

OUR MISSION -

“To ensure the preservation of the character and biological biodiversity of Wagner Natural Area for Educational, Scientific and Research purposes.”



Friends of the Fen



WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Wagner Natural Area Casino

Volunteers needed to help fundraise for natural area’s site maintenance, research, and outreach materials.

Where: Century Casino, 24 Boudreau Road in St. Albert.

When: Saturday, February 4th & Sunday, February 5th, 2023, from 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 a.m., both days

Please contact info@wagnerfen.ca, if you wish to volunteer for our casino. There are still positions available.

Upcoming Events:

Annual General Meeting, Sat., March 18, 1 to 3 p.m. at Percy Page Centre, Edmonton. Further details to come.

Spring Clean-up, Sat. May 6, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

All newsletter stories, unless otherwise noted, were prepared by Dave Ealey, WNAS Past President.

SITE MANAGEMENT

Weed Management at Wagner Natural Area

By Brian Pratt

This is the first year of volunteering activities at Wagner Natural Area (WNA) for me. It has been a fantastic learning experience. Knowing the effectiveness of our manual weed management efforts has been rewarding.

Previously, I never fully comprehended what an invasive species was and how harmful it could be to a fragile ecosystem such as WNA or other natural spaces.

My daughter, Brinley, has been the focal point in our conservation journey. She loves nature and anything outdoors. She may be quiet, but inquisitive to what we experience. If she finds empty snail shells or a grouse feather, she wants to know what it is and why she found it in that condition.

Beyond scheduled manual weed management events, we have undertaken further invasive species depopulations. Chris Saunders initiated this project for the natural area. It has been a great learning experience for Brinley and I.

August 20, 2022
(Southeast entrance to Morgan Creek)

Chris, Brinley and myself started around 9 a.m. We cleared the common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) along the ditch and the trail. We stumbled upon orange hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca*) and a Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*). Luckily, I had packed my battery-powered reciprocating saw with a pruning blade (I enjoy my tools!). I made short work of the maple and cleared the trail in the process. Slowly, we meandered down to the creek bed. Much to my surprise, I could not believe the infestation of tansy. The three of us began deflowering the tansy; however, the extreme heat of the day stopped us at high noon. We decided to continue this mission the following weekend.

September 3, 2022

We planned to start at 9 a.m. Ironically, Brinley and I met Chris at the southeast entrance at 8:30 a.m. We marched down the trail to Morgan Creek. This day, we attacked the toxic tansy with focus and intensity. Brinley quietly deflowered the tansy at a steady pace.

Support Us!



The Wagner Natural Area Society welcomes new supporters, volunteers, and all people interested in natural history and the preservation of the ecological integrity of this delightful natural area.

VOLUNTEERS / MEMBERS

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

Email: info@wagnerfen.ca

DONATIONS

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

Please see page 10 for the donation/volunteer form.

Chris had a two-pronged attack. He started with deflowering tansy; then as opportunity arose, he would shift to **pale yellow iris** (*Iris pseudacorus*). Chris was able to extract a clump of three pale yellow iris right down to and including the rhizome.

Tansy infestation seemed endless, and we struggled to make it to noon as the heat exhausted us. Being goal-oriented, I could not let the tansy stand and increase in population. I suggested we tackle the tansy the next weekend.

September 10, 2022
(*Morgan Creek tansy deflowering Part 1*)

This day, only I returned. Being a solo act and having more experience now, I knew I had to pack light. With a sling bag, hand pruning clippers and garbage bags I continued the deflowering mission.

As the ground was moist, I was able to pull the tansy in the bank root and all. It seemed the further I went down the creek, the thicker the tansy. It was 1:30 p.m., and I had to stop when I ran out of bags. I lugged the full bags of deflowered tansy back to my truck. I may have been tired, but not defeated.



Volunteer showing mature iris and roots.



The culprit, common tansy, seen in midsummer. Photo courtesy of Chris Saunders.

September 11, 2022
(*Morgan Creek tansy deflowering Part 2*)

Knowing that I had to finish this day, I packed extra bags and started extra early: 8 a.m. Now that I knew what I had left to tackle, I made a focused attack. The dew was thick, I was soaked in minutes... an annoyance; however, this weeding needed to be done. I deflowered steadily in the tall wild grass. I stepped cautiously as I could not see the ground or the fringes of the creeks.

As I moved down the winding creek, I saw many tansy deep in the creek bed. I did not want to disturb the slow-flowing creek, so I leaped across the bank and back, as needed, to rip the tansy by the roots. By noon, Morgan Creek was absent of the toxic tansy. I was relieved! Seven bags of toxic tansy over two days. Not bad for a one-man show! Victory over the fallen tansy was mine!

I was home in time to watch my Green Bay Packers be humbled by the Minnesota Vikings in NFL play...my team may have lost, but I humbled the tansy in Morgan Creek.

It was in the coming days that I realized the true impact of my tansy deflowering efforts. Because of my efforts, Chris Saunders was able to focus on tansy populations in other fields, (Osborne, Willow, Spruce and southwest corner near Atim Road). This made my efforts not only noticeable, but valuable to the big picture at WNA.

It is these experiences I have drawn from Wagner. I feel now that I am a true "Friend of the Fen".

RESEARCH:

Correction -- Species Highlight in August Newsletter – Western Jewelweed (*Impatiens noli-tangere*)



Photo courtesy of Sydney Cantu.

Thanks are due to Patsy Cotterill and Derek Johnson for helping clarify the identity of this plant featured in Sydney Cantu's, our summer student's, final newsletter in August. This plant is one of my favourite, non-orchid plants at Wagner, and it was clearly of interest to Sydney, too. However, it is not *I. capensis*, but in fact *I. noli-tangere*. The current recommended common name for this species, from the Canadian botany database Canadensys Vascan, is western jewelweed, although it is also called yellow jewelweed, or western/yellow touch-me-not (four different common names!).

Positioning of the photographs in Johnson et al. (2017) of both *I. capensis* and *I. noli-tangere* may lead to some confusion with the identification of these jewelweeds...I have annotated my edition, at Derek's suggestion!

An interesting side-note in Patsy's information about the plant identification problem is that the abundant moisture in spring 2022 likely led to the abundance of jewelweeds/touch-me-nots flowering...in some years, there may be lots of seedlings present in spring, but they are not able to reach maturity. Something to watch for this coming spring of 2023!

Work Cited:

Johnson, J. D., Kershaw, L., MacKinnon, A., & Pojar, J. (2017). *Plants of the western forest*, p. 195. Partners Publishing.

BOARD BULLETIN:

Update on Executive:

A report on annual activities by the membership, volunteers and directors over 2022 will be forthcoming in early 2023.

Unfortunately, our President, Cheryl Johnson-Dempsey has requested to resign from her position, in light of her extensive, post-Covid travel plans. We will miss her insight and efforts at the helm of the Board but hope to take advantage of her many skills as a part-time contributor to our Public Education and Outreach program.

The Board of the Wagner Natural Area Society, after an early January meeting, is aiming for the following for 2023:

- getting ready to manage our first casino as a volunteer charity organization,
- preparing for a summer of visitors and activities on the natural area, and
- ensuring we are ever on the alert to engage neighbours, visitors, and governments, in a collaborative way, to maintain the integrity of the Wagner Natural Area for all of its special features.

Wagner Natural Area Society submission for hearing into Tree Clearing, DP 21-D-543, March 28, 2022

(The text following is the content of the WNAS Board submission to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board hearing that we requested into the Parkland County approval of a permit for wholesale clearing of private land adjacent the south boundary of the natural area.

The County approval of the extensive tree clearing came well after the clearing had been done and after the landowner had been denied a permit to install a home-business that was essentially a light-industrial land use within a Country Residential setting.)



We are disappointed to find the Land Use Planner's declaration, in the Hearing Agenda package, of support for approval of the tree clearing permit DP 21-D-543. From our submission, there remain a number of questions about the appropriateness of tree clearing along the boundary of the natural area. We believe that the wholesale clearing of trees is in conflict with Parkland County's policies for the retention of natural vegetation and native biodiversity. Furthermore, county planners should not be obligated to accept misleading statements as so-called "reasons" to justify egregious actions.

First, while the landowners claim they were only removing a large number of dead and so-called infested trees, to replant with other trees, the recent photographic evidence, from Google Earth for 2015 in attachment 5A of our submission (page 53 Agenda), disputes that description. Furthermore, the hand-drawn map of forest cover on page 34 of the Agenda package does not show the full extent of forest removed by the bulldozing. In fact, it only shows the coniferous vegetation and ignores the extensive deciduous woods between the conifers and the former homesite, which is also the footprint of the new homesite.

Our experience with vegetation mapping throughout the natural area and our perimeter surveys along the north edge of Osborne Acres, also casts doubt on there being any unusual number of dead trees in that location. We know from our surveys that, except for a few locations where heavy winds or microbursts have blown down groups of trees, we don't have unusual concentrations of dead trees. In the area surrounding the major marl pond to the north of the new landowners' property, the typical conifer growth is white spruce, black spruce and tamarack. Perhaps the presence of some tamarack, which don't have needles in the winter, may have been confused for dead trees. A proper assessment would have revealed that.

Furthermore, the presence of carpenter ants is a natural occurrence within a living forest...some trees die and these ants, along with other species, both plants and invertebrates, play a role in the decomposition of the trees; they aren't the cause of the death of the trees. It's a shame that the previous owners, who were admittedly quite elderly, were unable to manage their structures and prevent ants moving in. That hardly seems suitable justification for trashing a 20-to-40 m buffer of living forest.

When the only tool considered is a bulldozer, then of course pushing all the trees down is an easier approach. Selective logging to remove a handful of problem trees doesn't appear to have ever been considered. Such an approach would have been more compatible with a living forest that was well established on the natural soil conditions in that location.

The new landowners seem to feel we are suggesting unreasonable conditions and have no standing to make such requests. It's true that the County does not have a category spelled out in the land-use bylaw for us to challenge a conflict with environmental policy. What it comes down to is in how the word "discretionary" is being interpreted. We believe that the County does have the latitude, indeed the authority, to consider that such extensive tree clearing is inappropriate along a buffer with a designated natural area.

What we truly don't understand is why a new landowner would move into a country residential area where a community of neighbours has been actively supporting a harmonious relationship with something special—that is, an environmental gem widely known to be a sensitive landscape—and immediately strip clear a broad swath of living forest.

Well, in fact, we do know that the original plan was to install a kind of industrial base for a level-3 business that was totally inappropriate within a country residential

district. Such a kind of business is fine for the business park within the Acheson industrial lands. I remind the panel that that plan was denied under the hearing into 21-D-179.

Going forward, we don't want to see a gradual expansion of other inappropriate activities along the south edge of the Wagner Environmentally Significant Area to take precedence from the tree clearing under 21-D-543. We know the vast majority of Osborne Acres residents are living in that district because they appreciate the special value of having such a unique natural area in their backyard. We are duty-bound to protect and conserve that natural area for the future. We can't do that alone; we look to the County to have the conviction to enforce land-use planning that is compatible with a sustainable environmental conservation plan.

Decision of Panel

In its decision to uphold the permit for the tree clearing, the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board provided some acknowledgement of the WNAS' concerns and required several conditions placed on the approval. Chief among the conditions were the following:

- *must plant new trees and vegetation in a density comparable to what existed before the trees were cleared (note-- planting was to take place by no later than June 30, 2022),*
- *the trees and vegetation must be trees indigenous to the area,*
- *may not plant an invasive species,*
- *shall not alter the natural drainage that creates any surface run-off onto adjacent properties.*

Subdivision Hearing Before The Land & Property Rights Tribunal

On November 29, WNAS appealed Parkland County Subdivision Authority's approval of a third subdivision for the quarter-section of land on the SW corner of the Wagner Natural Area. This property lies immediately west of the 80-acre eastern half of the quarter-section, which became the Nature Conservancy of Canada's portion of the SW corner of Wagner.

The image shown is from the County's approval document for the subdivision proposal and illustrates the location of the subdivision extending eastward from Atim Road. The design was provided by Pals Geomatics on behalf of the subdivision applicant.

The LPRT made its decision on the day of the hearing to declare that WNAS did not have standing under the legislation to have its case heard. We provide the following for readers to understand what our concerns are about the County approach to subdivision of land within agricultural buffer lands south and west of Wagner Natural Area. Only some of what was prepared below could be presented because the LPRT insisted on first hearing our arguments about our status as Appellants.



LPRT Hearing Comments

Thank the Tribunal and all participants for the opportunity to make our case about concerns regarding the proposed subdivision immediately west of the Wagner Natural Area.

Eligibility: The Board of the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS) believes that we are the right party and in the right place to appeal to the Land and Property Rights Tribunal on this matter.

Who? My name is Dave Ealey and I am the Past President of the Board of WNAS. As duly elected officers of the Society, the Board undertakes all management for the nonprofit Society registered under the *Societies Act* since 1982.

That means that we ...

- mend fence,
- remove weeds,
- pick up garbage that blows in off the highway,
- welcome visitors and maintain amenities for them,
- monitor for hazards,
- provide environmental education, and
- collaborate with onsite researchers.

Some of these activities are typical chores of a rural landowner.

We also maintain contact with a revolving door of government departments and staff—that variably take credit for our existence as an environmental gem in their county or within the provincial protected areas network under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*, while at other times, fret at our intrusion into their ordered system of rules and legislation.

That being said, we acknowledge the necessity of having a clear set of rules for a civilized society to function. We have held a Recreational Lease for providing the general public with access to nature-oriented Recreational and Educational Use for over three decades. We also hold a Water Licence since 1985 to ensure the use of water in its natural state for conservation and

recreational purposes—that licence refers to the importance of the quantity and quality of groundwater and surface water that sustains the special features of Wagner Natural Area. It was the efforts of Wagner Natural Area Society that spearheaded action against highway designers that would have eliminated the heart of the natural area—not once, not twice, but three times. We have also had to stand our ground in challenging unsound water schemes by individuals after approvals by government departments, and sometimes winning.

We disagree with the County and provincial government who are arguing that Wagner Natural Area Society should not be challenging this subdivision ruling. Under the Parkland County’s process for subdivision, we were informed prior to the approval of the subdivision that there was no right of appeal through their process. We expressed our concerns at that time about what we felt was missing from the County’s approach to subdivision within Special Project Area A, as identified in the Acheson Area Structure Plan (ASP).

On the provincial government side of the issue, please be aware that we had no intention of masquerading as a government department; however, as the provincially designated Volunteer Steward for the Wagner Natural Area, and with our recreation lease and water licence authorizations, we felt obligated by our commitment to the continued existence of this special tract of Public Land to at least search for an impartial hearing.

The Land and Property Rights Tribunal is a new entity in the world of providing Albertans with access to independent, fair and timely quasi-judicial and alternative dispute resolution processes, including under the *Municipal Government Act*, which governs the municipal role in subdivision actions. And so, we have followed the process as we understand it and as expressed on the LPRT website; we have confidence from reviewing the Mandate and Roles Document and the Code of Conduct and Ethics that we will at least be listened to.

Concern about subdivision

Wagner Natural Area Society is concerned that the approval violates Parkland County Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw.

There are four reasons given for the decision to approve, for which we provide the WNAS objection:

1. *Existing lot to east is PC-Conservation District*----- WNAS: The land to the east is districted PC-Conservation District NOW, but when the Kichton property was originally split, it was AGG (Agricultural General District). The landowner has already split the original 1/4 section. With that subdivision, we at least had some idea of continuity going forward, and the development pressure in the adjacent properties.

2. *The existing lot to the east used for environmental purposes only and owned by NCC (Nature Conservancy of Canada)*----- WNAS: this statement may be correct, but it is completely irrelevant to the proposed noncompliant subdivision.

3. *Proposed two residential lots conform to use under AGG*----- WNAS: OK, but then that should be expected in an AGG context.

4. *Proposed lots don't interfere with neighbourhood amenities or use, enjoyment or value of neighbouring land parcels*----- WNAS: we wholeheartedly disagree. At the very least, the County should not be increasing the residential density adjacent to an existing Natural Area protected under provincial legislation.

Additional information provided by Ms. J. Harnden (Senior Planner, Parkland County) about the reasons for decision include the following: 1. "there are no proposed changes to land use at this time"; 2. the proposed subdivision is "outside of the Wagner Recharge Area."; and 3. "adjacent landowners made no written submissions."

Respectively, these arguments are incorrect, missing the point, and misleading.

1. There are indeed substantive changes that automatically happen with subdivision of

property; each of the two new landowners become entitled to withdraw 1250 m³/yr from the groundwater aquifer. That is a material change in use.

2. The subdivision may be outside of the Wagner Recharge Area for groundwater, but the property is clearly connected to the Wagner Natural Area (WNA) through the surface water flow that is conspicuous in its effect on the vegetation characteristics and in the water that flows in a northeasterly direction toward the central portion of the WNA. Further details about the value of the Wagner wetland complex and the significance of disruptions to water flow into the area are available, because we completed a formal Alberta Wetland Rapid Evaluation Tool, with accompanying ground truthing, two years ago. The results of the ABWRET are built into the Water Act application process, but if there are any land use planning actions occurring within the Wagner perimeter, we can advise about any potential conflict. If land use planners are in any way supportive of retaining the Wagner Natural Area for the County, we expect to be contacted.

3. While it is true that WNAS did not make a formal written submission to the original subdivision, we did, however, through communication with the County planner, make our concerns known. As we had indicated, it was clear that the County process did not allow for a formal appeal.

So, what is the remedy?

Keeping a unique natural area is complicated, as those of us actively managing it know. We don't want to be adversaries in the effort to maintain the natural area. We want to be able to collaborate with our neighbours. But there needs to be a deeper appreciation of the potential for impact to the continued existence of Wagner Natural Area.

MEMBERSHIP – WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY

Support / Donate / Volunteer

For more Information about Wagner Natural Area or the Society and about field trips and other activities, go to wagnerfen.ca.

Wagner Natural Area 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

Society's annual fee is \$10 for Supporting Members and \$15 for Voting Members. Voting Members are key to run WNAS; must qualify through nomination. See website. The Society's fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

Annual fee (Supporting \$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 with 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 [June 2022]

SITE MANAGEMENT



Champion Pet Food company volunteers help with maintenance of Wagner's Marl Pond Trail in fall.

Teams of enthusiastic volunteers able to come out and tackle a specific project, as well as meet their corporate commitment to community service, are especially important to sustaining Wagner Natural Area. We get to work with a group that is already used to working together, they can come during the work week when there is less disruption to regular visitors, and we introduce the natural area to many who may become ambassadors.

If you know a group interested in doing community service volunteer work in the outdoors, encourage them to contact us at info@wagnerfen.ca.

