

BLESS



Big Lake Environment
Support Society

BIG LAKE NEWS

SECOND QUARTER 2006

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BIG LAKE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT SOCIETY

Province expands Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park

On the first anniversary of its designation, the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park has been expanded by 20 hectares on the eastern end of Big Lake. The Alberta government purchased the privately-held land in April and added the wetlands and surrounding forest to the park.

“This is the best remaining forested area on the lake shore,” said Denis Ducharme, Minister of Alberta Community Development. “By adding this land to the park, we continue to honour the memory of a beloved former Lieutenant Governor and pay tribute to her passion for the environment, education and Alberta’s youth.”

The new land contains a freshwater wetland ecosystem surrounded by small deciduous and coniferous woodlands. It offers a unique learning opportunity for almost one million people in the Capital area. Long term plans for the park include developing an environmental education centre focusing on the extensive wetlands and migrating birds.

Community Development collaborates with the surrounding municipalities including the City of St. Albert, City of Edmonton, Parkland County and Sturgeon County, on preservation, education, recreation and tourism interests for the park. This ensures integrated management of the

We are so tickled pink about the addition Dave Burkhart went out and photographed the area, the following are some of his photos from the 20 new hectares of Lois Hole Park.



Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

Rachel Carson

entire land base. Existing mineral commitments within the park expansion will continue to be honoured.

“With expansion of the park around Big Lake, we will be able to protect this natural gem for generations to come,” said Paul Chalifoux, Mayor of St. Albert. “It is a great tribute to the legacy of Lois Hole and a fitting reminder of her commitment to the environment and love of learning.”

The Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park protects an internationally-renowned region for the nesting and migrating of waterfowl and shorebirds. The new land increases the size of the park to 1,441 hectares or more than 3,561 acres. It is excellent habitat of mature white spruce, birch, aspen and balsam poplar forests with an undergrowth of hazel nut, dogwood and wild rose plants. More than 220 species of birds have been observed within the park, including Franklin’s gull, black tern, eared grebe, northern pintail, yellowlegs, dowitcher, pectoral sandpiper and American avocet. Tundra and trumpeter swans use the lake during migration. Other animals make their home in the area, including deer, moose and coyotes and smaller animals like damselflies and butterflies.

Provincial legislation created the Big Lake Natural Area in 1999 along the western edge of St. Albert and Edmonton, attracting visitors from around the world to watch bird migrations. On April 22, 2005, the area was expanded and re-designated as the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park.

Waste concrete pipes to be removed from LHPP

BLESS Members who frequent the south shore of Big Lake near Lakeshore Estates subdivision in Parkland county adjacent to 231 St have likely run across a pile of huge concrete pipes sitting close to and even half buried in the reeds on the lakeshore.



In late March the BLESS Board of Directors contacted the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission, whose sewage pumping station is nearby, to ask if they could remove the pipes. It might perhaps seem like a small thing, but we believe the more of these remnants of the past that can be cleaned up to restore the natural area, the more visitors will enjoy the natural experience and the greater will be the respect for and desire to preserve the park.

Mike Darbyshire, managing engineer for ACRWC's operations promised to investigate and committed to deal with the issue if an investigation showed the pipes were theirs. It turned out that they were the property of ACRWC.

Over the long haul of life on this planet, it is the ecologists, and not the bookkeepers of business, who are the ultimate accountants.

Stewart Udall

A meeting between Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, Alberta Environment, Parkland County and AWRWC was held to determine whether the land in question belonged to the county or to the park and how best to remove the pipes. All parties were in agreement that the pipes should be removed and the group as a whole determined that winter, after freezeup, would be the best time to do so as that would allow a large picker truck to gain access to the area while avoiding damage to vegetation. ACRWC has therefore scheduled the job for this coming December and will inform BLESS when the pipes have been removed.

The BLESS Board of Directors commends ACRWC, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, Alberta Environment and Parkland County staff who addressed this problem so diligently once made aware of the situation. This is a great example of effective community stewardship in action.

Spruce Up the Sturgeon

The eighth annual Spruce Up the Sturgeon event occurred on Sunday May 7 this year. Warm sunny weather drew just over 70 St. Albert residents to the banks of the Sturgeon to help pick up 600 kilograms of trash.

Stuart and Rosalind Loomis and Dan Stoker were actively involved with City of St. Albert staff Anna Royer and Lorraine Vaillant on the committee that organized and ran the river bank cleanup. The logistics of organizing such an event cover a wide range of activities, from obtaining gloves and trash bags and vehicles to carry away the trash to publicizing and promoting the event.

Dan set up his ever popular aquatic display, as well as some fledgling willow wands and organized a mini planting along the shores of the Sturgeon, a precursor to the primary River Edge Enhancement Project plant-

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The egrets are back at Big Lake

Please give the egrets some space over the next 4 - 6 weeks so that they'll have a chance of a successful breeding season. Any new visitors to the site should be accompanied by a responsible birder so that they'll have an appreciation of what's considered a reasonable viewing spot.

Note from Dave Nadeau.



Photo courtesy of Peter Stahl, all copyrights retained.

Summer Nature Center

The Opening Date for the BLESS Summer Nature Centre has changed by one day from the last announcement:

Tuesday June 27th, 2006 is now the Nature Centre Grand Opening at the Little Log Cabin on the Sturgeon River.

The Nature Centre will be open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 am until 3:30 pm each day throughout the summer.

ing scheduled to occur on June 18, Father's Day.

A great big thanks goes out to St. Albert's Mayor Chalifoux, Dairy Queen and Tim Horton's for snacks and T-Shirts and to all those folks involved for their hard work and public spirit in keeping our river looking great.

REEP

River Edge Enhancement Project

The Father's Day REEP planting of hundreds of seedlings on Barrymore Flats along the Sturgeon River went off flawlessly thanks to the tremendous efforts of Dan Stoker and the REEP committee. It was a tremendous success with whole families participating in what turned out to be a real fun event. Trees were planted, mulch laid, some tadpoles and aquatic bugs were viewed in Dan's "bug trays", booklets on river edge enhancement were available and drinks were had.



Thanks to the entire REEP Committee, as well as the supporters of the project: the City of St Albert, Evergreen Foundation, Roy Financial, BLESS, Home Depot, Pro Western Plastic, Tim Horton's and Select Rentals.



City of St. Albert Activity Update Road Construction

Construction activities for the City of St. Albert's West Regional Road will kick into full steam again in early August. The activities have, for the most part, been suspended between April 1 and July 31 during fish spawning and migratory bird nesting seasons as stipulated in the federal government's approval for the project. BLESS directors continue to meet with the City on a regular basis to bring our concerns regarding the project's environmental impacts to the forefront.

The City has recently assigned a new manager, Tracy Allen, to its road project which has resulted in better oversight to some environmental issues but Ms. Allen goes on leave in August and it remains to be seen how issues will be addressed as construction progresses.

A recent meeting revealed the city has not eval-

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uated the impact of stormwater release into the adjacent Riel Marsh wetlands. Spencer Environmental, the city's environmental consultants were tasked with a study of Riel Marsh vegetation some time ago but, as revealed by the consultant at the meeting, the study involves only cataloguing existing vegetation, not evaluating the impact of the new release of stormwater on vegetation throughout the area. BLESS has yet to receive any other information related to the vegetation study. Concern has been raised because of the unusually high water levels in South Riel this year. Foot trails that have been used for decades remain under water and paper birch as well as other trees well back from the new stormwater release point have their roots still covered in water.

After August 1, expect to see more heavy equipment on the roadbed as crews push the preload overburden off the road surface. The city's contractors have obtained permission from the provincial government to use water from Riel Pond to control dust levels. Contractors will also be digging up the road where it crosses the lagoon to move culverts from the north end of the lagoon to the south end. Road crush will be spread, concrete curbs and gutters will be installed, paving will take place and street lighting will be installed this construction season according to the city's schedule. The city also intends to remove the haul road from Riel Pond, pave some trails and landscape the area this year. City staff have been unable as of this date to provide any indication of where and when pedestrian access will be provided over the road.

Also beginning in August, bridge approach slabs will be installed and bridge decking will be finished. Guard rails will be installed, deck joints will be poured and concrete finishing will be undertaken. The city is projecting work on the

bridge to be complete by mid -September. BLESS directors will continue to meet with the city on a regular basis as the road progresses and will continue to press for effective mitigation of environmental impacts from related construction activities.

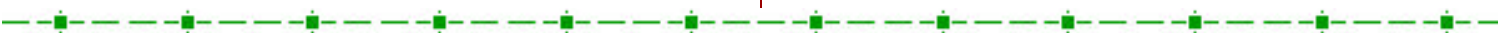


Roy Financial Mayor's Walk for Charity

Once again BLESS members collected donations from sponsors and exerted themselves in the 3 km Mayor's Walk for Charity. Dave, Stuart, Rosalind, Nicholas and Miles braved the misty weather early in the morning to help setup at the Senior Citizens Centre and then head onto the course. It is not certain yet how much was raised for BLESS.

To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase it's usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.

- Theodore Roosevelt



Park Planning is Proceeding

BLESS Directors Dave Burkhart, Miles Constable, Stuart Loomis, Lilo Engler and John Samson, as well as environmentalist Elke Blodgett met June 16 with Kyle Clifford and Rob Speliscy of Alberta Parks and Protected areas to identify areas for new park signs for Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. Part of the new lands for the park were scouted as well. So watch for beautiful new green and yellow park signs to start showing up at the major access points to the park, at the BLESS platform and along the south side of Big Lake.



INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OR WANTING TO RENEW AN OLD MEMBERSHIP?

It's easy, just send us an email info@bless.ab.ca with the following information:

Name

Address

Single (\$10) or family (\$15) or volunteer (5 hours of volunteer work, great for students!)

Phone number