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W A G N E R N A T U R A L A R E A
N E W S L E T T E R

The Wagner Natural Area Society has decided to publish a quarterly newsletter to inform interested parties about past and upcoming events, and to report on recent progress in development and use of the property. We hope that you will find this newsletter helpful and informative, and we invite any comments or suggestions you might have as to its contents. (Contact Terry Thormin, editor, at #306, 10630 122 St. Edmonton, T5N 1M8; phone 482-1389).

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY
GETS NATIONAL AWARD

We quote from a news release by the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas. "The Wagner Natural Area Society has received national recognition for its protection and management of the Wagner Bog west of Edmonton. It has leased the half section bog from Alberta Public Lands Division since 1983. This has allowed the Society to protect and manage it and to undertake scientific studies. The result has been increased public awareness of the area without overuse or abuse.

"The area contains 16 of the 26 species of wild orchids found in Alberta. It first came to prominence in 1969 when it was surveyed by the International Biological Programme. The resulting report described the area as: Very interesting calcareous fens, marl bogs and a nesting colony of Bonaparte's Gulls.

"The Society has been very successful in getting financial resources and "in kind" services to assist its work. The Public Lands Division of the Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife has provided ongoing support through contributions of both material and advice.

"The award was announced at the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas' sixth annual meeting in Winnipeg, Manitoba, according to Ross Thomasson, Council's Chairman.

"The Council, composed of scientists, non-government conservation organizations and provincial, territorial and federal governments, was established in 1982. It is an independent organization formed to encourage the establishment of a nationwide system of protected ecological areas and to provide a forum for workers in the field to share solutions to problems, develop selection criteria and management guidelines for protected areas.

"The Wagner Natural Area Society received one of two awards granted this year." The award was presented by the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas to Terry Thormin of the Wagner Natural Area Society at the International Peatlands Symposium held in Edmonton in late August of 1987.

INSECTS OF WAGNER NATURAL AREA

During the summer of 1985 the Invertebrate Zoology Program of the Provincial Museum of Alberta, under the direction of Dr. Albert T. Finnermore, undertook a study of the terrestrial invertebrates of the Wagner Natural area. Although the final results are not in, (it takes many years of work by numerous experts just to identify all the species of invertebrates collected in such a study, let alone to analyse the data) some very interesting results have turned up so far.

About 30,000 specimens have been mounted and to date 791 species have been identified, including 1 leech, 10 slugs and snails, 2 centipedes, 1 millipede, 1 pseudoscorpion, 2 harvest spiders, 37 spiders, 8 dragonflies and damselflies, 14 thrips, 70 leafhoppers and relatives, 335 beetles, 1 lacewing, and 309 ants, wasps and bees. There are still many groups that have not as yet been worked on or have only partially been studied. The flies for example, probably constitute a major portion the fauna, and the wasps have only partially been worked on and will increase greatly in number of species. It is expected that by the time everything has been identified, the total list will include between 3,000 and 4,000 species.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the study, at least to the non academic, is the number of new records for the province that are turning up. In some groups as many as 50% or more of the species are new records. For the professional entomologist, however, what is perhaps more exciting is that we are learning a great deal about diversity and habitat distribution of insects in a rich calcareous fen.

SUMMER WORK

During the summer of 1987 the Society hired Andrew Hendry on a Student Temporary Employment grant from the Provincial Government. Andrew accomplished an amazing variety of jobs very competently. Maintenance work included repair of the fence, trail repair and maintenance, construction and placement of some new signs and a various other tasks.

Andrew conducted a number of biological surveys. A breeding bird survey produced 57 species with some evidence of breeding on the property and another 23 species found with no evidence of breeding. These data were incorporated in a larger survey for the Alberta Breeding Bird Atlas project. A mammal survey concentrated specifically on the distribution of the Water Shrew on the property. The traps used to catch the shrews also produced Five-spined Stickleback, the first record of this fish for the property. An amphibian survey was also conducted, with particular emphasis on Tiger Salamander distribution and tadpole development. A survey of flowering plants was also carried out with particular attention to the orchids, especially the two species of adder's mouth orchid. As well both a lichen and a fungus survey were done. The fungus survey was our first ever and produced 71 species. Most of the work involved in collecting and identifying the fungi was done by Dr. Randy Currah of the U. of A. whom we thank very much. Finally, Andrew also conducted a survey of the water drainage pattern within Wagner.

All of the survey information was written up and distribution maps were produced for much of the information. As well Andrew assisted in guiding public walks, helped construct a display used at the Provincial Museum and did some general interpretive and public relations work with visitors. The Society wishes to express to Andrew its appreciation and thanks for a job well done.

TOUR BOOKINGS

In April of this year the Society set up an arrangement with the County of Parkland, Parks and Recreation Department, for the latter to act as the Society's tour booking agent. The purpose of advance bookings is to allow the Society to monitor the number of groups that use the property, and to avoid large numbers of people using the trail at any one time. This would only apply to organized groups or clubs who wish to use the trail system, and not to individuals or family parties. We therefore ask any group that is planning a trip out to the Wagner property, to phone the County of Parkland and make a booking. Their phone number is 963-2231 ext.350. We wish to express our thanks to the staff of the County Parks and Rec. Dept. for their kind help in this matter.

WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY:

ITS WHYS AND WHEREFORES

The Wagner Natural Area Society was formed and incorporated in December, 1982 following a threat to the Wagner Natural Area from road construction in conjunction with development of Highway 16X. The original members, representing the Edmonton Natural History Club, Edmonton Bird Club, Alberta Wildlife Foundation, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Friends of the Devonian Botanic Garden and the Parkland Rural Residents Association, joined forces to preserve the integrity of the site, to encourage its educational use and to permit some kinds of research and limited recreation. In the summer of 1983 the Society obtained a 21-year lease on the property from the Alberta Government and began active management.

Since then, fences, signage, gates, outhouses and a picnic shelter have all been installed. The receipt of grants from the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, the S. M. Blair Family Foundation and others provided the capital for these developments and others including, most importantly, a 1.2 km. long walking trail and boardwalk.

More recently the Society has adopted a comprehensive management plan prepared by Catherine M. Mowat, as part of the requirements for her Masters Degree in Environmental Design from the University of Calgary. This plan now provides direction and guidelines for the Society's long-term management of the site. While this plan was being prepared and since its completion, the Society has embarked on a wide range of management initiatives, for example, developing an education kit for teachers, and establishing policies for biological collecting and for controlling of beavers which were causing flooding in parts of the property.

The Society has also played a role in land-use issues involving surrounding areas, such as planning for Big Lake and advising the Provincial Government on land-developmant applications in the area. Efforts to protect the Wagner property further by site expansion and control have included ongoing negotiations to aquire adjacent private land, and to obtain a lease to a county road (Villeneuve) allowance which traverses the property. To encourage local support, the Society has led interpretive walks for local residents and has started two new 'traditions', this newsletter being one, and the Annual Fall Barbecue being the other. To thank the several public foundations that have generously donated to it, the Society hosted a trail-opening ceremony in June, 1987.

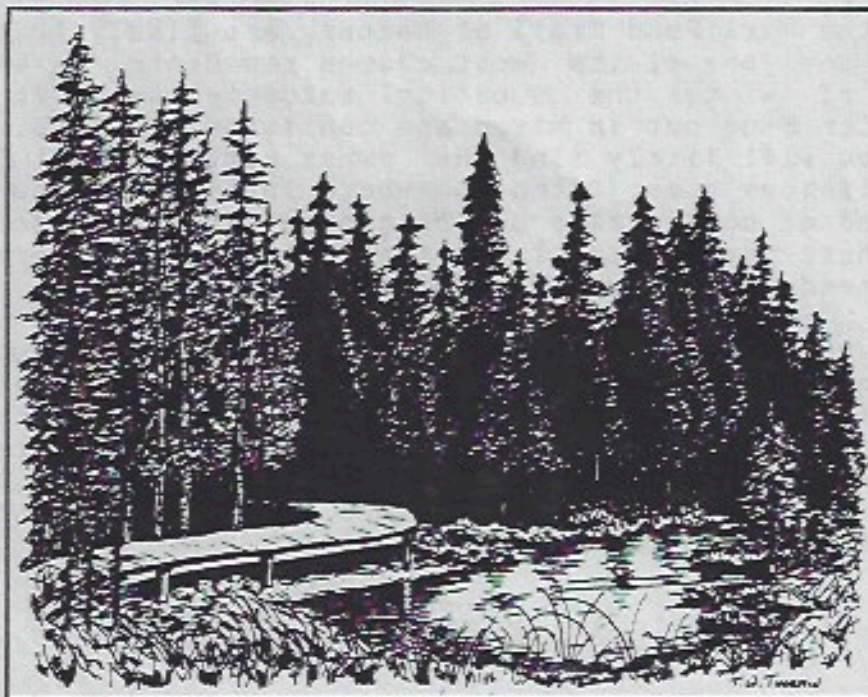
Direct on-site management by the Society has included annual clean-ups, regular site monitoring and inspections and establishing a group booking service. Additionally, the Society has hired employees for two consecutive summers to conduct biological surveys of mammals, birds and plants, repair and improve capital developments, lead natural history tours and interact with public users.

As well as completing or continuing with these initiatives, the Society will consider engaging in the following major activities in the near future:

- pursue sources of income, alternative to project-specific grants, to become financially self-sufficient;
- develop a larger membership to enhance human resources;
- strengthen and solidify local and political support;
- complete biophysical inventories;
- encourage research related to site management (eg. determine carrying capacity and determine management efforts to protect significant species and habitats such as the fen communities);
- monitor the site, including degree of human use and health of significant features and populations.

FIRST ANNUAL FALL BARBECUE

On Saturday, October 3rd the Wagner Natural Area Society held its first annual fall barbecue. About 45 people attended, including Bill Wagner, original owner of the property, local residents from Osborne Acres, staff from the Natural Areas Program, staff from the Provincial Museum of Alberta and members of the Society, families and friends. The Society provided roast potatoes and coffee; individuals provided their own meat and drinks, while contributing a salad or dessert for general consumption. After dusk a bonfire was lit and everyone roasted marshmallows. Despite imperfect weather everyone had a good time and the Society has decided to repeat the event next year, most likely in September.





WAGNER WILDLIFE PROFILE:

CHATTERBOX OF THE WOODS

Visitor to the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner, are likely to hear, even if they do not see, one of its most common residents. On warmer days in the middle of winter the scolding ratchet-like calls of the Red Squirrel often ring out in mixed and coniferous forests. If you follow the calls you will likely find the owner sitting about 10 to 20 feet up in a coniferous tree. Often somewhere in the area you can also find a large mound of cone scales on the ground. This is a squirrel midden; the place where the squirrel habitually tears apart spruce cones to get at the seeds, its favorite food.

In the fall the Red Squirrel is busy storing seeds in numerous caches for the long winter ahead. But its food is not restricted to seeds and a variety of mushrooms are also gathered. In winter, when temperatures plummet, the woods become silent, as the noisy little creature sleeps the time away in its dome-like nest of sticks in the branches of a spruce tree. But when winter days are milder, its chattering calls once again break the silence of the forest.