

BLESS Newsletter

September 2019

This is the first edition of what we hope will become a regular quarterly newsletter informing BLESS members 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.

About BLESS

Current Board Members

President – Al Henry

Vice Presidents – Pat Collins, Linda Brain

Treasurer – Miles Constable

Secretary – Dave Burkhart

Members at Large – Lyn and Tony Druett

Regular Board Meetings

These are held at the VASA boardroom, 25 Sir Winston Churchill Avenue, at 7:00pm on the first Wednesday of every month. The next meeting will occur on October 2nd. In addition to board members, all members of BLESS are welcome to attend to learn more about current initiatives and to express their opinions.

BLESS Summer Nature Centre at the Log Cabin - July and August 2019

The Summer Nature Centre was a great success this year with a total of 1174 visitors to the log cabin over July and August. Both children and parents enjoyed participating in a variety of nature-



themed activities including scavenger hunts, bean bag toss, a daily colouring contest, and many different crafts. Overall, it

was wonderful to see so many kids learn and develop an excitement about nature and the environment. The BLESS

board of directors would particularly like to thank Danika Wack for the fabulous job she did coordinating the summer activities. Her excellent closing report will provide valuable input into developing Nature Centre programs in the future.



“What great fun it was attending the BLESS nature camp this summer! My 2 grandsons, age 3 and 5, always burst through the door to see what Danika had prepared for that week. They had fun with the crafts, loved the factual puzzles, the nature displays and all the games outside the log cabin. Danika was always very friendly and very patient helping the younger boy. Thanks so much” from Linda Brain (grandmother)

World Migratory Bird Day 2019

World Migratory Bird day was celebrated by BLESS on Saturday May 18th at Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. It was a great success and 19 exhibitors and more than 600 people are estimated to have visited the site. It was covered by 2 television news channels and several local journalists. Besides enjoying the lovely natural area, visitors were able to interact with bird experts, dip for aquatic insects, discover indigenous history and culture beneath an authentic teepee, and gather information on local nature groups and vendors. Children were delighted by amazing face painting and getting up close to a tiny saw-wet owl, a falcon and several tame ferrets. We were pleased to sign up several new members to BLESS and to sell some of our pocket sized Bird and Plant Guides.



BLESS Mammal, Reptile and Amphibian Guide Book in the Works

After the success of the BLESS Bird Guide and Plant Guide books for the Big Lake area, a third book is now under production. Mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and possibly fish are being researched. Contributions of photographs of any of these animals that could possibly be incorporated in the book would be welcomed. Please submit them to Linda Brain at lindabrain49@gmail.com. We hope to have this new guide book ready for sale and distribution by the end of the year.

Newly Formed Big Lake Community League

A group of residents (Big Lake Community League Steering Committee) from three Edmonton neighbourhoods located southeast of Big Lake: Starling, Trumpeter, and Hawks Ridge, have recently formed Big Lake Community League. Big Lake Community League is the 160th community league to join Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. Big Lake Community League will offer recreational and social programs as well as host events throughout the year for community league members. The

purpose of the Community League is to enhance the quality of life for residents. We are in the process of planning our first AGM. If you'd like to learn more, you can send us an email at biglakecommunityleague@gmail.com or find us on Facebook: Big Lake Community League

"I'm excited to also be a member of BLESS and share support for the great things they do as stewards of Big Lake natural area." ~ Teresa Marshall, Chair, Big Lake Community League Steering Committee

Structural Repair of the BLESS Viewing Platform

A significant amount of work has occurred since Council gave the go ahead for the structural repair of the platform and allocated a \$345,000 budget for the work. In Feb 2019 BLESS was informed that we were successful in obtaining a



provincial CFEP grant of \$125,000 to assist in repairing/rebuilding the observation platform. BLESS has been provided with monthly progress updates regarding the design and approvals. Here is a summary of the latest good news received from Dean McMullan at the City.

The construction tender (Evaluated Tender) formally closed on July 10th. The tender evaluation process has since closed, and the construction contract has now been awarded to "Formula Alberta". This company has done previous bridge repair work for the City of St. Albert in the recent past. Engineering Services was pleased with the past performance of this vendor. This vendor also had previous experience with wood bridge like structures, so it appears that they have similar related experience.

Regarding project construction schedule the work is very much dependent on weather because the construction will occur under frozen conditions only. Therefore, the actual site mobilization date is not yet known. According to the contract schedule, the substantial performance completion date is April 1, 2020.

Provincial Funding for Lois Hole Provincial Park

Earlier this year the NDP, provincial government of the day, set aside \$160,000 for much needed improvements to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park (LHCPP), of which BLESS is steward under Alberta Parks' stewardship program.

Sharina Kennedy, the Alberta Parks planner who shepherded the management plan for LHCPP to fruition last year, after it had operated as a park for well over a decade without a plan, announced at the time that the money was intended to provide access for the disabled to existing pit toilets and to develop a 1.2 kilometre gravel trail through the nearby forested area that would have interpretive signage highlighting the importance of preserving upland habitat. The trail would compliment the nearby boardwalk, installed a number of years ago by Ducks Unlimited that focuses on interpretation of wetland ecology. Some of the funds allocated were to go towards revegetation of areas that had previously been forest but had been removed for farming and to provide a kiosk where BLESS and other groups could engage the public on issues affecting the natural area.

Possible Platform “Enhancements” Including Educational Signage

On September 16th BLESS made a well received presentation to St Albert City Council suggesting that the structural repair of the platform provides a unique opportunity to add educational signage regarding bird species that migrate to and from Alberta. The following are suggestions for enhancements to the platform that were outlined in the presentation:

Eight low mounted informational signage boards describing important migrating bird species that visit Big Lake.

A central, horizontally mounted display board showing the migrations to and from North, Central and South America.

A sign board at the entrance welcoming visitors and giving the history of the platform, including photos of its original construction.

Reinstalling the binoculars on the platform and installing a second set of binoculars at a height suitable for small children and people in wheelchairs.

