toured with a theatre group from Halifax to dramatize the plight of the turtle. This fall, he hopes to attach a small caravan on the back of his bicycle in the shape of a turtle shell and ride to area schools. To make people feel they have a stake in the recovery project, Caverhill will often name a turtle after its discoverer or after someone who helps out. Sometimes the name just comes naturally. "Let's see, there's Turner, Allen, Spurr, One-eyed Wink, Stump with one hind leg..." Caverhill recites. "And of course, there's Ela." She was

discovered by a friend of Caverhill's a few years back. The name comes from Sanskrit meaning earth. Caverhill has determined that she's around 28 years old and has probably produced five clutches, or nests.

"Scientist would cringe to hear me anthropomorphizing," Caverhill says. "But the point is, turtles do have personalities - and they are consistent. Some are totally relaxed; others tuck right into their shells and don't peek out for hours. Others are mean, some are smarter, like Shy, who can flip lids off sardine cans." In short, "It's just a really cool turtle," he says about the Blanding's.

One day, he adds, he might like to settle down in Pleasant River. He draws an analogy between the people who live in this region and the turtles, which can live up to 80 years or more.

"People return here generation after generation. There's a clear sense of place and history. In a way, the turtles parallel the history of the people. So it goes, that if you meet a turtle when you're young, you may form that association for the rest of your life."

We backtrack down the railway bed, past Ela's nest, into another marsh, then head back down the road, but with no luck. Once we take a right on to a gravel road, Caverhill holds up his directional antennae and points it toward the southeast. The pulses intensify.

"Sounds like she must be up at Dick Allen's farm," Caverhill says. We load our gear into Caverhill's minivan, cruise down the road and take a sharp turn up another steep drumlin. We find Dick Allen, Winnie's former husband, coming out his house. A cattle farmer, Allen has helped by fencing off a brook to prevent his cattle from crossing turtle habitat. After a nice chat about drumlins and hard winters, the early settlers here and the swallows that nest in his barns, we get Allen's permission to search a fire pond at the edge of his field.

As we shimmy under a barbed-wire fence and slog through a soggy field pockmarked by cattle hooves, the pulses from Ela's transmitter grow louder. Within minutes of reaching the pond, Caverhill wades in knee-deep, following the pulses, stops and then scoops Ela out from a clump of sedges.



Figure 1. Brennan Caverhill searches for Ela the Blanding's turtle. Photo by Andi Rierden.

It is a rarity to see a Blanding's turtle. Unlike snapping or painted turtles that you might spot on a boulder or the side of a stream basking in the sunlight, Blanding's are far subtler and mostly burrow into thick marsh cover. For that reason, and because of its dome-shaped carapace, brilliant yellow and black colorings on its neck and plastron, and an upraised lip that makes the turtle appear as if it's eternally smiling, it's hard not to be transfixed. Caverhill is right on: *this is a really cool turtle*.

He points these features out to me, briefly, then gently places the turtle back into the same spot. Next he measures and records the depth and temperature of the water and the air temperature. He also makes a note that since he last saw the turtle, she has traveled around one kilometer.

Caverhill and his colleagues at Kejimikujik are hoping their efforts will lead to the recovery of the endangered Blanding's turtle population in Nova Scotia over the next two decades. Already they've amassed volumes about the turtle's genetics, range, reproductive behaviors, hatchling movements and habitat. The biggest challenge, however, is getting humans to pay attention and invest in the turtle's survival.

As we wind up our interview, Caverhill says he can't ever imagine not educating the public and working to save this animal.

"This is my life's work," he tells me. "I truly believe that people can live with nature and the two can co-exist."

Looks like he's close to proving that, right here near the banks of the Pleasant River.

For more information go to www.speciesatrisk.ca/blandings

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Figure 2. With a radio receiver and antennae, Caverhill keeps track of the turtles' movements and habitat. Photo by Andi Rierden.

Quebec News

Algal Blooms Contaminate Drinking Water Sources

The Quebec government announced a plan to control the spread of blue-green algae that have adversely affected more than 70 lakes in the province over the past summer. Several communities across the province have been cut off from their regular water supply for various periods of time because of the presence of harmful cyanobacteria, which produce a toxin that causes a host of physical and medical problems.

It is well known that one of the conditions that encourages the growth of the algae in lakes is an abundance of phosphates, that leech into the water from nearby fields, golf courses, lawns, etc. Claude Béchar, the province's environment minister, recognizes that controlling certain kinds of human activity near important bodies of water could be one way to contain phosphate levels and curtail the algae's spread. The rampant growth of blue-green algae in Quebec lakes is a problem, and needs attention, Béchar admitted.

"If the solution to save our lakes is more controls, and a better overview of the situation, we will do it," he said.

The government is aware of the problem but it's important to keep it in perspective, said Quebec Health Minister Philippe Couillard.

"There should not be panic over this. It's not threatening anybody's life," he said.

More than 10 communities across the province are living with partial or complete water bans because of blue-green algae in their water supply.

Ontario News

By Natalie Helferty, CSEB 2nd Vice-President

Ontario Chapter Welcomes Denisa Necula to the Board.

Denisa has been living in Canada for just over a month now, having moved to Toronto from Romania. She is a watershed manager and water quality monitoring and reporting specialist, and is looking for mentoring with someone in her field in Canada. She is also taking the CEPIT certification course through ECO Canada to upgrade her skills to Canadian standards. She is looking for work in her field as well upon completion of the course.

Natalie Runs for Town Council

Natalie Helferty, Ontario Chapter Co-Chair, is running for Town Council in Richmond Hill to bring her skills and experience in planning ecology to a leadership and decision-making role. After many years of advocating for good science-based planning, she believes change is in the air among residents and its time to 'become

the change she wishes to see', as Mahatma Gandhi said. You can find out about Natalie's election at <http://www.nataliehelferty.ca>. If elected, Natalie will be looking for assistance to take over the role of 2nd Vice President and is always looking for help to run any events for the Ontario Chapter. She wants to thank Grant, Wendy, and Denisa for their help in getting the Chapter Board functional again. She will remain a member of CSEB.

Legislation

Ontario has gone through a number of legislative changes in the past year, including the Places to Grow Act and Growth Plan that requires new planning in municipalities to stem 'urban sprawl' and intensify existing urban areas to become more functional for communities. Additionally, Bill 51 Planning and Conservation Land Statute Amendment Act, is soon to be at 3rd Reading, having had Standing Committee meetings in August. This Bill hopefully will be passed this fall. It reforms the Ontario Municipal Board, a unique quasi-judicial appeals planning board that has been granted power to make planning decisions for a municipality when a developer was unhappy with a town decision. The Bill reduces the power of appeal to the board by developers, thus leaving decisions within the power of municipalities. (This is another reason why Natalie has reshifted her focus from consulting at OMB hearings to running for Town Council, with this shift in power.) The Bill strengthens the role of local town councils and residents in community planning. For more information, see:

http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_23647_1.html

Get Involved

We encourage all Ontario Chapter members to get involved in making CSEB a vibrant association, so please offer your assistance and talent, no matter how small a contribution you can make. As Margaret Mead said, *"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world, in fact it is the only thing that ever has."* With information that each of us has, science and thoughtfulness can become the basis of good decision-making to improve our environment considerably. It is up to us to use our considerable talent and energy to do so.

"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world, in fact it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

Manitoba News

Manitoba's Conservation and Recovery Strategy for Boreal Woodland Caribou

Boreal woodland caribou once roamed throughout the boreal forest of Manitoba. Historically, they ranged from the south-eastern Manitoba/Minnesota border to south of Wapusk National Park. Now, woodland caribou no longer occur south of the Winnipeg River in south-eastern Manitoba. The disappearance of woodland caribou from the southern parts of their historical range can be attributed to varying degrees of impact by human activities. Today, major threats to boreal woodland caribou are habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation.

Boreal woodland caribou were listed as "threatened" under the federal government's Species at Risk Act (SARA) in 2003. Currently, the population of woodland caribou in Manitoba is estimated to be between 1,800 and 3,150. In Manitoba, caribou management programs have been in place for many years and have been instrumental in the survival of this species.

Manitoba's Conservation and Recovery Strategy for Boreal Woodland Caribou outlines the guiding principles, and the recovery goals and objectives that have been developed by the provincial recovery team from Manitoba Conservation. This strategy is essential to conserving and recovering boreal woodland caribou and their habitats.

Manitoba is also working with other provinces, territories and the federal government in developing a national woodland caribou recovery strategy for the conservation of this majestic species.

For more information on the Caribou strategy, see the Manitoba Government web site at: http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/managing/pdf/bw_caribou_strategy.pdf



Saskatchewan News

Chapter News

Submitted by Robert Stedwill, Saskatchewan Chapter Chair

The summer of 2006 has been relatively quiet with respect to activities going on in the Province, what with most biologists and environmental types in the field, enjoying the opportunity to work without freezing extremities. Certainly here in Saskatchewan, it was one of the best summers that I can recall for field work – once the rain ended in June.

Although one of our objectives this past year was to focus on the nuclear debate, it appears that various groups within the province have managed to get themselves heard; both for and against, the development of the nuclear industry in Saskatchewan. So, needless to say, with this undercurrent of debate emerging, we didn't see a burning need to wade into the debate, when our original intent was to have people to start talking about it.

Having said that, however, another issue which heretofore has had little space devoted to it in the media, and which we have been focusing on and becoming engaged in, is the growing concern of being downwind of the emissions from the oil sands in Alberta, particularly in the Fort McMurray area. Our plan is to take advantage of the opportunities to make presentation at public hearings, or input into the public dialogue, on the development of the oil sands, and mitigation that is required to lessen the environmental footprint. Although the public consultation is devoted to Alberta, we see a real need for the consultation to have a Saskatchewan perspective, to ensure that the final report addresses impacts outside of Alberta.

Our Annual Saskatchewan Chapter General Meeting was held in **October 17th in Regina**, so that the chapter could have representation later in October at the **CSEB's AGM**.

AGM Business Meeting Minutes

October 17, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Brewster's on Victoria Ave E, Regina, Saskatchewan

Attendees: Doug Walton, Joseph Hnatiuk, Robert Stedwill, Curt Schroeder, Jeff Hovdebo, Ron Anderson.

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Approval of agenda: Motion (J. Hovdebo/D. Walton) approve agenda as circulated (Carried).

3. Review minutes of previous AGM (Oct. 2, 2005 in Craik): Motion (J. Hnatiuk/J. Hovdebo) minutes of October 2, 2005 approved as circulated (Carried).

4. Business arising: The issue of oil sands development in Alberta as it affects Saskatchewan (acid deposition) continues to be a major, growing issue. CSEB-SK ought continue to speak out about this where ever and whenever possible.

5. Reports:

- a. Financial: no report but a balance of about \$3,000
- b. Membership: no report
- c. National Directors: Jeff's term as a national director expires in 2007. Joseph's term expires in 2009. AGM to be held in Manitoba, may be postponed. Lack of communication with national office a serious concern.

Motion: (J. Hnatiuk/J. Hovdebo) Be it resolved that the CSEB-SK chapter register its concern regarding lack of communication with the SK chapter. (Carried).

The CSEB-SK chapter will continue to make serious efforts to contribute to the CSEB quarterly newsletter.

6. Election of Officers:

Motion: (C. Schroeder/J. Hnatiuk) Be it resolved that the officers for 2006/2007 be as follows:

- a. Past Chair: Curt Schroeder
- b. Chair: Robert Stedwill
- c. Vice-chair: Jeff Hovdebo
- d. Treasurer: Brent Bitter
- e. Membership vacant (Doug Walton informally agreed to promote/recruit members) (Carried).

7. Other Business:

- a. National AGM to be announced soon.
- b. PUBS conference at U of R in February, 2007.

ACTION: J. Hovdebo to propose a sponsorship opportunity at PUBS and present it to the next executive meeting.

8. Adjournment:

Motion (J. Hnatiuk) motion to adjourn at 8:00 p.m. A presentation followed by Ron Anderson (Sask. Environment) titled: **Modeling the effects of climate change in the prairie ecosystem.**

Alberta News

Alberta Environment Launches New Website

Submitted by: Lisa Marie Rusnac Howie, Alberta Regional News Contributor

Alberta Environment encourages active participation of all Albertans to steward our land, air and water. In order to engage early and have meaningful public and stakeholder involvement, Alberta Environment has launched a new website called, *Getting Involved: Initiatives*. This site provides a one-stop location where information on current, future and past public and stakeholder involvement initiatives are listed. Visit the site at <http://www.environment.gov.ab.ca/stakeholder/>

Bird Discovered With West Nile Virus

July 28, 2006

Edmonton – A crow collected in Brooks that tested positive for West Nile virus is the first sign of the virus in a bird in Alberta this year. A member of the public found the crow on July 26. It was submitted to Alberta's West Nile virus wild bird surveillance program and tested positive on July 28. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development tests primarily corvids (crows, magpies, blue jays and ravens) for evidence of the virus. Forty-one birds were tested before this first positive case was detected.

"Although this first positive case came three weeks earlier than in 2004 and 2005, it is located well within the high risk region in southeastern Alberta where the virus was detected in previous years," said Dr. Margo Pybus, Provincial Wildlife Disease Specialist and Sustainable Resource Development. "Last year we tested 220 birds. Only seven of them tested positive for the virus, including four crows from the Brooks area."

On July 25, 2006 the province announced the first evidence of West Nile virus in two samples of mosquitoes collected this year. The mosquitoes were collected near Tilley and Medicine Hat. It is reasonable to assume that the virus may be present throughout southeast Alberta. No human cases have been reported in Alberta in 2006 compared to 10 in all of last year.

This year bird surveillance is limited to the Grassland Natural Region in southeastern Alberta – the area east of Highway #2 and south of Highway #12. Data from this and previous years indicate environmental conditions are not suitable elsewhere in the province for the type of mosquito that is primarily responsible for spreading the virus. Albertans in the surveillance region can take fresh, dead birds, particularly crows or magpies, to any Fish and Wildlife office (**call 310-0000 toll-free for locations**).

Carcasses should be handled using gloves or doubled plastic bags. Specimens can be placed in a freezer if they can't be brought in right away. If carcasses are dried or old, they can be wrapped in plastic and disposed of with household garbage.

Albertans are advised to take precautions against mosquito bites. Only a small proportion of mosquitoes carry the virus and the risk of infection remains low, but the infection can cause serious illness



with severe consequences. People should use an insect repellent containing **DEET** and wear long sleeves and pants at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Information on West Nile virus is available on the Alberta Health and Wellness website: <http://www.fightthebite.info>.

Media enquiries may be directed to:

Dave Ealey

Communications
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
(780) 427-8636

Dr. Margo Pybus

Wildlife Disease Specialist
Alberta Sustainable
Resource Development
(780) 427-3462

For human-health related enquiries:

Howard May

Communications
Alberta Health and Wellness
(403) 949-5011

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000. Copyright(c); 2006 Government of Alberta

Anglers Asked to Limit Fishing for Trout in Streams During Hot Spell

July 28, 2006

Southern Alberta... The Alberta government is asking anglers for their voluntary co-operation to restrict fishing for trout in streams in southwestern Alberta during very hot weather.

High water temperatures and low stream flows cause considerable stress on fish populations. Water temperatures as high as 27° C have occurred recently on some streams between Rocky Mountain House and Cochrane.

Typically, water temperatures are highest in late afternoon. Anglers can help by avoiding fishing for trout any time that water temperatures exceed about 22° C.

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Dave Christiansen

Fish and Wildlife Division
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Rocky Mountain House
(403) 845-8269

Travis Ripley

Fish and Wildlife Division
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Calgary
(403) 297-7199

Dave Ealey

Communications
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Edmonton
(780) 427-8636

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000. Copyright(c); 2006 Government of Alberta

Bison Fences Balance Resource Needs Fencing guidelines for bison on Alberta public lands— with wildlife and access in mind.

August 8, 2006

In cooperation with Sustainable Resource Development, the University of Calgary has developed a brochure to assist bison ranchers in selecting a wildlife-friendly fence design. Bison, like cattle, can now be grazed on some public land, but the operator must meet certain conditions that ensure wildlife will not be disrupted and recreational access for Albertans will still be available.

Stakeholders representing the following interests helped develop the guidelines:

- bison industry
- wildlife managers
- rangeland managers
- environmental and conservation groups
- hunting community
- fencing experts

"The process followed to develop the bison fencing guidelines included many interests, and provided equal opportunities for participants to share knowledge, learn, and discuss fencing design options. The resulting guidelines represent a synthesis of the best available information about containing bison while providing for wildlife movements," said Dr. Cormack Gates with the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary.

The bison fencing brochure is available by contacting the Bison Centre at 780-986-4100, or online at:

<http://www.bisoncentre.com>.

Copies can also be obtained from the local Rangeland Management Agrologist's office. For more information on bison grazing on public land, visit:

http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/land/pdf/Bison_Grazing_2006.pdf



New fencing guidelines will help manage bison grazing without limiting access for wildlife or recreationists.

Wanted: Regional Newsletter Contributors

CSEB needs to set up a network of regional newsletter contributors to gather newsworthy information and solicit regional based articles for inclusion in the quarterly CSEB Newsletter/Bulletin. If you are interested, please contact Gary Ash at gash@golder.com.

Alberta's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Programs in 2006 and Upcoming Surveillance

M.J.Pybus, PhD, Provincial Wildlife Disease Specialist, Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Edmonton, on behalf of Alberta's CWD team (Reprinted from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Website)

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a chronic degenerative and ultimately fatal disease of cervids (primarily deer and elk). It has the potential to eliminate local cervid populations and is considered a significant threat to deer populations in Alberta. Through CWD surveillance and management activities previous to 2006, two geographical areas were identified as potentially high risk for CWD incursion into Alberta: the Dillberry Lake Provincial Park area south of Chauvin (in wildlife management unit [WMU] 234), and the region around the confluence of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers (in WMUs 150 and 151). At the end of 2005, four CWD-positive mule deer were identified in Alberta, all from the latter region (see map).

January to March 2006

An International Expert Panel¹, convened in 2004 to examine the epidemiology and risks of CWD to cervids, concluded that CWD is likely not native to cervid populations in Canada and that there are no natural barriers to prevent further spread of the disease in affected areas. In light of these findings, and the potential for CWD to negatively affect cervid populations, the Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development made it a priority to prevent or limit the spread of CWD into the province. Accordingly, the Division implemented a CWD response program from mid-January to mid-March 2006. The specific goals of the program were to limit disease transmission by reducing deer densities in the vicinity of CWD-positive deer, and to determine the extent of the disease distribution by conducting surveillance upstream on the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer rivers. Intensive herd reduction was conducted in three local areas, all within approximately 10-km of previous cases of CWD in wild deer in Alberta or Saskatchewan: Red Deer River (RDR), South Saskatchewan River (SSR), and Dillberry Lake Provincial Park (DLPP). These areas involve small portions of the eastern end of wildlife management units 151, 150 and 234, respectively. In herd reduction areas, staff were instructed to shoot any deer that could be safely shot and recovered, regardless of species, sex, or age. Aerial surveys were conducted before and after each delivery to determine deer distributions and the changes in deer numbers.

Enhanced surveillance for CWD was conducted upstream from the RDR and SSR herd reduction areas (west to Highway 886 in the former, and west to CFB-Suffield in the latter). The goal was to collect and test 250 adult deer from each of these areas.

The field response program relied on Fish and Wildlife staff to shoot deer, collect heads for CWD testing, collect reproductive samples, salvage hides and salvage usable meat. In addition, incisor bars were collected for age determination and tissue samples for genetic analyses. Staff from Saskatchewan Environment participated in disease control activities within the Saskatchewan portions of the 10-km circles. All deer were processed in Oyen by Fish and Wildlife staff. Most of the heads were tested by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in Edmonton.

A few were tested by Prairie Diagnostics in Saskatoon. Hides were provided to the Oyen Rod and Gun Club for fundraising programs. Antlers were provided to the provincial hunter education programs for teaching purposes. Salvaged meat from CWD-negative deer was distributed through normal Fish and Wildlife channels. Guiding principles for the program were safety of staff and the public, in conjunction with efficient shooting of deer with minimal disturbance to landholders and local residents.

In total, 1688 deer (1475 mule deer [md], 213 white-tailed deer [wtd]) were collected between January 23 and March 11, 2006. Collection activities in the herd reduction areas yielded 1022 deer from the RDR /SSR areas (884 md and 138 wtd) and 40 from the Dillberry area (27 md and 13 wtd). Collections during the enhanced surveillance programs yielded 361 deer from the upstream Red Deer River area (319 md and 42 wtd) and 265 deer from the South Saskatchewan River area (245 md and 20 wtd). With the exception of one serious vehicle accident, all safety, surveillance and initial herd reduction goals were achieved successfully.

The program reduced local herds in the vicinity of infected deer but did not significantly affect the overall deer populations within the WMUs. For 2006, estimated spring populations were 2800 md and 3000 wtd in WMU 151 [2765 km²], and 650 md and 330 wtd in WMU 150 [1841 km²]. Summer recruitment (i.e., fawns) will increase these estimates by about 30% prior to the 2006 hunting seasons.

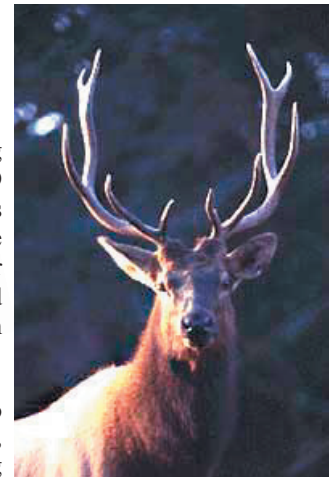
During the winter program, nine CWD-positive deer were collected in Alberta and two in Saskatchewan. All positive cases were mule deer in the early stages of infection and were collected within Range 1 W4 (that is, within 10-km of the border). No infected deer were found in the upstream surveillance samples. Considerable public information was provided locally throughout the winter programs, particularly in Empress and Chauvin. Additional information was provided to primary wildlife stakeholders including the Alberta Fish and Game Association, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society, as well as Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Ongoing CWD public advisory committees were established at Chauvin and Empress.

Total direct costs of the winter CWD program were in the range of \$470,000. Primary costs were associated with staff expenses and overtime as well as field equipment and supplies. Diagnostic costs were provided in-kind by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

September 2006 to January 2007

For the 2006 fall hunting seasons, the provincial CWD management program includes increased surveillance along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border and significantly increased hunting opportunities within identified areas of disease risk.

The goal of surveillance is to define the distribution of CWD, whereas the increased hunting



will help ongoing efforts to reduce deer populations and limit further spread of the disease.

Since 1998 the CWD surveillance program in Alberta relies on hunters submitting heads of hunter-killed deer each fall in areas of concern. For 2006, the program is focused along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border and has been expanded to include mandatory submission of heads from all deer shot in WMUs 150, 151, 234, 256 and 500. In addition, in order to detect any potential spread beyond these units, voluntary submission of heads of adult (non-fawn) deer shot in WMUs 148, 144, 152, 162, 200, 202, 203, 232, 238 and 236 is requested.

Heads should be frozen and submitted at any Fish and Wildlife office of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development during business hours or at one of the 24-hour drop-off freezers located throughout the target areas. Detailed freezer location information is available from Fish and Wildlife offices and by visiting www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/diseases/CWD/index.html. Hunters will be notified of CWD test results within six weeks. A new labeling system provides a unique identification number for each head submitted. Labels and instructions are available when hunters turn in a head for testing at Fish and Wildlife offices or at the 24-hour freezer locations.

New for 2006, three Chronic Wasting Disease Control Areas provide increased deer hunting opportunities to help reduce deer populations in areas of potential disease risk:

- WMU 234 – only the portion of WMU 234 within ranges 1 and 2
- WMU 151 – only the portion of WMU 151 within ranges 1 and 2
- WMU 150 – only the portion of WMU 150 within ranges 1 to 3

In the control areas, licences for resident hunters are available through the under-subscribed licence system. In addition, landowners in the control areas or their immediate family can apply for these licences through their local Fish and Wildlife offices — similar to existing landowner licence approvals. Three tags are issued with each CWD quota licence. The first two tags are valid for two antlerless deer (either mule deer or white-tailed deer). The third tag can be used on any deer, but is not valid until the heads from the first two deer have been submitted to a Fish and Wildlife office. Licences cost \$9.00 plus GST.

Chronic Wasting Disease in wild deer in Alberta, April 2006. Total of 13 cases.

Along with the head, hunters should provide the following information:

- Hunter wildlife identification number (WIN), name, address, and phone number
- Species of animal (mule deer or white-tailed deer)
- Date animal was harvested
- Location – WMU and GPS or section, township and range
- Sex of animal and approximate age of deer (yearling or adult)

2006 CWD surveillance areas.

WMU 150 and 151

CWD control areas*:

Archery season Sept. 6 – Oct. 31.

Rifle season Nov. 1 – Dec. 20.

Landowner season Nov. 1 – Jan. 15.

*season open Monday to

Saturday

WMU 234 CWD control area:

Archery season Sept. 6 - Oct. 31.

Rifle season Nov. 1 - Dec. 20.

Landowner season Nov. 1 – Jan. 15.

British Columbia News

Chapter News

The BC Chapter has been inactive during the past year, due in part to a lack of a Chapter Chair to take over the reins. John Maher, who took on Acting Chair well over a year ago, has had to step down due to work commitments. So far, nobody has stepped forward. So, if any of the chapter members has an interest in addressing environmental issues in BC, and promoting the interest of the CSEB in the province, please contact the CSEB National President Shawn Martin at smartin@gartnerlee.com.

Time To Stop Dumping Raw Sewage, Victoria Told

Submitted by Gary Ash, CSEB

The Canadian Press - VICTORIA

The B.C. government is ordering Victoria and its suburbs to develop a plan to stop dumping raw sewage into the Pacific Ocean by June 2007.

The order comes just 10 days after an independent scientific report commissioned by the area's municipalities concluded dumping raw sewage into the Pacific Ocean is no longer a long-term option. B.C. Environment Minister Barry Penner said he directed the Capital Regional District to provide the provincial government with a fixed timetable for sewage treatment.

"Under the Environmental Management Act, I have the authority to require them to bring a plan for me that will become legally binding and that's what I indicated today," Penner said in an interview.

"It's now time to stop talking about whether they need to treat sewage but more along the lines of how they are going to do it and I look forward to receiving their plan."

Victoria is constantly criticized nationally and internationally for promoting its clean and healthy life style while allowing 129 million litres of sewage to flow untreated into the ocean everyday. Penner said the Victoria area can no longer rely on water dilution and ocean currents as a method of sewage treatment.

The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry report concluded historic and projected population growth in the Victoria area makes natural dilution unsustainable, he said.

The government is directing Victoria's regional district to submit an amended waste management plan, including a schedule for sewage treatment.

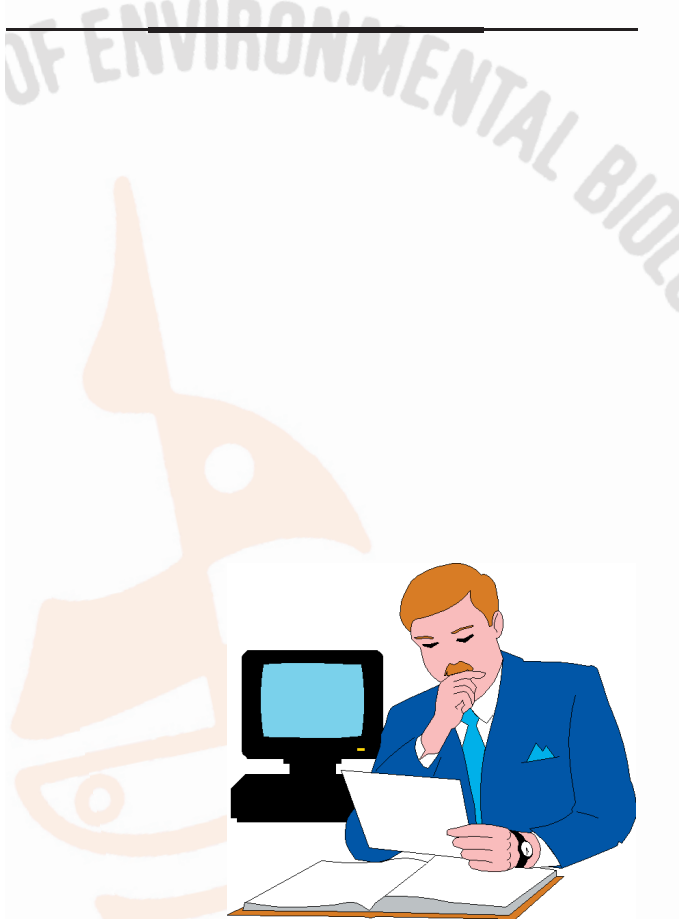


The report was highly critical of several major coastal communities for discharging raw sewage directly into oceans or major rivers.

Thank You

Thank You Sean Sharpe

Sean has submitted his resignation as newsletter editor due to work commitments. On behalf of CSEB, we would like to thank Sean, for his many years as editor, and hope he will continue as a regular contributor of BC news in the future.



Wanted: Newsletter Editor

Duties: Solicit input, edit materials for four newsletter issues per year.

If you are interested, please contact Gary Ash at gash@golder.com.

Territories News

Territories Director's Report

Submitted by Anne Wilson

Greetings! The days are getting noticeably shorter and frostier as winter starts, and this is the time of year when we check over our winter field gear, and wait for the ice to form.

In the NWT, this is well underway, although a little later than usual. Seasonal forecasts for the three Territories predict above normal temperatures for the next three months for most of the region, so this does not bode well for ice road construction. Climate change is the subject of considerable research, and a useful link can be found on the Canadian Climate Impacts and Adaptation Research Network North site at <http://taiga.net/c-ciarn-north/databases.html>.

While those of us who live and/or work outdoors in the north appreciate the milder winters, we are also having to deal with changes such as different wildlife species moving in, along with pests and parasites. One interesting example occurred recently at the Yellowknife Airport. Several years ago coyotes were observed for the first time around the runways, and a small but healthy population became established in the area. This raised concerns that they would get in the way of taxiing aircraft (come on, aren't coyotes wlier than that?) and last year the Territorial Wildlife Officers were asked to trap and remove them. Upon second thought, however, it was noted that with the advent of the coyotes taking up residence, the bird population on the airport lease was reduced substantially, and the hazard of bird strikes was almost eliminated. So no coyotes were trapped, and we are reminded how interconnected everything is.

With respect to educational activities, Environment Canada is looking at hosting a short course in February on the Canadian Council of Ministers for the Environment (CCME) water quality guidelines for the protection of freshwater aquatic life. Many of the guidelines currently in use were derived using the 1991 protocol which takes the lowest scientifically-defensible effects concentration and applies a safety factor. Current revisions to the protocols incorporate use of a distribution-based statistical analysis of all relevant toxicological data (species-sensitivity distribution), and where possible, the influence of toxicity modifying factors such as pH or hardness. Information on how guidelines have been derived will be useful to biologists in assessing their applicability to interpreting water quality data, and evaluating the potential for effects of various parameters on a site-specific basis. For further information, please email me at anne.wilson@ec.gc.ca.

Activities in the NWT and NU

The Mackenzie Gas Project (MGP) continues to keep people busy with Joint Review Panel and National Energy Board hearings well underway in communities across the Western NWT and in Whitehorse. Community hearings will wind up in mid-April, when the panel will start writing their report for submission to the federal government. Information and links are available at <http://www.mackenziegasproject.com/>.

Mining in the North remains very active for a variety of mineral and metal targets. Uranium exploration is active in the Thelon watershed of the NWT, and in Nunavut. Tamerlane Ventures Inc. has applied

to mine a bulk sample of lead-zinc ore from near the old Pine Point mine, and this is undergoing an environmental assessment.

Wolfden's High Lake project targets copper, zinc, gold and silver deposits, and is currently being assessed by the Nunavut Impact Review Board. The CanTung tungsten mine remains in production, although nearing the end of its mine life. For the diamond mines, Diavik Diamond Mines Inc. is preparing for public hearings in November on their water licence renewal application, and considerable attention is being paid to the issue of ammonia concentrations in effluent, and to the aquatic effects monitoring program.

Environmental assessments have been completed for two gold projects in NU (Meadowbank and Doris North) and these will be moving to the regulatory phase. Information on projects in the NWT can be found on the web sites of the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board and the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board. Nunavut projects can be accessed through the Nunavut Impact Review Board website at <http://nirb.nunavut.ca> or the Nunavut Water Board site at <http://www.nunavutwaterboard.org/en/home>. There is never a dull moment here!



Municipal Issues

The new Canada-wide Strategy on the Management of Municipal Wastewater is moving forward, with consultation information available on the CCME website Nov. 1st, 2006 (www.ccme.ca). Extensive aboriginal consultation is scheduled to take place over the next few months in the Yukon, NWT and Nunavut.

Environment Canada is running a somewhat related research project on the use of aeration to optimize lagoon treatment under arctic conditions. Summer and fall sampling has been completed, and data will be compiled shortly to evaluate supernatant quality for two lagoon systems near Yellowknife. Meanwhile, the program continues on a tentative basis into the ice cover season, to see if the aeration systems can keep open water and extend treatment.

I would appreciate hearing from northern members with ideas about what we can initiate by way of CSEB activities – anything from discussions over coffee, to collaborating perhaps with Ecology North on natural history type events? Information on activities would be great as well, to include in the newsletter. Please email your thoughts to me at anne.wilson@ec.gc.ca.

Meanwhile, keep warm!

National Park Expansion for North

Federal Environment Minister Rona Ambrose announced October 13th that her department plans to complete Canada's national park system, starting with work on a brand-new park bridging forest and tundra.

The federal plan also includes the expansion of Nahanni National Park in the Northwest Territories, and promises to move ahead with parks from southern British Columbia to Manitoba to Quebec and three marine conservation areas.

She indicated "We're going to be taking very concrete action in the very short term to achieve these results."

Minister Ambrose was in Lutsel K'e, which is a Dene community on the shore of Great Slave Lake, that likely would be on the boundary of East Arm National Park. The federal government has reached an agreement with the Lutsel K'e First Nation to begin drawing the boundaries and setting the rules for the park.

Parks Canada first identified East Arm as a possible park in 1970, but the amount of land identified in the agreement is more than four times the original amount. In all, a total of 33,525 km² is included in land now under consideration for the park.

East Arm is occupied by herds of caribou as well as other game such as moose and black bear, as well as furbearers including beaver, wolf, red fox, muskrat, lynx, wolverine, martin, mink, and otter.

The land, a transition zone between the northern boreal forest and the open tundra, includes a large number of deep, clear lakes, numerous islands in Great Slave Lake, as well as numerous escarpments, gorges and waterfalls.

The agreement commits the Lutsel K'e Dene and Ottawa to complete a feasibility study for the park over the next three years. That study will include a minerals and energy assessment.

Minister Ambrose also committed to completing by 2008 the long-awaited expansion of Nahanni National Park, which is a World Heritage Site and global canoeing destination. The government is starting negotiations on a series of other parks, including Bathurst Island in Nunavut, the Interlake lowlands region in Manitoba, the south Okanagan-Similkameen area in B.C. and four regions in Quebec.

Other News

Conserving Wildlife Species and Recovering Species at Risk in Canada:

A Discussion Document prepared for the Minister's Round Table under the Species at Risk Act (2006)

The first Minister's Round Table under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) is scheduled for December 6 & 7, 2006. At this first Round Table, discussions will focus on improving the conservation of species and protecting and recovering species at risk and their critical habitat, specifically by making more systematic use of the ecosystem approach, by considering socio-economic factors in listing and recovery planning processes, and by promoting Canada's conservation legacy. To guide Round Table discussions, participants will be provided with a document that explores these themes.

Recognizing that many Canadians have a keen interest in the conservation and protection of wildlife species at risk in Canada, the discussion document is now available for consideration; input is solicited specifically with respect to the questions posed in sections 4, 5 and 6. Input on these questions received by Monday, November 6th 2006 will be summarized and provided to participants to inform discussions at the Round Table.

http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/public/showDocument_e.cfm?id=1146

Scientists To Fake Arctic Oil Spills

Reprinted from

CBC News, October 16, 2006

A group of Arctic oil spill experts who recently met in Halifax say they plan to create artificial spills in northern waters to learn how to clean them up. Six oil companies are backing a series of international experiments aimed at improving technology for cleaning up spills. Norwegian scientist Evor Sinkus says more oil production and shipping traffic in the Arctic has increased the risk of spills but the clean-up technology is not well-developed.

"The response is not so good in ice-covered water as it is in open water," said Sinkus, a member of an international team which includes Canadians based at the Bedford Institute in Halifax.

During the next three years, the scientists plan to create oil spills in Canada's Beaufort Sea and also in Arctic waters off of Norway. It's the only way they can improve the technology, Sinkus said.

Canadians Leave Heavy Ecological Footprint: World Wide Fund For Nature

Reprinted from CBC News, October 24, 2006

A new report by conservationists says Canadians rank fourth in the world in their consumption of the Earth's resources. The World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature report on the state of the natural world measures the environmental impact or "ecological footprint" left by 150 countries. The footprint of a country includes all the crop land, grazing land, forest and fishing grounds needed to produce the food,

fibre and timber it consumes, to absorb the wastes in generating the energy it uses, and to provide space for its infrastructure. The group says humans are stripping the Earth of its resources faster than at any other time in history and that we will need two planets' worth of natural resources by the middle of this century to support it if current trends continue.

WWF names the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Finland and Canada as the worst offenders, followed by Kuwait, Australia, Estonia, Sweden, New Zealand and Norway. It says the carbon dioxide footprint, from the use of fossil fuels, was the fastest growing component of our global ecological footprint, increasing more than nine fold from 1961 to 2003. A new report by conservationists says Canadians rank fourth in the world in their consumption of the Earth's resources.

The report, released in Beijing in mid October, also says the number of species has declined significantly between 1970 and 2003. Land-based species declined by 31 per cent, freshwater species by 28 per cent, and marine species by 27 per cent.

"We are in serious ecological overshoot, consuming resources faster than the Earth can replace them," James Leape, the director general of WWF International, said in a news release. "The consequences of this are predictable and dire."

"It is time to make some vital choices," he added. "Change that improves living standards while reducing our impact on the natural world will not be easy. The cities, power plants and homes we build today will either lock society into damaging over-consumption beyond our lifetimes, or begin to propel this and future generations towards sustainable living."

The report singles out China for its potential to make a difference. The country comes mid-way in world rankings, at No. 69, but its growing economy and rapid development mean it has a key role in keeping the world on the path to sustainability. Leape told Reuters that China, home to a fifth of the world's population, was making the right move in pledging to reduce its energy consumption by 20 per cent over the next five years.

"Much will depend on the decisions made by China, India and other rapidly developing countries," he said.

Moving?

Any change in address should be sent to CSEB,
P.O. Box 962 Station F, Toronto ON M4Y 2N9 or
e-mail: Gary Ash at gash@golder.com

FLORIDA PLAN TO CREATE REEF ENDS WITH UNDERWATER TIRE DUMP

1970s recycling project an ecological disaster

PETER WHORISKEY

The Washington Post

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.

Reprinted from The Edmonton Journal, October 3rd, 2006

Now the idea seems daft. But in the spring of 1972, the dumping of a million or so tires offshore here looked like ecological enlightenment.

From the scrap tires, artificial reefs would grow and fish would throng, or so it was thought. A flotilla of more than 100 private boats with volunteers turned out to help. A Goodyear blimp christened the site by dropping a gold-painted tire.

"A potential grouper haven," a county report opined. Artificial reefs made from tires "appear to be the next best thing to recycling."

What happened instead is a vast underwater dump - a spectacular disaster spawned from good intentions. Today there are no reefs, no fishy throngs, just a lifeless underwater gloom of haphazardly dropped tires stretching across 35 acres of ocean bottom. It's not just a matter of botched scenery. Because they can roll around, the tires are pounding against natural reefs nearby.

"It's depressing as hell," said Ken Banks, a reef specialist for Broward County, who recently explored the site. "We dove in and swam for what seemed like an hour and never came to the end of it. It just went on and on."

Robin Sherman, a professor at Nova Southeastern University, led a project a few years ago to retrieve some of the tires most directly damaging Fort Lauderdale's natural reefs. "It was completely recovered with tires—it was even hard to find whatever we had worked" she said. "That's when I realized we have to clean the whole thing." So, after years in which the site was studied and then neglected, officials here are planning to clean up the environmental experiment gone awry.

Two months later, she dived in the area again.

Coastal America, a partnership of federal agencies, state and local governments and private groups, is trying to organize a cleanup using military salvage teams that would use the tire retrieval as a training exercise. Once the divers pulled the tires up, they would be disposed of by the state at a cost of about \$3 million to \$5 million.

The scale of the project - some say there are as many as two million tires below - and the number of different specialties required had prevented previous bureaucratic efforts from going forward.

Will Nuckols, project co-ordinator for Coastal America, called the rolling tires a "coastal coral destruction machine."

"For the past several decades, people have looked at this task and

then at each other and said, 'Well, I can't do that,'" he said.

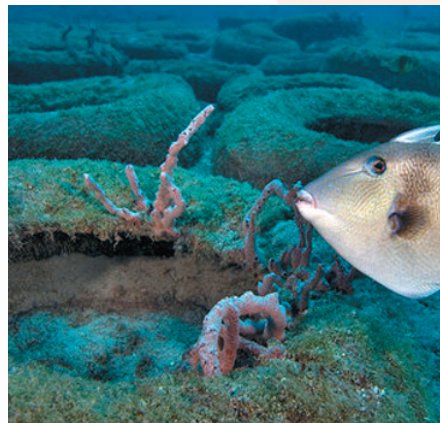
With each dive team retrieving about 700 tires a week, officials estimate that the effort would take three years. They plan to begin in 2008.

"It's easy to throw something into the water," said Keith Mille, of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. "What we're finding is it's extremely expensive to remove something from the water."

The first documented artificial reef in the United States was created off South Carolina in the 1830s. Over time, people have sunk rocks, trees, concrete, ships and barges to create reefs. When successful, they were - and continue to be - popular attractions with anglers and divers alike.

Artificial reefs made from scrap tires began in the United States in the late 1950s or early '60s, when the country was facing the monumental task of disposing of millions of automobile tires. At the time, stockpiled tires were creating fire hazards, fostering mosquito breeding and blighting the landscape. Reefs made from tires seemed like an easy solution.

While coastal communities around the country embraced the idea, few projects, if any, were conceived on the grand scale of the one off Fort Lauderdale. Proponents touted it as the largest scrap-tire reef in the world.



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