

**BOW VALLEY NATURALISTS
NEWSLETTER, Fall 2006
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PROGRAMS/EVENTS

**BVN meetings:
7:30 pm., Banff Seniors Centre.**

Wednesday, OCTOBER 25

A Spider's Niche with John and Kathleen Hancock.

Wednesday, NOVEMBER 22

Mot-mots and manakins: gems of Costa Rica with Shelly Mardiros and Michael Shuster.

**Banff-Canmore Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, December 16**

Potluck supper and compiling of results will follow at 6:00 p.m. in the Banff Seniors Centre

For details, contact Diane or Mike McIvor at 762-4160

BANFF NATIONAL PARK PLANNING FORUM

OCTOBER 27-28

Friday: 9:00 am – 4:30 pm

Saturday: 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Alpine Room, Whiskyjack Lodge, Lake Louise Ski Area

What's happening. What's in our future.

Parks Canada's annual planning forum is an event you should check out. It's a chance to hear about progress and challenges in achieving the vision for the park, and to look into its future with other people who care.

As well as looking at key achievements over the last year, Parks Canada, representatives from a variety of organizations (the Round Table), and interested members of the public, will be exploring together some of the key issues for the upcoming Park Management Plan Review.

You're invited to attend any part of the proceedings – observe from the gallery, ask questions at the Fireside Chat with our Park Superintendents, or join a small group on Day 2 and share your thoughts on the issues and possible solutions for the Park Management Plan Review. (see agenda on page 3)

ISSUES

MORE THAN MELTING ICE: LET US COUNT THE WAYS

Peter Duck

The loss of glacier mass in the Canadian Rockies is the current media darling as a dramatic sign of warming climate. However, there are many more signs that the effects of a changing climate are accumulating to make our mountain ecosystem different. Here are a few I've noted.

- Mt. Norquay Ski Area is recognized as being no longer economically viable due in part to shrinking seasons as a result of late snow accumulation.

- Skiing at Sunshine Village no longer is on all natural snow. The ski resort now requires artificial snow making capability to ensure that skiers will be able to use the ski out.

- The Athabasca Glacier is thinning dramatically with summer seasons removing three to four metres of ice from the surface each year. The road to the ice is longer and the ice-cored moraine it runs on is continuing its constant sag into an ever-deepening depression. How long before Brewster will have to come to Parks Canada with a revised plan for glacier access? Even the foot trail to the glacier is about to be blocked by the raging meltwater stream that now rushes across the valley just under the toe of the glacier.

- On the September long weekend our family was returning from a trip to Miette Hot Springs in Jasper National Park when we encountered a traffic jam on the Yellowhead Highway as people spontaneously stopped their cars to run and frolic in the warm waters of Jasper Lake. The water, after flowing only 5 to 10 centimetres deep over the vast glacial sand plain for several kilometres, had warmed to a surprisingly comfortable temperature. It felt like a heated swimming pool making it possible for even a timid lily dipper like me to jump right into the deeper pools. While I am sure this would have occurred in previous years, to have it happen on September 4 seemed a bit out of character. I wonder how all this late season warm water changes the downstream ecosystem?

- This summer I was reading an old brochure about how Bow Summit is one of the best places to stop and enjoy a display of subalpine wildflowers. Indeed, my early years with Parks Canada saw me working on the reclamation of the Bow Summit area to ensure that visitors did not destroy the blossoms with excessive informal trail development. We struggled to find ways to prevent short-cutting between designated routes. As I made a bit of a photo excursion there this summer I was struck me by how hard I had to work to find one of the expanses of fleabane, groundsel, paintbrush and columbine we had worked to protect. After a few moments the reason become obvious! These displays are shrinking fast or disappearing altogether. But not because of wayward visitors or locals with lenses. The gaps between the clusters of big trees are being filled in with little trees instead of flowers. It's quite striking! There are the usual tall matriarchs and patriarchs of weather worn fir and spruce and very little in the way of middle aged trees. But the ground is now being covered by an apparently expanding mat of up to about 20 year old trees a metre or less tall that are suppressing the flowering herb mat. Warmer summers and longer growing seasons seem to be facilitating the success of tree

regeneration dramatically changing the flowerscape of the Bow Summit viewpoint.

There is a whole ecosystem out there responding to shifting patterns in the physical world that forms the framework for all life on the planet. Got your own favourite indicators of climate change? Send us a note and we can share them in the next newsletter.

Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff: an update on BVN' s participation

Peter Duck

After a lengthy planning process that involved both external and internal advisory groups, this summer Parks Canada released its proposals for managing human use in the Lands Adjacent to the Town of Banff (LATB). BVN participated in this process as a member of the external advisory committee and also commented on the proposals put forward for general public review. We now await Parks Canada's response to the comments that were submitted by the public.

The proposals include some worthy projects that should facilitate the ability of park users to enjoy activities consistent with the values and philosophies that are at the heart of our national park system. For this reason BVN is supportive of many of these proposals and encouraged Parks Canada to proceed towards implementation of a human use management strategy for the LATB in ways that will improve opportunities for appropriate contact with and understanding of nature and natural processes.

The following summarizes a few of the key points BVN stressed in submitting comments to Parks Canada this summer.

Ecological Integrity

Our general support for the LATB planning proposals comes with the condition that there must be no risk to the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity as determined through environmental assessment (EA). Environmental assessment of the LATB proposals is essential to bring scientific knowledge and analysis to bear on planning decisions. It also will provide opportunities for the public to be involved in considering detailed configurations for what currently are largely conceptual proposals.

Ensuring Ecosystem Gains

Many of the proposals involve new trail developments rationalized on the premise that they will facilitate an improved ecosystem condition by reducing the use of the abundant informal trails that have emerged in ecologically sensitive areas close to town. There must be a coherent plan for decommissioning these informal routes as well as a consistent and concerted effort to develop and enforce measures that ensure unacceptable human use does not continue in these places. It would be folly for Parks Canada to develop new recreational opportunities only to have Canadians discover that the Agency is either unwilling or, for other reasons, unable to accomplish the promised reductions in human disturbance in areas intended for restoration. We must confess to a certain degree of skepticism that the Agency has the will to remove these patterns of use from the landscape but we continue to strongly encourage it to do so and will strongly support efforts in this direction.

Follow Established Habitat Protection Guidelines

To be acceptable, proposals for new patterns of human use and infrastructure must respect the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG) guidelines for establishment and maintenance of wildlife movement corridors. Parks Canada has been instrumental in developing these guidelines and supporting their application on lands outside of the Park. It would be both hypocritical and a very dangerous precedent for wildlife management in the Bow Valley to not apply these same scientifically accepted standards inside the park.

The Purpose of Feasibility Studies

Some proposals call for feasibility studies to be conducted. One is a proposal to examine the feasibility of a trail along the Trans-Canada Highway to connect to the Healy Creek fire road. Another is to examine the feasibility of constructing an aerial tramway to Mount Norquay from the floor of the Bow Valley. The call for feasibility studies is prone to be interpreted as support for these proposals. This is not the case for BVN and our support for feasibility study should not be misconstrued. There were differing views amongst members of the external advisory committee toward these proposals. The agreement to conduct feasibility studies was an attempt to find a way for all parties to have their ideas about human use or concerns relating to the proposals' environmental effects addressed. In these cases, support for feasibility should be interpreted as support for a formal process that ensures the environmental, social, and economic implications of proposals are diligently and objectively documented at a very early stage in the planning process and in a publicly accountable manner.

Maintain The National Perspective

It is important for Parks Canada to ensure that all proposals for human use and proposals to manage human use in the LATB are in the interest of all Canadians. The concept of developing or designating infrastructure for human use but controlling environmental effects by limiting awareness of the opportunity to local users has been suggested, but is unacceptable.

If you wish more detailed information or documents relating to the LATB planning process please contact Parks Canada or BVN (Peter Duck, 762-4335).

Planning Pending: National Park Ski Areas

Mike McIvor

As this newsletter goes into the mail, we still are waiting for an announcement from Environment Minister, Rona Ambrose concerning the guidelines that will govern the preparation of new, long range plans for the mountain park ski areas - Mt. Norquay, Sunshine Village, and Lake Louise in Banff; Marmot Basin in Jasper. A meeting scheduled for Friday afternoon of the Thanksgiving long weekend, at which the "refined" guidelines were to be presented to interested "stakeholders", was abruptly cancelled. So far, no replacement date has been offered.

The official reason provided by Parks Canada for the postponement was that too many people were unable to attend the meeting because of the very short notice. And the notice was very short! However, as time drags on, if you care about the future of these parks, you have to worry the delay may have had more to do with political interventions than busy schedules.

The history of these ski areas in national parks has been one of constant pushing against the constraints - real or implied - imposed

by the special places in which they operate. No sooner were their original long range plans completed, plans that permitted major expansion but were clearly intended to define limits, when the lobbying and badgering began to overturn those limits whether they applied to daily skier capacity or areas on the ground.

There is no denying the fact the ski areas wield considerable clout in the winter economies of Banff and Jasper. Now, faced with flat or declining markets in the industry as a whole, increasing competition from ski areas, especially in B.C., that are not in national parks, and the reality of ever-shortening seasons as a result of global warming, the owners have engaged a high-powered lobbyist to carry their demands to what they believe will be a sympathetic federal government.

In flexing their political muscles, the ski areas are confident they can count on support from tourism and business organizations, some recreational groups, local politicians, the government of Alberta, and others - perhaps including some people with Parks Canada - whose primary interests, like theirs, are not with protecting national park ecosystems. With these forces mobilized the potential is real, and the risk great, that the price for propping up these operations will be extracted from the landscapes of the national parks.

I find it impossible to predict what shape the new guidelines might take. Expect the worst: hope for something not quite as bad. That's my approach. Parks Canada CEO Alan Latourelle, failing to accept that this exercise had occurred already, stated that he wants to see limits established for park ski areas just as they have been for park communities and Outlying Commercial Accommodation facilities. But, he said, in order to achieve this, some expansion will have to be allowed. The big worrying questions for me are: how much damage to national park values will be done to reach those new limits, and how soon will they too, be eroded? Far better to hold the line now!

National park decision-makers, at the political and administrative level, are hearing a great deal from people motivated by self-interest. If you are more concerned about the long-term integrity of national parks, why not drop them a line?

Say "Yes" to ecological integrity; "yes" to quality visitor experiences; "yes" to education as a key element in the mandate of parks; and "NO" to further commercial exploitation.

Issues Around the Corner

As you can see from the agenda for the upcoming planning forum, Parks Canada has identified 2 topics it feels will be particularly important in the next couple of years: the 10 year Park Management Plan review, and the Icefields Parkway Project. Watch for more details in the future.

Friday October 27

9 am – 9:30 Welcome & Superintendent's Remarks

9:30 – 12:00 Round Table Remarks

1:30 – 1:45 Presentation: Icefields Parkway Project

1:45 – 2:45 Presentation: 2008 Management Plan Review

3:00 – 4:00 Superintendent's Open Forum / Fireside Chat

Saturday October 28

9:00 – 12:00 Small Group Discussion: 2008 Park Management Plan - Identifying Issues and Solutions

1:00 – 2:00 Park Management Plan Plenary Discussion

2:00 – 3:00 Forum Debrief & Wrap Up

Diverting the River

Peter Duck

It's time to divert the river. The river of waste, that is. Approximately half of the waste produced in Banff is food waste. This material, which could almost be characterized as water in the shape of vegetables, is shipped to landfills in the Calgary area. The Bow Valley Waste Management Commission, on behalf of the Bow Valley communities of Banff, Canmore and the Municipal District of Bighorn is starting to look at ways of diverting this flow of food waste towards compost production.

There is no doubt that backyard composting is the most environmentally sound way of keeping this stuff out of landfills and making compost that can be used where it is produced. But this is not feasible on a large scale in a town where the climate is cold and preventing habituation of wildlife is a high priority. Even more relevant is the constraint that much of the food waste is produced in foodservice operations in a dense urban setting with little space for storage let alone on-site composting options.

Since the Town of Banff already has a high-tech in-vessel composting facility and has committed to the purchase of a new vertical mixer to make the process more efficient, the Town has agreed to take the lead in demonstrating ways for getting organic material to the composting plant. The Commission is now working with foodservice operations in Banff to explore two ways of doing this. One way is to collect material with a truck for delivery to the facility. Another is to pass food waste through garburators so it can flow down past the golf course through the existing sewage mains. Each approach comes with its own pros and cons relating to logistics, environmental concerns, and economics. It is hoped that by running some demonstration projects these advantages and disadvantages can be articulated in the Banff and Bow Valley operating context and local councils will then be able to make informed decisions as to how their communities should proceed to divert food waste from landfill disposal.

At present the Banff Springs Hotel, Bumpers, and the Inns of Banff have offered to help the Commission by demonstrating food waste diversion. We hope to have several more businesses volunteer to be involved in the coming weeks. It also will be important to have residents test diversion in their households. Households with or without garburators are needed to volunteer to separate, weigh, and divert their food scraps either to their garburator or to an organics collection bin placed in the neighbourhood. Anyone willing to wade in and help test diverting the food waste river please call Peter Duck at 762-4335 or email to Peter.Duck@Shaw.ca.

Of Wild Things...

High Flying Herons

Peter Duck

I normally think of Great Blue Herons as those "stay calm; wait for the signs" birds that fly in a low lumbering way over the wetlands. That changed this summer. Twice. Once during a lull in banding at the Ranger Creek monitoring site; we had run out of stimulating conversation (or my mouth was full of cinnamon bun) and I was scanning the sunlit skyline of Pilot Mountain. The binos picked up about 15 big birds with slow but authoritative wing-beats cruising in a v-shape at about 2400 metres. Geese? No. Different beat and profile and too early for flocking towards the Vermilion Pass. By the time I retrieved the spotting scope I was able to find these birds circling in a wide free-for-all over the west shoulder of Pilot. The only thing to come to mind was herons and the occasional flash of grey in the morning sun seemed to support this. Approximately three weeks later, as I walked the riverbank in the Town of Banff at 7am I was treated to a similar aerial display. Five Great Blue Herons engaged in what can only be described as a cross between ballet and dogfight with circling rises followed by dramatic dives and the occasional simulated attack on each other. Never more will I doubt a heron's skills or ability to look lively in the skies. If anyone has comments or similar observations to share, it will be great to hear from you.

The Return of the Red Fox

Shelley Mardiros

For most of the last century, sightings of red fox have been rare indeed in Banff National Park, and, although foxes were presumed to breed here, there were no known dens, nor reports of juvenile foxes (see Holroyd and Van Tighem's Wildlife Inventory, 1983.) Parks Canada's wildlife observation database includes no fox reports between 1981 and 1996, and only 6 between 1996 and 2003, a far cry from the "abundant" status reported by Williamson in 1916.



Cascade Valley, summer 2005

photo: Chuck O'Callaghan

So the recent discovery of a fox den in the Cascade valley, along with fox sightings by a number of BVN members and others along both the Cascade fireroad and the Bow Valley Parkway, herald an increase in the BNP fox population. Current thinking suggests a positive relationship between the presence of wolves and foxes:

where there is an active wolf population, the smaller coyote, competing for some of the same prey, moves out, leaving a niche for the even smaller fox to move into. As there is less overlap in what prey they pursue, both wolf and fox co-exist more readily than either species will with the coyote. The recovery of the wolf population in Banff National Park may account for the fox's return.

The male wolf weighs about 35–60 kg, while the coyote is 13-20 kg, and the male fox about 5 kg. Foxes are omnivorous, eating berries, plants, insects, small mammals, birds, eggs and even carrion. In winter, their excellent sense of hearing aids them in hunting subnivian mammals, like voles and shrews, that are active but invisible beneath the snow. They also bring down surprisingly large prey – Mountain Parks Carnivore Specialist Dr. Mike Gibeau spotted a fox carrying a ground squirrel this summer in the Cascade valley. Fox pairs den up in mid-winter, and kits are born in April or May.



Bow Valley Parkway, June 12, 2006

photo: Michael Shuster

Banff Springs Snail Recovery Strategy and Action Plan Posted Soon

Dwayne Lepitzki, Ph.D.

Earlier this year, the Banff Springs Snail recovery team presented the draft recovery strategy and action plan for the snail at the April BVN meeting. As part of the process required by the Species at Risk Act (SARA) for species given legal protection by the federal government - i.e. in Schedule 1 of SARA - the next step before the document is finalized and signed by the Environment Minister is a 60 day public consultation period. The strategy and action plan has been translated and will soon be posted on the public registry, soliciting public comments. The posting will occur "any day now" at

www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

This is the first SARA recovery strategy and action plan to be posted by the Mountain Parks and the first produced by Parks Canada that includes a recovery strategy, action plan, and delineation of critical habitat; therefore it is doubly important that the public be involved in the process. Other SARA listed species must undergo the same process so now is the time to help determine if Parks Canada is heading in the right direction when it

comes to recovery of endangered and threatened flora and fauna under their jurisdiction. To become involved follow the Public Consultation links on the SARA registry website.

COSEWIC Seeks Public Input on Assessing Species at Risk of Extinction

Dwayne Lepitzki, Ph.D.

As stated elsewhere in this newsletter, COSEWIC is the organization responsible for determining if native Canadian flora and fauna are on the road to extinction. COSEWIC uses the best available scientific, Aboriginal and community knowledge to assess species through a process that is supposed to be independent and transparent.

In 2005, a new way was implemented for COSEWIC to gather information not otherwise available for the assessment process. Community Knowledge was defined as “information derived from observation, personal experience and culture informing about a species (or group of species) current and/or past population distribution and abundance, habitat use and availability, life history traits, ecological relationships and potential threats to the species survival”. Naturalist groups were listed as an example of people that may possess Community Knowledge useful for the COSEWIC assessment process.

At present, the gathering of Community Knowledge is limited to the internet. Click on the “Community Knowledge” link at www.cosewic.gc.ca

to see what kind of information is needed for the species currently being assessed. Fill in the questionnaire and your Community Knowledge will be included in the process.

Late Summer Metamorphosis

Mike McIvor

In early September, Diane and I found the Mourning Cloak with its unmistakable markings, newly emerged from its chrysalis, or pupa, in a small spruce tree west of Muleshoe. The Mourning Cloak is one of the few species of butterfly in Canada that overwinters as an adult. With the onset of cooler weather in the fall, individuals such as this will seek refuge in a sheltered location, resuming activity in response to sunshine and warmth as a welcome sign of spring.



photo: Mike McIvor

COSEWIC Mollusc Species Specialist Subcommittee to Meet in Banff, Fall 2007

Dwayne Lepitzki, Ph.D.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is the organization responsible for determining if native Canadian flora and fauna are on the road to extinction. To make the task less daunting, the country's flora and fauna have been divided up into a number of species specialist subcommittees (SSC). A total of nine SSCs exist for everything from terrestrial mammals to birds, plants and lichens, arthropods, and molluscs. The SSCs, composed of species experts, take the lead role in preparing, reviewing, and submitting species status reports that are the basis of the COSEWIC assessment process.

Among the many tasks assigned to the SSCs is the convening of annual meetings where members of the SSCs discuss the latest results from COSEWIC, draft, discuss and maintain a list of potential candidate species, and recommend status ranks for species currently being assessed. To help make the process transparent, the public may attend portions of these meetings.

The annual meeting of the Mollusc SSC is usually held in the fall over at least one and a half days. The first day has traditionally been open to the public whereas the second day is reserved for recommending status ranks. It is a great opportunity for people to see for themselves how the complicated process of listing a species works.

Next year's COSEWIC Mollusc SSC meeting will be held in Banff, most likely at the end of September. On the agenda will be the first official 10-year re-assessment of the endangered Banff Springs Snail. Stay tuned for more details as the date of the meeting approaches.

Dwayne (aka "The Snail Guy") has been on contract with Parks Canada for over 10 years studying and recommending recovery actions for the endangered Banff Springs Snail. He has been a COSEWIC Mollusc SSC member since 2005 and will be helping organize the 2007 meeting with the COSEWIC Secretariate.

BOOKS

Colleen Campbell

Rutter, Nat, Murray Cuppold, Dean Rokosh. Climate Change and Landscape: in the Canadian Rockies. The Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation, Field, BC, CA, 2006.

This is a terrific primer relating complexities of climate science in a readily understood format. The authors examine the effect of global weather events specifically in the Canadian Rockies and explain the history of our climate through research of local glaciology and geology.

For the truly curious, some roadside geologic examples with photographs and specific locations references are included. The final two chapters discuss potential short term and future climate change.

Illustrations are thoroughly described and a relevant glossary is included.

In each of the following two books, the accounts of bears and the many ways in which humans relate to bears are examples for the much larger concern of how we view all species and the ecosystems that support them. Both books remind us of accelerated degradation of ecosystems and loss

of species.

Payton, Brian. Shadow of the Bear: Travels in Vanishing Wilderness. Viking Canada (Penguin Group) Toronto, Ontario, CA, 2006,

Payton looks at ecological degradation using various species of bear as his lens. His essays explore compromised landscapes in which some particular bear has been important, ecologically and culturally; in each case study, he investigates historic and current conditions and leaves the reader to develop the details of their own laments.

Peacock, Doug and Andrea. The Essential Grizzly: the Mingled Fates of Men and Bears. Lyons Press, Guilford Connecticut, USA, 2006.

Doug and Andrea Peacock investigate the nature of the various respectful and disrespectful relationships humans have with bears, especially grizzly bears. Though drawn from US examples, the 'territory' they explore is universal. This book is compelling and will resonate with many who live and work in bear country, or have any interest in the fates of all bears.

Thanks

Thanks to our MAPS volunteers

Peter Duck

I would like to thank all those who volunteered to help us keep the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) programme running this year. Our MAPS banding station is just a small operation but the work is essential when combined with similar stations across North America. It allows researchers to build a credible long-term database capable of revealing population trends and responses to environmental patterns such as climate change. MAPS also rounds out BVN's role in the community by adding ecosystem monitoring to our education and advocacy activities.

MAPS offers participants the rewards of being up close and personal with some of nature's most beautiful and delicate creatures and provides a chance to share the perfection of a mountain morning with friends. Thanks to our banders and thanks to those who came out for the first time this year and added new energy and conversation to our mornings at Ranger Creek. Thanks also to those who offered to stand by on specific dates but due to unforeseen scheduling circumstances were not able to attend a session. Your commitment gave us the confidence to set up a schedule and get the season rolling.

If you see these people please acknowledge their contribution. See ya next year!

Ben Alken, Grahame Booth, Joel Hagen, Deb Hornsby, Andrea Kortello, Josh Levac, Chris MacDonald, Greg Meyer, Ken Symington, Amy Turnbull, Loraine Widmer-Carson

When the Banff Recycling Society folded earlier this year, they made a generous terminal donation to the Bow Valley Naturalists. With these funds, we have purchased a new digital projector with remote control and laser pointer for use at our monthly public presentation series, to serve today's technical requirements now that our out-moded slide projector has been put out to pasture.

Many thanks to the Banff Recyclers for supporting BVN. We also would like to thank **Heather Dempsey** and **Parks Canada** for the many times in recent years that they have loaned us their projector, along with their expertise, for educational presentations.

BVN members and other interested parties are invited to come to our first presentation of the season on October 25th to see our new Optoma DX605 in action! (Oh yeah, there'll be spiders, too).

Messages to BVN members from the secretary.

Wanted: 'mailers'. Yes, those envelopes you receive in the mail from organizations requesting donations. If you have extras, please bring them to a meeting. I can put them to good use for mailing the BVN newsletters.

Email messages. If you are not receiving email messages from BVN and would like to, or if you would like to remove your name from the email list, please let me know.

Diane McIvor

ADDRESSES

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