

## BLESS June 2022 Newsletter

This is the quarterly newsletter informing the BLESS membership about ongoing environmental issues, events and achievements around Big Lake. We hope the membership finds this newsletter useful and interesting. Comments, questions and suggestions from anyone reading this newsletter would be much appreciated. Please submit your feedback to the BLESS board of directors at [info@bless.ab.ca](mailto:info@bless.ab.ca).



### Current Board Members

President – Al Henry  
Vice Presidents – Pat Collins, Tony Druett  
Treasurer – Miles Constable  
Secretary – Dave Burkhart  
Directors at Large – Lyn Druett, Linda Brain, Jillian Dyck, Teresa Marshall, Meagan Dyck, Nick Parayko, Kevin Aschim, Megan Hobbins.

### Regular Board Meetings

These are usually held at 7:00pm on the first Wednesday of every month. During the Covid 19 situation the board meetings have been conducted using ZOOM. We are hoping to resume in person meetings this summer. In addition to board members, all members of BLESS are welcome to attend the meetings. Anyone wanting to be added to the list of ZOOM invitees should submit their request to [info@bless.ab.ca](mailto:info@bless.ab.ca).

### Financial Report

BLESS is in good shape financially, as of June 1 our chequing account had just over \$10,700 and our casino account had just over \$15,100. The Casino monies are used for our Summer Nature program wages, taxes and expenses. We received an Environmental Initiatives grant of \$2,150 from the City of St. Albert for our animal guide to Lois Hole Park, so those monies are allocated to photographs and printing.

### Summer Nature Program

Loreena Nieuwenhout has joined our team as our Summer Nature Interpreter. She will be conducting nature interpretation tours with different weekly themes. The program starts June 27. You can find out how to register for a tour from our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/biglakeenvironmentsupportsociety](https://www.facebook.com/biglakeenvironmentsupportsociety) Loreena will be out at Lion's Park promoting our summer program on Canada Day, come on out and greet her.

### Family Nature Night at Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park

Nature Alberta's Family Nature Night will take place at LHCPP on Wednesday, August 10th The event is free to the public and runs from 6:00 pm until 8:30 pm in the vicinity of the picnic shelter north of the parking lot. The Alberta Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy will attend to talk about the herpetology of wetlands and hope to bring a live tiger salamander to show families. The Alberta Lake Management Society will be on hand to do some water testing and/or pond dipping. The Wagner Natural Area Society will provide a presentation about why wetlands are so important. There may be a plant identification activity. The BLESS Summer Nature Program Interpreter will be on hand with fun and educational activities for family members of all ages. Reserve the date and arrive early to see it all.

## Permanent BLESS Signs in the Shelter

The Province's Parks Dept. has authorized BLESS to install three permanent signs on the north wall of the LHCPP shelter. The first of these signs will list the five "BLESS Objectives" that are a key component of our original By-Law document. The other two signs will list BLESS's "Major Achievements" during its 30-year history and BLESS's "Ongoing Activities". Temporary drafts of these signs were installed in the shelter prior to the recent World Migratory Bird Day Event. In addition to the three permanent signs, BLESS has installed a temporary poster listing "Current BLESS Priorities" and "Long Term Initiatives".

## Ducks Unlimited's Wetland Centre of Excellence Program

On Wednesday June 15th, 2022 from 1pm to 3pm, the launch event for DUC's first Wetland Centre for Excellence in Alberta was held at the John E. Poole Wetland in LHCPP. Representatives of the DUC educational programs from Winnipeg, Toronto and the Maritimes flew in for the event and began with introductory speeches. St Albert MLA Marie Renaud and the shadow minister for the Environment, Marlin Schmidt, emphasised the importance of educating our young people in ways that protect the environment of our precious wetlands. The Deputy Head of Bellerose Composite High School introduced the teacher who is coordinating this WCE program - Clayton Wowk. He teaches science, and the 20 students in his Grade 11 biology class have been pleased to carry out conservation and awareness projects during June 2022. Working in groups of 3-5 they have designed and carried out the following projects.



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1. Water testing at 3 locations to compare the health of the lake, wetland, and lagoon.
2. Planting native trees as an eco-buffer and for flood mitigation.
3. Wetland Conservation Group – They interviewed the NDP Minister of the Environment re general awareness of wetland issues.
4. This group originally planned to design, construct, and install bird feeders in the area. They were told that animal feeding in the parks is not in line with provincial park policies. They then decided to design wetland bird identification signs to be fabricated and installed by DU.
5. Wetland clean up and garbage disposal.
6. Initially they planned to install trash cans along the Boardwalk to alleviate litter, but they



encountered permitting problems. They then came up with the idea of photographing and videoing the other groups and posting their videos on the Bellerose Instagram page as a summary of all the projects undertaken.

After the formalities and group photos, attendees were invited to partake of the free Mexican food (provided by a Food Truck). Several activities were then available for people to enjoy.

- a. Marsh Bingo - a scavenger hunt.
- b. A guided walk.
- c. A do-it-yourself photo booth (with props)
- d. A make your own wooden bird feeder, from a kit.

It was a very impressive event, attended by about 50 people. It was a good introduction to DUC and it's first Alberta location for the WCE initiative. Photos are of the two MLA's and the students who have taken part in the program.

### **This Year's World Migratory Bird Day Event**

The BLESS World Migratory Bird Day event on May 14th, 2022 took place as planned in LHCPP. After a drizzly start to the day, the sun emerged and about 250 people joined the event to celebrate the arrival of migrating birds at Big Lake.

Within the shelter were displays by the Provincial Parks Department, the Wagner Natural Area and Nature Alberta – which also featured a children's craft. Outside, the public were welcomed with snacks, by ID Wealth Management, our generous sponsors. The NSWA set up a tent with information and a demonstration of how watersheds work. Along the boardwalk, visitors were able to interact with a pond dipping activity, a bird identification station, and a demonstration of the use of the I Naturalist app.

BLESS board members were joined by the newly hired coordinator (Loreena) for our Kid's Summer Nature Program that runs on site throughout July and August. The BLESS displays and



information included opportunities for the public to join our organisation and resulted in several new members signing up (one of whom has now become a director on the Board).

BLESS emphasised the theme for 2022 based on the slogan “Dim the Lights for Birds at Night” and displayed the problems that arise for birds who migrate at night and what can be done to mitigate these difficulties. The 11 species of birds chosen for 2022 were displayed on a poster, and their migration routes were shown on large maps of North and South America.

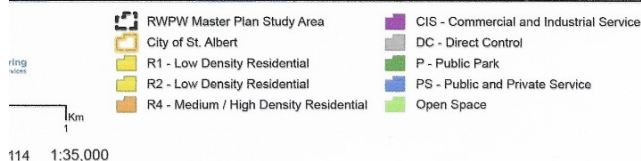
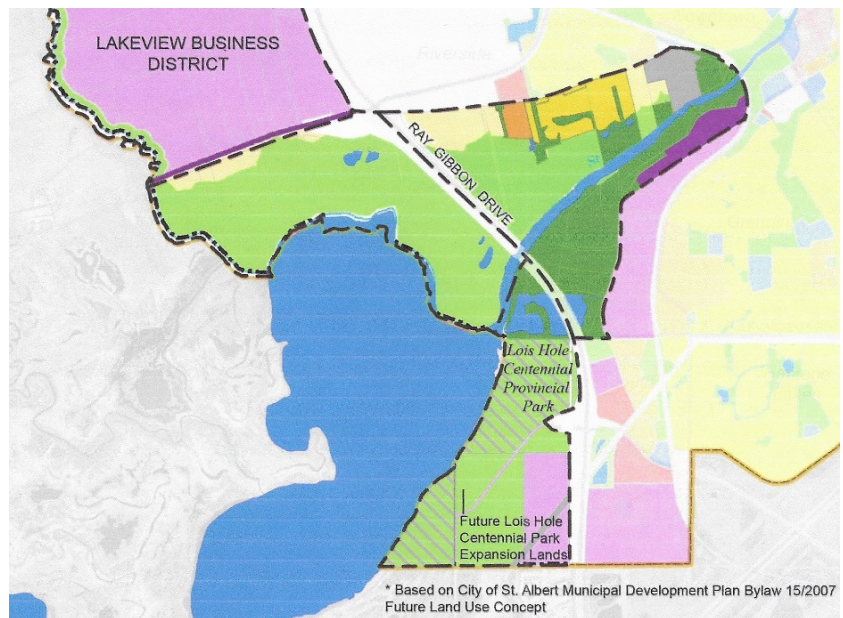


The participants, the BLESS board and other members, and the adults and children who visited, were an integral part of the event. They all came together with interest and enthusiasm to make the day a success. Photos of the event thanks to BLESS member Lasiru Wijesuriya.

### Proposed MDP Amendment

In April 2021 City Council revised St Albert’s Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and changed the designation on a strip of land on the south side of Meadowview Drive to be Employment Lands, which is the MDP’s new terminology for what was previously “Industrial” land uses. Subsequently, in May 2021, the Council voted unanimously to revise the MDP designation for these lands to be Public Open Spaces. However, at a committee meeting on June 13th 2022 council members have voted to rescind their May 2021 motion and not to proceed further with that proposed change to the MDP. BLESS is very

disappointed at this decision of the council members. We will be continuing to advocate against the possibility that there will be industrial land uses south of Meadowview Drive. We will also be advocating for the MDP to be revised to delete the Employment Lands designation from a parcel of on the west side of the proposed LeClair Way extension. That land was particularly acquired by the Province of Alberta so that it could be included into Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. The illustration to the right is a plan taken from the City’s Red Willow Park West documents that were prepared in 2018. BLESS circulated this plan to the committee at their meeting on June 13th 2022. The RWPW plan was based on the land



**Figure 2.3:**  
Future Land Use

uses that were designated in the MDP prior to April 2021, and on information provided in the Province of Alberta’s LHCPP Park Management Plan. Given that the City of St Albert is now proceeding with an ASP that covers this area, BLESS feels that the designation noted in the MDP for the Provincially owned parcel should be corrected to conform with RWPW plans, and the Province’s plans, as soon as possible.

**Red Willow Trail Closure**

The trail on the south side of the river under the Ray Gibbon Drive bridge was closed to the public at the beginning of March. At that time the City’s signage indicated that the trail would be reopened in April. However, it is now projected by the City that the closure will continue into August. The trail closure extends all the way to just east of the BLESS viewing platform. The closure also covers the new multi-use trail that was installed last year on the west side of Ray Gibbon Drive, so it effectively removes almost all access to the land adjacent to the former sewage lagoon lakes. BLESS is continuing to communicate with the City staff in order to minimise the negative implications of this extended closure. We are also requesting that the wildlife corridor on the north side of the river should be reopened as soon as possible, and by the fall at the latest. The following photos (taken on June 19th from outside the prohibited area) show the current situation for the trail under the bridge.



**2022 AGM**

The BLESS 2022 Annual General Meeting was held online on June 15th. President Al Henry reported on BLESS achievements over the past year, Treasurer Miles Constable presented the audited financial report for 2021 and members of BLESS elected a board of directors for 2022. This year's board added two new directors, Kevin Aschim and Megan Hobbins. We now have 13 members serving on the BLESS Board of Directors, as listed on the first page of this newsletter.

### Latest Wildlife Sightings

A black crowned night heron roosting near Elke's Point. The photo was taken recently by BLESS Vice-president Tony Druet from across the stormwater pond.

