



### 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



## Upcoming events:

2021

### Site Management

**Spring Clean-Up Day – Sat., May 8,  
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Come prepared for the weather and wet conditions. Pick up sticks and bags provided.

#### *Time to spruce up Wagner.*

Physical distancing to keep everyone safe. Some refreshments and water.

Meet at Wagner parking lot. Register by email at [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)

### 2021 Annual General Meeting

**Members, Voting Members and interested publics invited for a "virtual" Annual General Meeting.**

**When: Sat., March 27.**

**Where: on Zoom (people can phone in if can't use Zoom)**

**Time: 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.**

**What: Brief business meeting and a talk on "Community Engagement in Weed Management: the City of Edmonton Experience" by Qiting Chen, IPM Program Coordinator.**

**Register by email [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)  
Invitation will be sent to you with a Zoom link to participate.**

Visit our website:

[www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca)  
for more information about Wagner Natural Area.

**All stories and photos by Dave Ealey, unless otherwise noted.**  
Queries to [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)  
**Submissions welcome!**

## Trail Rehabilitation in the Nick of Time

Featured on our front page are some of the volunteers who helped spread out gravel along the south half of the Marl Pond Trail. We owe thanks to Alberta Parks for a prodigious pile of pea-sized pebbles plunked precisely on the first Thursday in November (5<sup>th</sup>).

Early on Friday (Nov. 6) the workers came prepared to do their chore. Unfortunately it had rained a little overnight and the volunteers faced a hard layer of frozen gravel encasing the precious grit. Committed shovel and rake work, and an estimated 135 wheelbarrows later, and the entire trail from the big marl pond south of the boardwalk all the way to signpost #2 at the edge of the open field was plastered. We hope the visitors appreciate the stabilized pathway. It will likely be easier to walk if we get a significant snowmelt this year.

Saturday (Nov. 7) it snowed--it was officially winter; we couldn't have spread the gravel that day!



## Doing the Right Thing

***As part of the Parkland County engagement process in advance of the Acheson Area Structure Plan (ASP) going before the County council for approval, the WNAS Board reviewed the various drafts and provided input to the planners managing the writing of the ASP. As part of the bylaw process, a public hearing was held on December 8, 2020. This hearing was conducted as a teleconference and the Wagner Board approved a submission that was read into the public hearing proceedings as follows:***

“Deputy Mayor and Council, thank you for letting me speak on behalf of the Wagner Natural Area Society. My name is Dave Ealey, and I am President of the Society.

“This fall we participated in the public engagement sessions for the Acheson Area Structure Plan (the ASP)...and even submitted a number of corrections, comments and concerns to the planners. It’s now a better document and we’re glad to have contributed.

“A number of further amendments, which we requested, are included in the list of changes for the ASP in this hearing today. Thank you, in advance, for considering that more robust language that starts to recognize the need for proper biophysical assessments.

**“But make no mistake, we are still deeply concerned that part of this ASP threatens our groundwater.**

“I’m talking about the plan for a new commercial/industrial area immediately south of the railway tracks on both sides of highway 16A and just to the east of Atim Road. It may seem tiny compared to the scale of Acheson, but the planned expansion is in the very heart of the critical recharge zone for groundwater feeding Wagner Natural Area.

“The quality and quantity of groundwater has created Wagner’s unique features—the marl ponds, fens, rare orchids—it’s a little bit of Alberta’s boreal forest in your backyard. **I’m not here to rant.** I just want to make sure you are aware that you may lose this environmental gem, if you do the wrong thing.

“Sometimes we feel like we’ve been fighting against impacts and developments for such a long time.

- In the mid-1980s, Alberta Transportation wanted to slice through the very middle of the sensitive and spectacular Hourglass Fen, just to connect highway 16 to 16A. That would have wiped out an incredibly unique feature. Opposition to the idea and the realization that it would tarnish one of the FIRST natural areas in a provincial public land program, led AB Transportation to put that plan away. **They did the right thing!**
- Almost 10 years later, Alberta Transportation was back at it again, looking to take a significant swipe out of the natural area to install a link to highway 44. After a scientific impact assessment and the discovery of several rare plants, they were required to re-think their plans, and shifted the access for the overpass in order to limit the damage. **They did the right thing!**
- Ten years later, we had to challenge a private development north of the natural area where an individual dug a pond so deep that it started draining the groundwater aquifer much too fast. The proposed development was not approved by the Appeal Board. **They did the right thing!**

“During the past 10 months of the pandemic, we’ve seen many of our neighbours in Parkland County come to the natural area and walk our trail. Two of our Board members are Parkland residents and enjoy seeing friends along the trail. People clearly thrive on their connection with this special place. For many of us who commit so much time to maintain the site, Wagner Natural Area is our place of **spiritual nourishment**. We don’t want it ever to be lost...

“Parkland County admits the significance of our recharge zone by clearly mapping it in Map 5 of the ASP, but then places no constraints on the lands labeled in Map 6 as commercial/industrial, within that recharge zone.

“At the very least, developers need to be alerted that any development planned for that recharge zone is **required** to have a proper assessment of the hydrogeological consequences, with a clear plan for how damage to the groundwater will be averted. Not may, not perhaps, not might be a good idea, but **must** be done. As responsible planners and decision-makers, **IT IS YOUR TURN TO DO THE RIGHT THING! Thank you.**”

*Following the submission, I responded to questions from Council about the nature of the amendments in language and tone that we recommended. In most cases, our input was accepted in the final draft. The Acheson ASP is now in the second phase of being updated, which involves drafting proposed land use concepts for a block of agricultural land (called Ag Area B) in the southeast part of the ASP. The County plans a virtual open house to obtain input about that block and then the ASP is presented to the Edmonton Municipal Regional Board and Parkland County Council in the Fall of 2021. There are no plans to make changes to the zoning for agricultural lands immediately south and west of Wagner Natural Area during the current phase, according to the County planner for the ASP. More details and the relevant County plans are available on the Parkland County website.*

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## **Re: Summer activities at Wagner Natural Area**

As the Covid guidelines will likely continue to affect gatherings as we head into summer, we are cautious about leading field trips or scheduling events. Also, as we will not be able to hire a summer student this year, the opportunity to staff field trips for outdoor groups or school classes is limited. Our May Species Counts (birds and plants) at the end of May and an Orchid Walk on Sunday June 13 are planned; adjustments for physical distancing will be made.

Details about work bees that can be kept Covid-safe, will be announced when we are able, so please stay tuned and monitor the wagnerfen website.

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Watch for a new map at our information kiosk this spring! Alberta Parks signage staff helped design the content for the kiosk and we expect to be able to install everything at some time in April.