

*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



Nature is tough on "our" trees: porcupine foraging and blowdown.

## Upcoming events:

### Weed Whacking Workbee

**When: Saturday, June 19  
9 a.m.—1 p.m.**

**What:** Help dispatch undesirable invasives--Tansy, Pale Yellow Iris--join Wagner Weeding Crew.

**Where:** Meet at Wagner Natural Area parking lot.

Come prepared for weather, mosquitoes, and wet areas—gloves, rubber boots, water and snacks are recommended. Bring spades! Check out our story on the weeding plan (p. 4).

**Please pre-register by emailing [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca).**

### 2021 Activities

The pandemic is still affecting our ability to lead field trips or host gatherings. Stay tuned!

Orchid Walk—June 13—followed by Orchid Week at Wagner—anticipated peak for Yellow Lady's-Slipper.

Walk at your own time. We plan to have our guided walks back for next year!

Check website for work bees.

Visit our website:

[www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca)

for more information on upcoming events at Wagner Natural Area.

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All content by Dave Ealey unless otherwise acknowledged.

# SITE MANAGEMENT

## Manitoba Maple Pruning and Spring Cleanup

The first week of May saw intense activity at Wagner Natural Area as we finally tackled the task of precisely removing the invasive Manitoba maples from the Marl Pond Trail and along our southern border. This species has been extensively planted as a roadside tree and around many country residences and is readily distributed by wildlife. A non-native species, it outcompetes our native trees and has been interfering with naturalization efforts in the former hay fields along our southern borders.

An enthusiastic crew of five volunteers from West Parkland Gas Co-op Ltd., based in Stony Plain, brought their chainsaws and made short work of these unwanted trees. Thanks to these young men and their office coordinator, Carole, who organized the donation of their labour through the company's Community Volunteer Program. In addition, Robert, Cheryl and Melissa helped with the clearing of debris, especially along the Marl Pond Trail.



We deeply appreciate their efforts to the management of the Wagner Natural Area.

# Support Us



On June 12, a Yellow Lady's-Slipper captured in its prime by Mike Berezowsky. Thanks, Mike.

Hope everyone gets a chance to enjoy Orchid Week at Wagner.

## VOLUNTEERS / MEMBERS

People of all talents and interests are desired and welcomed to become more closely involved with the Natural Area and the Society.

Email: [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)

## DONATIONS

All donations help maintain the integrity of the Natural Area and its surroundings, provide education material, enhance visitor's experiences, and support on-going research studies and surveys.

**Please see page 7 for the donation/volunteer form.**

Spring Cleanup took place during a very soggy Saturday May 8. It wasn't pouring, but it might as well have been! Everything was wet and the almost constant drizzle didn't allow for much fun, but the volunteers were tremendous! About 25 people braved the cool, wet conditions and made a very impressive haul of debris and litter from along the access road, parking lot and highway fenceline.

Perhaps everyone was eager to get out due to being cooped up under the pandemic restrictions, yet they all seemed keen and made a real contribution to sprucing up the natural area. Pat yourselves on the back, volunteers...you made a difference. There were additional volunteers who came out on Sunday because they thought the cleanup would have been cancelled due to the rain; they added more bags to our pile.

I also thank the Parkland County staff who came out during the following week and hauled the garbage to the land fill. Much appreciated!



Wagner volunteers are the hardest!



Thanks to Parkland County staff who hauled away our collection of mostly highway debris.



This stalwart volunteer also carried a passenger while hauling debris!

# To Weed or Not to Weed, That Is the Question!

Sometimes we are asked why we remove plants considered weeds from the natural area. Philosophically speaking, one might suggest that if a plant can grow, then we should let it. A natural area is not like someone's front yard where everything is manicured and sorted. Nature is messy. Leave it be!

Well, as the stewardship group responsible for managing the recreation lease for this public land, the Wagner Natural Area Society has assumed some of the obligations of a landowner: maintain the access (Marl Pond Trail), keep the facilities operational, and ensure that efforts are made to manage weeds. Specifically, under the provincial *Weed Control Act*, that means destroying plants identified as prohibited noxious weeds and controlling those plants identified as noxious.

Of course, plants that are officially recognized as weeds are, not surprisingly, very good at spreading their seeds or growing through vegetative means. The number of seeds many of these plants produce can be prodigious, which makes their elimination difficult; seeds may lie dormant for many years, so that plants can sprout when suitable conditions arise. Consequently, an organization consisting of volunteers requires a strategic approach to maximize its effectiveness. Constant monitoring to ensure early detection and response is key.

Following many years of reactive "weeding," the WNAS is focusing on a more strategic approach. At the time of writing, we are preparing for a "Weed Whacking" event on June 19 to help us plan how to prioritize where, when, and how we implement a strategic plan. We've selected a confined area along our only named flowing waterbody: Morgan Creek. We're targeting pale yellow iris and tansy ragwort, as well as a few garden escapees (see pictures), with the intention of eradicating these species from that stretch of the natural area.

The story of the pale yellow iris (a young plant shown here to the right) we hope will be a short one for Wagner Natural Area. As a specialty landscaping flower species, it was previously sold commercially. Concerns about its ability to spread and take over native aquatic systems led to its listing as a prohibited noxious weed. Very recently, staff of Parkland County have been very successful at quashing the source population for this plant. Previous work bees of Wagner volunteers have also made great progress at eliminating this species.



Anyone involved in those earlier work bees can be proud of the fact that only a few handfuls of plants remain. On a scouting trip completed June 9, specimens have been flagged to make it easier for volunteers to dig them out.



Tansy (left) is a different story because the source of these plants is more widespread. Although tansy will need to be dug up and bagged, like the iris, and there are many more plants that need to be removed, this species tends to occur in clumps which may be easier to deal with than a more scattered species.



The garden escapees that we will also be removing are distinctive and should be easy to spot and to eliminate. Volunteers will be taught to identify any species that need to be removed.

Let's hope the next newsletter can report success!

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# EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

## Sharing the Word Through CBC



Wagner Natural Area—view to NE and Big Lake as seen by drone. Image courtesy of CBC.

It's not so hard to get your story out if the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) comes calling! My only problem with connecting with our national broadcast network to generate positive media coverage is that I have had to change my computer index system...previously, the only CBC acronym in

my personal files was for the Christmas Bird Count!

I was thrilled to hear from Adrienne Lamb, the host of CBC's program *Our Edmonton*, that CBC was interested in including Wagner Natural Area in an episode for her program. As it was not a program that I was familiar with, I had no idea the flurry of social and traditional media WNAS was facing. Thanks to Claudia Palylyk, a WNAS Board Director, for suggesting in late winter that CBC consider coming on site and filming segments. (Let us know of media outlets that you think might like a story about Wagner Natural Area—email us at [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca).)



Adrienne photographs Claudia for CBC's *Our Edmonton* program.



WNA Society Past President Ben Rostron, filmed by Rick from CBC, talking about groundwater.

The Board approved on May 11, at our regular Zoom Board meeting, the use of CBC drones, which was the final step in advance permissions for the CBC crew. Claudia prepared a thorough backgrounder about Wagner Natural Area and its environmental features, visitor use and the conservation history. From our files, including photos from a former Director, Leota Cummins, we provided CBC with images to share as part of their production.

May 25<sup>th</sup> was *Lights, Cameras,*

*Action!* Well, so there were no lights (just the sun), only two cameras—one on a tripod and the other on the drone (both operated by videographer Rick from CBC), and limited human action—interviews of me (Dave Ealey, President), Dr. Ben Rostron (hydrogeologist and Past President), and Adrienne walking the trail, describing what she was seeing and making connections to images of Wagner Natural Area and to other segments of her program. The CBC drone operator, Dave, did his work along with Rick immediately after the main segments were filmed.



Aerial view of a popular spot along the Marl Pond Trail boardwalk. Image courtesy of CBC.



Using drones requires certified operators and careful use of the drone to avoid restrictions about flying in controlled air

space (a specific distance from airfields/airports) and other rules. Dave, the CBC drone operator, must still set up a temporary landing site as he did here in Central Field. When I asked him about potential reactions of big birds, he clearly was aware of the need to avoid disturbance.



After the big day of filming, Adrienne had imagery for us to see and web material within a couple days. The entire show was broadcast on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. Ben's enthusiastic description of groundwater and the eclectic combination of little snippets by Adrienne on various features of the natural area were delightful. I particularly enjoyed seeing archival footage from 1986 of Alice Hendry and Peter Lee talking about the natural area while walking the brand new boardwalk. It's very gratifying after 35 years to reconnect, at least virtually, with a couple of the many WNA supporters who represent the heart and soul of this environmental gem.



To see the program, check out the CBC website and search for "Wagner Natural Area."

## MEMBERSHIP --- WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY

Support / Donate / Volunteer

For information about Wagner Natural Area or the Society and about field trips and other activities, go to [www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca).

Wagner Natural Area Society is a Registered Charity. Donations will help maintain this very special area; \$20 or more are receipted for Income Tax purposes. CRA B/N119287522 RR 0001

The Society's annual fee is \$10 for Supporting Members and \$15 for Voting Members. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

Annual fee (Supporter \$10/Voting \$15): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

May the Society CONTACT you by: EMAIL: Yes / No

PHONE: Yes / No

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

If you can VOLUNTEER to help the Society with maintenance of the Natural Area (circle): Yes

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with cheque/money order, payable to Wagner Natural Area Society, to:  
Treasurer, Wagner Natural Area Society,  
30531-118 Ave., Acheson, AB T7X 6M5

Or scan the completed form and pay online. Submit your membership/donation by Interac bank transfer to:  
Treasurer@wagnerfen.ca  
Mav 2021

## Site Management:

It's continually surprising to discover the inappropriate uses of a sensitive natural area by those rare visitors who are clearly unaware of the impact they are causing. On the big day of filming with the CBC, and while installing portable planks to help hikers avoid the wetter parts of the Marl Pond Trail, I found a large leanto constructed in our dense spruce forest.



Dismantling the leanto added another hour to my long list of volunteer activities on the natural area. I would much rather have spent the time communing with nature, listening to bird songs and discovering a new lichen.

We do this site management to avoid anyone thinking it's a good idea to set up camp at Wagner. If you come across anything inappropriate along our trails, please let us know through [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca). We want to protect the natural area for future compatible uses.



More of Leota Cummins' photos—the always striking Bunchberry, a member of the *Cornus* genus.

