

BLESS September 2021 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.



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

Regular Board Meetings

These are usually held at 7:00pm on the first Wednesday of every month. During the current Covid 19 shut down the board meetings are being conducted using ZOOM. 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.

Financial Report

As of the end of August BLESS was in a reasonable financial situation with just over \$10,000 in the bank, although we have still to account for our final paycheque to Tiffany and expenses from our Migratory Bird Day event. Our upcoming casino, assuming it is not cancelled again thanks to Covid-19, is used to fund our summer education program. See the article below on how you can help.

Upcoming Casino

Our biggest fund raiser of the year is slated for October 14th and 15th at the St. Albert Century Casino. We still have some easy positions to fill during the day or in the evening. It's a great way to support our summer Nature Programme for children. If you'd like to help, with a free meal included, please call Linda at 780 569-2001 or email - lindabrain49@gmail.com.

BLESS Summer Nature Program

The Summer Nature Interpretation program wrapped up at the end of September after another outstanding summer of guiding kids and their families along the Boardwalk, the platform and the local trails from the Park shelter. Tiffany Maslyk, who we hired to conduct this year's program, did an outstanding job with everyone, explaining and showing people aspects of our natural world that they didn't know about. Eight weeks of programming over July and August went by quickly with activities and nature walks focused on themes that included wetlands, water and shore birds, mammals, insects and native plants. More details may be found on the BLESS Summer Nature program Facebook page. Well done Tiffany!



World Migratory Bird Day and BLESS 30th Anniversary Event

After twice cancelling World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) celebrations in May 2020 and 2021 because of Covid 19 restrictions, the BLESS Board of Directors decided to proceed with a scaled down event on the weekend of September 11th and 12th. This time the event was coupled with a celebration of the 30th Anniversary of BLESS's formation in 1991. Two new sets of displays were prepared and set up for public viewing in the LHCPP shelter.



The north end of the shelter was occupied by displays and other exhibits documenting the history and accomplishments of BLESS from 1991-2021. The displays made obvious the critical role that volunteers play in the success of programs that BLESS has been involved in over the years, from riparian enhancement to water quality testing to plant and bird studies to nature education and more. We look forward to the next 30 years.

To celebrate this year's WMBD, BLESS installed two new posters on either side of the existing Ducks Unlimited display on the east wall of the shelter. One poster depicted six bird species that migrate through Alberta, and the other one depicted twelve species that breed in Alberta and migrate south for the winter. The biannual migrations of several of these bird species were outlined on horizontal maps of North and South America using coloured ribbons that outlined the extent of the various migrations. Visitors were surprised by the incredible distances that some of the birds covered. Nature Alberta kindly contributed to the cost of these displays.

At the south end of the shelter both Nature Alberta and the Province's Parks Department provided displays. Abigail from Nature Kids gave out a craft that fitted perfectly into WMBD's theme of "Sing, Fly, Soar, like a Bird". She had sets of materials for children to make decals to hang in windows and deter birds from flying into them. As one little boy explained to the CTV camera man, he had made it to "Save the birds!". Parks Alberta representatives Bailey and Jackson put up an excellent display about hibernation, and had lots of interesting goodies to hand out, including leaflets, info booklets, Park bandanas, children's cutlery sets and collapsible buckets to douse campsite fires.



Another popular location for families on the Saturday was out on the boardwalk, where Peter Daly from the City of Edmonton Entomology Department put on a display about "pond dipping".

He even brought along a few examples of crayfish from the Lacombe Park Lake to augment the “rather dry this year” wetlands off the boardwalk. His knowledge of all things connected with amphibians and water bugs was phenomenal. Outside the shelter on the Sunday Gordon Court and his falcon Vinnie “held court”. Adults and children alike were fascinated by this magnificent bird and Gord’s extensive knowledge of birds that he shares most freely.



The displays and other activities were arranged in the shelter in a fashion that facilitated social distancing, and all participants were required to wear face masks and follow other Covid 19 requirements. Everyone who visited the event was very compliant. The event and BLESS’s history were extensively covered in an article by Kevin Ma in the St Albert Gazette and with a CTV news item on the Saturday evening. Over the two days we had approximately 120 visitors, including a very special one – a tiger salamander who wandered in and who was rescued by Abigail and returned

safely to the wetlands. Details of the event including historical posters and more photos are available at <http://bless.ab.ca/Events/September2021/index.html> .

Update Regarding Alberta Parks Dept Activities

As part of the follow up to their June reconnaissance trip to our park, Alberta Parks staff have been working at hauling out junk that has been littering the south shore of Big Lake. The area contains a significant amount of trash left behind from long before the natural area became a provincial park. The City of Edmonton Natural Areas Team is assisting in cleanup efforts by disposing of the trash that parks staff are extracting.



Also resulting from their June visit, Parks staff have been ground proofing existing trails along the east and south shores of Big Lake and have provided a preliminary draft of a trail map. Park staff have asked for BLESS input on the work done to date. The BLESS board is reviewing the draft provided and will send comments and suggestions on it to Alberta Parks in early October.

Recent and Current Stewardship Activities

BLESS members noticed and reported three missing plaques near the boardwalk and viewing platform on July 11th. Ducks Unlimited Canada was notified as at least two of the plaques were in recognition of the John E. Poole Foundation contribution to build the boardwalk. Parks staff were also notified. There has been a rash of similar thefts around Edmonton recently that police are investigating.

BLESS members also reported and took photos and videos of a haying operation on park land on July 20th. The incident is under investigation by the provincial government.

NSWA Fall Speaker Series

The NSWA is once again offering a free speaker series entitled WATERSHED WEDNESDAYS. Register online to attend these zoom presentations from 12 noon- 1:00 pm.

Oct. 6 - Wetlands

Nov. 3 - Aquatic Health

Dec. 1 - Water Quality

More information is available at: <https://www.nswa.ab.ca/2021/09/28/watershed-wednesdays-fall-2021/>

Latest Wildlife Sightings

Photos taken by BLESS member Tracy Kolenchuk while out walking at Big Lake:

