

WAGNER NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Terry Thormin (#306, 10630-122 Street, Edmonton) 482-1389



THE ROAD ISSUE

We must apologize to everyone for the long delay in getting this Newsletter out. Since March of this year it seems the only thing the society members have been able to work on is trying to save the Natural Area from potential major ecological damage as a result of a proposed road through the Wagner peatland. To ensure that everyone is aware of what the threat is, following is a brief synopsis of what has happened in the past few months.

THE ROAD THREAT

In March of this year the Department of Transportation and County of Parkland informed us of plans to build a road south from the corner of Highways 16X and 794 to connect up with Highway 16 (see map). The proposed road would go south through Lot 14, a 35 acre parcel of land that was purchased by Forestry, Lands and Wildlife with the intent of adding most of it to the Natural Area. The property was purchased partially with money from the Department of Transportation and a private donation from Xerox of Canada Limited, through the Nature Conservancy of Canada. At that time, it was our understanding that Transportation could have 4.6 acres at the north end of this property for the construction of the interchange at the

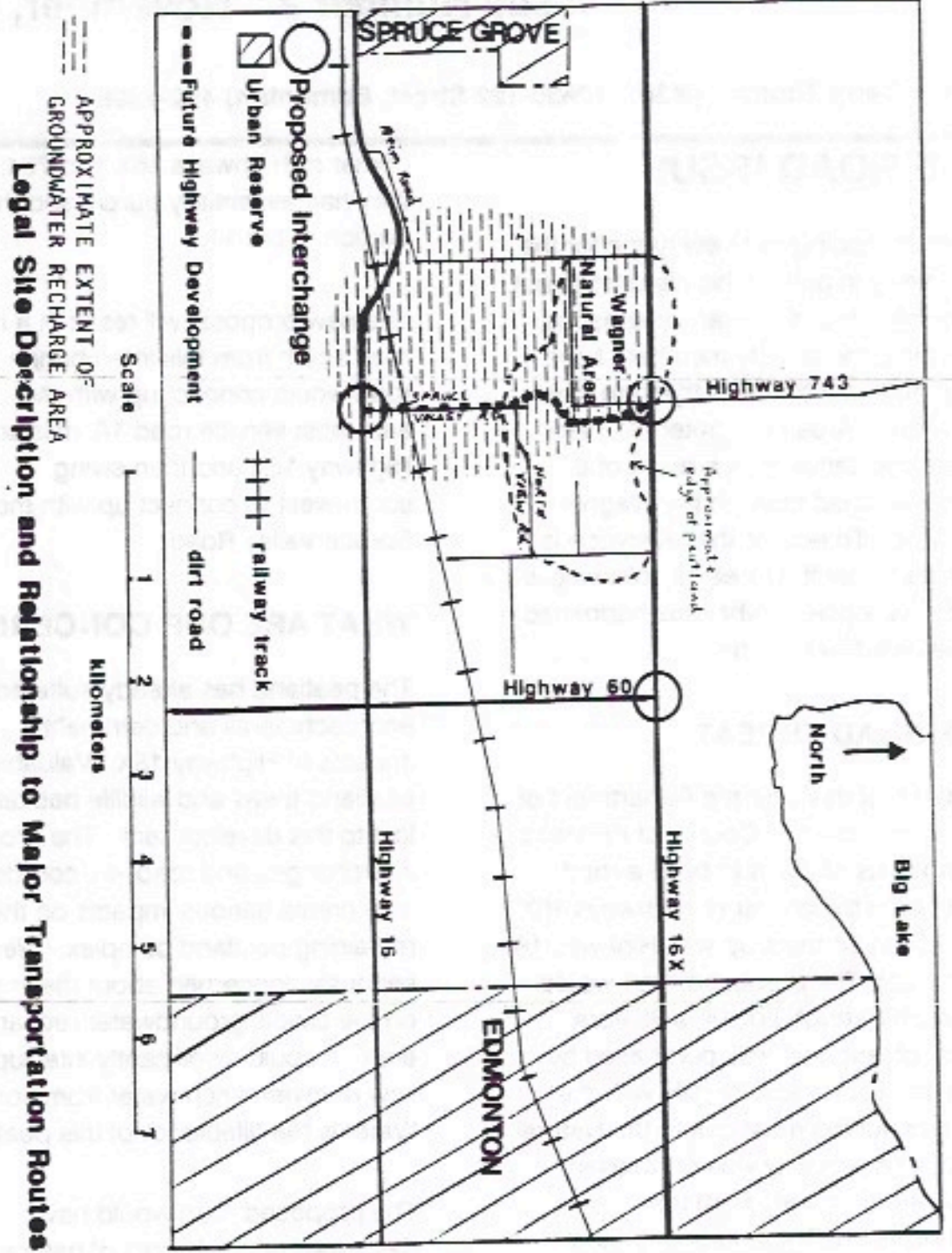
corner of Highways 16X and 794, since they had essentially purchased that portion of Lot 14.

The new proposal will result in a new road south from this interchange. The road would connect up with the east-west service road 1/2 mile south of Highway 16X and then swing south-west to connect up with the Spruce Valley Road.

WHAT ARE OUR CONCERNS?

The peatland has already suffered the encroachments and detrimental impacts of Highway 16X. Valuable peatland areas and wildlife habitat were lost to this development. The proposed interchanges and roadway corridors may create serious impacts on the remaining peatland complex. We are seriously concerned about the impact on the critical groundwater recharge area. It could significantly interrupt the flow of mineral-rich water from springs. Water is the "lifeblood" of this peatland.

The proposed road would have destroyed several acres of natural habitat including springs, a creek, fen-meadows and marl ponds. These habitats contain a large population of Yellow Lady's-slipper, a population of the uncommon Tall White Bog Orchid and one of the two recorded locations



APPROXIMATE EXTENT OF
GROUNDWATER RECHARGE AREA

Legal Site Description and Relationship to Major Transportation Routes

in the peatland complex of the very rare Bog Adder's-mouth orchid.

Pollution from the road is a significant risk: chemical pollution from road materials, salting and herbicides; noise pollution that will make the area less attractive to all wildlife.

The road will make an 'island' of the Natural Area, hindering the migration and breeding of animals. And the road will increase fire hazard by facilitating human access to the area.

Finally, we are worried about the incremental environmental effects of development activity on lands surrounding the peatland. Although each development by itself may not be the "death blow", each is certainly a "nail in the Natural Area's coffin".

WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO RESOLVE THIS SITUATION

The Wagner Natural Area Society has approached the Alberta Government in a constructive manner, asking that they honour their commitments and refuse road construction to occur on the parcel of public land that was purchased partially with private conservation money. We have also asked that the Government comply with their legal obligations to ensure the protection of the Wagner Natural Area, which includes protecting the site's water supply. We have also requested that the Government act in good faith and ensure that the proper environmental studies be done before any additional road developments

occur in the vicinity of the Wagner complex. We have written to all the Alberta Ministers involved in this issue and have asked the Premier to intervene.

HOW HAS THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDED

The Honourable LeRoy Fjordbotten, Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, has responded in a September 29 letter to the Society, stating "The public land in Lot 14, excluding the area for the interchange, is under reservation for Natural Area purposes. This parcel will be designated, as an addition to Wagner Natural Area, when land acquisitions in the vicinity are completed. As such, this parcel will not be made available for a road right-of-way."

The Society has also received a letter from the Honourable Al "Boomer" Adair, Minister of Transportation and Utilities, stating that they will undertake environmental studies in consultation with the Society. As well, we have a copy of a letter from Transportation sent to a member of the public, that states that Transportation only has plans for the construction of the interchange and another letter, sent to our Society from George Sewell, a Parkland County Councillor, states that council has put forth a resolution for a road from Highway 16X south only 1/2 mile to link up with the existing east-west service road. Beyond that he states that "I believe that the only way the 16X-16 link connection would be made is if Alberta Transportation would seriously consider the route for a ring

road around the Stony Plain Indian Reserve."

THE NEXT STEPS

Although this makes us much more optimistic than we were earlier, we do not feel that the battle is over. There seems to be two options for the road, one of which is the direct route south down the existing road allowance, the second is to situate the road to the east of Lot 14. The third possibility is to have no road. We feel it is highly undesirable that the road allowance option be exercised, as this would have the greatest detrimental effects on the Natural Area. Any road through the peatland, however, will affect the Natural Area, and as a result environmental impact studies must be done. As well we do not have any decision on the road continuing south from the east-west service road. We are also very concerned that more land be secured as a buffer zone around the Natural Area. For these reasons we have written the Departments of Transportation and Utilities, Environment and Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, and Parkland County Council, requesting a joint meeting with the Society to discuss all these concerns.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

We feel that much of what has been accomplished to date is largely due to the response of you, the general public, in writing letters of support. We wish to thank everyone who took the time to write a letter. If you have not written a letter and wish to do so now, it will still be of considerable value.

Please write to your MLA and/or the following ministers and ask that:

- any road proposal near the Wagner Bog complex be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment as provided for by *Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act*;
- the water supply for the Wagner complex be legally protected as provided for by the *Water Resources Act*;
- the government abide by the letter and spirit of the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Areas and Natural Areas Act*.

All or any of these Ministers should be contacted:

- Honourable LeRoy Fjordbotten, MINISTER OF FORESTRY, LANDS AND WILDLIFE
- Honourable Dr. Ian Reid, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT
- Honourable J.A. Adair, MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

Also send a copy of your letter to your MLA and the Reeve of Parkland County (Mr. Ken Fuhr, Reeve, County of Parkland, Stony Plain, Alberta, T0E 2G0) or write to them directly. (Please also send a copy of your letter to the Wagner Natural Area Society, c/o Barry Jenkins, 20 Forest Drive, St. Albert, Alberta, T8N 1X2)

- follow up your letter with a phone call
- write letters to the Editors of newspapers
- alert others and encourage them to act

This fight has not gone on without the Society incurring some expenses, and we are only a group of volunteers. If you feel like making a donation please use the following form.

Please send a tax deductible donation to:

Wagner Natural Area Society, c/o Barry Jenkins, Treasurer, 20 Forest Drive, St. Albert, Alberta, T8N 1X2

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Do you wish to receive further detailed information:

Yes No

Finally, this fight has pointed out that we have a desperate need for more members. If you are interested in joining the society please contact Alice Hendry (962-4836) or Terry Thormin (482-1389).

BOUQUETS

The Society thanks Mrs. Dee Louis, of Townhouse Fashion in Stony Plain, who purchased a membership subscription to the Evergreen Tourist Association on

its behalf. The Evergreen Tourist Association is one of a number of groups supporting the Society's stand on road developments in connection with Highway 16X

BIRDING IN WAGNER, 1950 & 60's

As a keen cinematographer in the 1950's and during the 60's, I had some of my most interesting experiences in Wagner Bog. I can recall on almost all of my visits, particularly in the spring, that some of the most common resident breeders included Mourning Doves, Boreal Chickadees, Bonaparte Gulls, Solitary Sandpipers, Lesser Yellow-legs, Flickers and a number of the warblers, including in particular, both Yellow-rumped and Common Yellowthroat. In the earlier part of the season, February and March, the Gray or Canada Jay as it was then called, bred regularly.

In the interest of recording a few of the breeding dates, Mourning Doves were usually well into the summer as follows: July 5th, 1959, 3 nests, one with 1 egg, and 2 with 2 eggs. July 19th, 1961, two nests were located, one with two small young and one with two eggs. Nearly all were located in leaning live or dead spruce and all at low elevations. Slightly earlier in the year, several Nighthawk nests were found. On June 20th, 1956, two nests with two eggs each and on June 13th I have another nest with two eggs all of which were laid on the bare ground usually in a burnt over or logged area.

Most of the Boreal Chickadee nests were located at Wagner in the latter part of May or early June when they usually had young. The earliest nest I found was May 25, 1960 when both adults were feeding young.

My first encounter with nesting Yellow-legs was in the Wagner Bog. On May 22nd, 1956, a nest of four eggs was found. Later the same year on June 3rd I flushed a female off four eggs sitting so tightly as they usually do, that she didn't leave the eggs until my foot was 10 inches away! This particular nest was hatching on July 3rd. To show some variation on hatching dates; on June 12th, 1958 I flushed a female off four downies which had just nicely dried off and in a matter of hours or possibly minutes would have left the nest.

One day on June 2nd, 1955 while skirting the edge of the Wagner marl beds I flushed a short-billed Dowitcher off four eggs. This was the only nest of this species that I ever found in Wagner but I did observe a nest with four eggs several miles away in the muskeg just to the west of where Sunwapta Broadcasting Station now has their facility. That nest was found a few years earlier on June 1, 1951.

Nests of the Solitary Sandpiper were observed in early July 1959, both of them located in Spruce, with the eggs being located in a Robin's nest.

My first records of Bonaparte Gulls nesting in Wagner was back in 1954 when I observed two families of downies on what is now called 'Jones Pond' on June 29th. In the following years quite a number of nests were found in the spruce surrounding the ponds and marl beds, with eggs, usually three, being recorded as late as June 21st. T.E. 'Tom' Randall who often accompanied me on my jaunts to the muskeg recorded nest building on May 23rd, 1962, no less than four in one small area.

Wagner was, and still is, a fascinating area. With its unique botanical attractions, and with a sizeable collection of bird and animal species, I would hope that the Wagner Bog will long be an interesting and fascinating spot to visit..

BY: **Edgar T. Jones**, 43 Westbrook Drive, Edmonton, Alberta, T6J 2C8, (403) 436-5327