



Our Mission -

"TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF THE CHARACTER AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF WAGNER NATURAL AREA FOR EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH PURPOSES."

Friends of the Fen

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring melt is very fast and high this spring (April 20). Rubber boots needed along the Marl Pond Trail.



Upcoming events:

2020

Annual General Meeting

Postponed until further notice. Board directors will continue to manage the natural area day-to-day business. Stay tuned to our website for any news about Wagner Natural Area.

2020 Activities

To comply with COVID-19 health recommendations, no guided tours and no coordinated clean-up days or weed pulls planned, until further notice.

Please enjoy our Marl Pond Trail safely; practise social distancing.

Help us by picking up any litter and disposing it in your home garbage.

Visit our website:
www.wagnerfen.ca

for more information about Wagner Natural Area.

It Takes a Village

Annual President's Report, by Dave Ealey

As with many other organizations in this pandemic year, our Annual General Meeting has been indefinitely postponed. However, it's still important to share insights about the health of Wagner Natural Area Society and our role as the steward for this special place for the year 2019. In the previous newsletter, an overview of "2019 Year in Review" provides a photo essay of activities, covering the three core areas of the WNAS mandate: Site Management, Public Education and Outreach, and Research and Monitoring. This report is intended to be more thought-provoking.

The concept "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child" is widely quoted to demonstrate the social responsibility and the valued input that the broader community commits to the raising of healthy, productive children. I think the expression works well to show the depth and breadth of the community of people who play a role in sustaining a special place, like Wagner Natural Area.

Who are the people in the Wagner community? (note: people may belong to different categories!)

- **Visitors** - several thousand people a year come to WNA to walk the Marl Pond Trail, attend an event, have lunch with family, or learn something new about our plants and animals. Over the past two years we've conducted surveys and learned that most come from the Capital Region, but can be from much farther afield, range in age from babies in backpacks to hikers in their '90s, and have interests as varied as the different species on our inventories. They are our ambassadors—the ones who speak out when external forces challenge the existence of WNA.
- **Dog-walkers** - among our most regular visitors, dog-walkers alert us to problems on site as they notice changes and share the information about Wagner within their own tight-knit groups. Given the variety of dogs and owners, we're grateful that most are responsible and assist by keeping dogs leashed and cleaning up after them. At the end of 2019, a pre-Christmas walk led to a lost pet drama, reported in our last newsletter, which was happily resolved in the new year. We acknowledge how important it is for these visitors to share our trail with their furry pets.
- **School and outdoor groups** - the most satisfying moments for Wagner veterans come with the opportunity to see the wonder in children as they spot that toad, feel different bark textures, learn that White-throated Sparrows sing "O, dear, Canada, Canada, Canada", and marvel at the skill of dragonflies that course around the perimeter of marl ponds. It is a privilege to be able to share our knowledge on field tours or in lectures in classrooms. And outdoor groups, which can range in age from cubs to senior hikers, are often more knowledgeable about the environment, which opens the door for more in-depth sharing of ecological values. Special thanks to the teachers and group leaders who recognize the value of a neighbourhood natural area like Wagner to showcase the environmental truths that inspire students.
- **Volunteers** - annual clean-up days, trail maintenance work bees, information fairs, and weed pulls are among the events for which we regularly recruit volunteers for site management and outreach chores. Sometimes intense activities, this work is essential for us to maintain a safe and clean trail for visitors and to protect our native flora and fauna against invasive species.
- **Members** - supporting members of Wagner Natural Area Society are a small but mighty group...many of whom are very long-time supporters, and the core of our workers over the years.
- **Voting members** - a slightly more exclusive group, our voting members have made a commitment to the running of WNAS and have the responsibility of selecting the Directors that serve. Most of the voting members have been Directors themselves.
- **Directors** - nine Director positions, voted on by the voting members, enable WNAS to meet the stewardship mandate for sustaining the natural area as part of the provincial protected areas network. Appointed Directors, currently two, are added by the Board to bolster expertise. The Directors coordinate events, conduct the business of the organization, respond to the requirements of the Society Act, report annually to Canada Revenue Agency to meet our federal charitable status, develop policy to

address situations that arise, communicate with regulatory authorities, and monitor what happens in the surrounding Parkland County that might impact the natural area.

- **Summer students** - the past two years, thanks to funding support through the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, saw the re-establishment of employment of a summer student to help us tackle public education and outreach, site management, and research and monitoring. Being responsible to hire, train, and oversee a young naturalist gives the WNAS an extra sense of purpose...many of our past employees have gone on to fulfill worthwhile careers in the environmental conservation field.
- **Neighbours** - a growing population of rural residential neighbours and a busy Acheson Business Park offer the WNAS some of our greatest support but also some significant conflict. Development plans, both business and residential, may not be compatible with the long-term survival of the natural area, so we continue to watch and willingly share our expertise about what it takes to sustain the high biodiversity of Wagner. Surprisingly, over the last few years we have also seen a large group of business park workers make the natural area their choice of a lunch or coffee site for rest and relaxation.
- **Parkland County** - as the level of government most involved in the planning of land use and in ensuring a well-managed network of infrastructure and services, the County provides policies and programs that are (mostly) benefits to the natural area. Grading of the access road, hauling away numerous bags of debris and weeds collected by Wagner volunteers, keeping the WNAS informed of new developments in a timely manner, and recognizing the significant contribution of Wagner Natural Area to the ecological function of the regional groundwater flow are much appreciated. An ongoing challenge arises when the complex interactions of different municipal governments play out within the county and WNAS becomes just one of a multitude of voices...that's when the Board focuses on making sure our voice can be heard. County staff are trained to deal with county residents, so it is a delight when they are responsive to the untraditional requests of the Society.
- **Alberta Parks** - at the provincial level of government, Parks staff provided supplies, support and advice on the running of the natural area. By confirming the authority of the recreational lease assigned to WNAS, Alberta Parks continues to acknowledge our expertise to serve as the steward for Wagner.
- **Alberta NGOs** - a number of like-minded nature organizations continue to be instrumental in helping WNAS sustain the natural area. Nature Alberta coordinates a public liability insurance program and connects WNAS to a provincial network of naturalist groups. SAPAA (Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association) serves as a network for information sharing on how to preserve, protect and restore the ecological integrity of Alberta's protected areas. Nature Conservancy of Canada is a key partner with WNAS in the management of the natural area and several of its members have volunteered on our Pale Yellow Iris weed removal activities. Sturgeon River Watershed Alliance, made up of communities and organizations operating in the Sturgeon River watershed, starting in 2019 invited WNAS to participate in the watershed planning initiative, giving us the opportunity to influence how others view the ecological function of groundwater that is the lifeblood of Wagner. North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, at the larger watershed level, provides a forum for information sharing about all matters related to water conservation and ensures WNAS is connected with municipal decision-makers who manage water in the watershed. In 2019, partners who helped sponsor and coordinate events at Wagner Natural Area, or gave WNAS an opportunity to promote our natural area at their event include the following: Alberta Community Bat Program, part of Wildlife Conservation Society Canada; Alberta Lepidopterists Group; Alberta Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy; Big Lake Environmental Support Society; Edmonton Seedy Sunday; Orchid Society of Alberta.
- **Research Groups** - Wagner Natural Area was selected by the Edmonton Native Plant Society as the site for an eco-island research project to implement naturalization of a former hayfield. Initial preparation of two sites, one along the south edge of the natural area and another along the northeast edge, was completed in late 2019. Also in 2019, researchers and students from MacEwan University undertook documentation on Wagner of the distribution and habits of a nonnative katydid species (similar to a grasshopper) newly discovered in Alberta.

Clearly, the array of individuals that play a role in sustaining and supporting the Wagner Natural Area is wide and diverse. If I have not included a particular group or category of a Friend of the Fen, please excuse the oversight.

Every year, the WNAS gets to engage with new friends that share their enthusiasm about Wagner with others in the village. Let's keep the community growing!

Coping with COVID-19 in 2020

There is no doubt that following the public health rules is an unprecedented challenge for everybody. Holding events at Wagner Natural Area this year is not possible until further notice. However, we are still committed to keeping our Marl Pond Trail open for visitors...enjoying a walk outdoors in a natural setting is important for one's mental health. The Wagner Natural Area Society volunteers will ensure basic site management is done to keep the trail safe and clean.

We ask visitors to practise social distancing and do not gather in groups on the site. Alberta Parks has closed the washrooms and the picnic shelter, so be prepared and use public facilities elsewhere.

Signage has been posted around the trail so that handling of the trail guides won't be necessary...we don't want people to worry about whether the trail guide booklets could spread the virus and we want to minimize the trips our volunteers have to take to replace the booklets over the summer.

Take a look at our signs and use them to add to your enjoyment of the trail. As we also removed the logbooks from our toolkits at the trail heads, please submit any sightings or comments you want to share with us through the Wagner Facebook page. Enjoy a safe summer!



Leota Cummins - In Remembrance



A long-time member as well as a Director for many years, Leota Cummins is fondly remembered for her contribution to the Wagner Natural Area and the Society. Here pictured from a more topographic setting, Leota is surrounded by the flowers that she most enjoyed photographing.

Born in Didsbury, Alberta, in 1924, Leota passed away in January 2020. She served as an attentive Board member for nearly a decade in the early 2000s, highly regarded for her delicious cinnamon buns brought to our Board meetings, and participated as an active trail monitor and skilled photographer. Her family chose the Wagner Natural Area Society as the designated charity at her memorial, for which we are truly grateful. Here are some of Leota's photographs from a collection she bestowed to the Society.

