WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEWSLETTER

Volume 10, Number 2 October 1996

Newsletter of the Wagner Natural Area Society, Management Committee and Volunteer Stewards of Wagner Natural Area, Parkland County, Alberta

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Wagner Natural Area Society

ANNUAL MEMBERS' NIGHT
Thursday, October 24, 1996

7:30 p.m. in the Provincial Museum, Ground Floor Lecture Room

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Randy Currah, Professor of Mycology at the University of Alberta, on

"The Ties that Bind: Mycorrhizas* and Ecosystems"
*Mycorrhizas are associations between fungi in the soil and the roots of higher plants

President's Report — Refreshments (Bring your own mug) — Membership Renewal — Displays

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Editorial

This has been a summer we shall remember against our wishes. It started out late, with continued wet and cold weather. It was disrupted by a change in summer employee when Glenn Jenkins, our first student, was lured away to a better-paying job and replaced by fellow student Jeanne Oh. It was fractured, ripped apart, by the sudden death of our treasurer, Janice Cantafio, in a road accident. (For our tributes to Janice, see page 3.) And over it all has hung the uncertainty and unpleasantness of the service road issue.

Nothing more clearly demonstrated Janice's key role in our Society than at an emergency meeting in early August when we had to divide up her duties and responsibilities among existing executive. Pat Clayton and Irl Miller stepped into the breach immediately, but past-president Dave Ealey has since nobly agreed to become our new treasurer. Irl will endeavour to continue Janice's liaisons with the County of Parkland and the town of Stony Plain, and Patsy will assume membership and mail-out duties for the time being. Of course, we will never be able to replace Janice herself. Feisty, fun, and always full of dreams, schemes and ideas, Janice brought her own unique combination of talents and perspectives to Wagner Society.

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Update on the Service Road

No news is good news—or is it? For the past couple of months the only thing we have heard officially about the service road is a profound silence! We have of course, not been idle. It has been a summer of communications—letter-writing and attending public meetings on local development plans—and research.

- We wrote to our supporters and potential supporters apprising them of the issue and requesting that they express their concerns to politicians if they were so inclined.
- Our own Edgar Jones, well-known naturalist, who has been associated with Wagner longer than anyone else, fired off an angry letter to the Premier asking why the government was prepared, in a time of massive spending cuts, to spend thousands of dollars on environmental impacts, both for the realignment of the overpass in 1991 and the present proposed service road, when common sense dictated alternative solutions. (While some of us try to play the political game with EIAs, Eddie states simply that this development is unnecessary!)
- We achieved some media publicity. Local newspapers helped us out by publishing our letters and interviews. In the latter part of May the Federation of Alberta Naturalists and the Canadian Park and Wilderness Society jointly issued a news release on our behalf. The eventual outcome of this was that the *Edmonton Journal* ran our story on September 3, as part of a larger feature on Special Places 2000. A short news item also appeared in the summer issue of *The Steward*, published by Provincial Parks.
- We undertook some research of our own—into development projections, costs of an alternative road network, and traffic flow volumes and patterns.

In July we heard that Alberta Transportation and Utilities (ATU) had chosen Spencer Environmental Management Services (who worked on the overpass realignment study), assisted by UMA Engineering, to do the Engineering and Environmental Assessment of the service road plan. Later that month we had the opportunity to examine Spencer's proposal and on August 8 we called a special meeting with Jarret Berezanski of ATU to discuss it. Our concerns centred mainly around the weighting given to the ATU's preferred option, the service road along the north edge of Wagner as previously described, and the lack of plans to investigate in detail other options we had suggested. (These include an underpass beneath 16X at Atim or Pioneer Roads to connect with a service road on the north side of 16X, or a road to the south parallel to the rail tracks, or no road at all.) The Society also criticized some of the terminology of the proposal as being vague, and the composition of the assessment team, which included several former ATU employees. During the meeting Berezanski stated that if the assessment indicated damage would occur to Wagner and that it would be unmitigable, or if the costs of mitigation would be too high, ATU would not proceed with the service road in front of Wagner.

Seismic Activity

The Society recently learnt that there is interest in undertaking seismic activity for mineral exploration and exploitation in our area. We do not own the mineral rights to our land but we can deny access to it. Accordingly, we are taking steps to let anyone with an interest in minerals know this, and that any activity on adjacent properties that might have an impact on the ecological integrity of Wagner will be vigorously contested.

Wagner Society Executive, 1996-97

Acting President - Pat Clayton (456-9046)
Acting Past President/Treasurer - Dave Ealey (422-0858)
Past President - Derek Johnson (436-8231)
Vice-President - Irl Miller (455-3866)
Secretary/Newsletter /Membership - Patsy Cotterill (481-1525)
Director/Public Relations - Alice Hendry (962-4836)
Directors - Beth Jenkins (458-1794); Edgar Jones (436-5327); Terry Thormin (482-1389)

Memories of Janice

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of our treasurer and friend, Janice Cantafio, together with her younger daughter Julia, in a vehicle accident on July 20, 1996. We join with many people in extending deep sympathy to the Cantafio and Jaburek families.

Janice Cantafio
Courtesy of Frank Cantafio

One thing very characteristic of Janice was her manner of speaking. When she began to explain an idea she felt strongly about she would start out with a very normal voice but as she progressed through the idea and emotion grew her voice would rise in volume and the words would come out faster and faster.

Irl Miller, retired teacher

Janice's university background was in math and the physical sciences. As a junior high school science teacher, and as a member of Wagner Society, she had opportunities to nurture an interest in biology as well. She entered the realms of peatland studies, aquatic insects, wildflowers and river ecology with typical enthusiasm. Nothing was too small to be of interest; she was fascinated with every aspect of the natural world. Her enthusiasm was catching and this made her a wonderful, innovative, inspiring teacher. She required a lot of effort from her students and this, in turn, meant that she had to devote a lot to time to preparation and marking. She was undoubtedly an inspiration for several students who have gone on to careers in science.

As a member of Wagner Society, Janice was a diligent worker and an enthusiastic learner. On the numerous occasions at meetings when we got distracted by theoretical schemes (pie-in-the-sky), Janice would bring us back to earth. She was practical and her solutions made sense. Janice felt that it was important for the society to do business in the County of Parkland. She also made sure that the Society got the best deals possible.

Janice was also a bit of a feminist. She was incensed at a parent/teacher interview once when a parent told her that women had no business teaching science, and she occasionally complained of the old boys' clubs that got in her way when she wanted to accomplish something. She managed to be a wife and mother and a community worker on her own terms.

Janice was a good friend. She was the kind of friend who would indulge in an hour-long phone conversation covering a wide range of topics. She was also the kind of friend who understood when I said I didn't have time to talk.

Alice Hendry

(Alice is a teacher herself and Janice taught her two boys.)

Janice was what I would call a *creative* treasurer, in the best possible sense. That is, she was always exploring, negotiating the best deal for the Society whether it was with the bank or the insurance company or businesses we were dealing with. What I liked was that she wasn't stingy with our funds—if you went to her with a pet project and asked for money for it she was always encouraging and usually said yes and certainly never said no outright. On the other hand, when *she* had a pet project she was always

very careful to be democratic about it, presenting us with (well-researched) options and letting us decide. She never did anything unilaterally. She was very conscious of the "two-way street" idea. She liked to buy goods and services for Wagner locally (i.e., in the County of Parkland), seeing this as a means of at once supporting local businesses and promoting local awareness of Wagner.

Janice was always moving forward, always looking for new ventures or new ways of doing things, whether it was deals or ecology courses or keeping abreast of computer software. She brought her farming background, her teaching background and her knowledge of local geography and politics and people, as well as her negotiating and entrepreneurial skills, to her volunteer work with Wagner. As a friend, though, we will probably remember her first and foremost for her omnipresent grin and her vivacity, born of a natural boldness and self-confidence, which was catching. It was impossible to be down in the dumps around Janice. Oh, she could be critical of people and situations and bluntly outspoken about them, but even when engaging in invective she somehow managed to sound cheerfully enthusiastic!

Janice influenced a great many people and achieved a lot in her life. Like many of us, she struggled to make time for her commitments, especially with having a young family, and she knew the guilt pangs of procrastination. It is tragic that Janice proved to have so little time. It is tragic that accidental death so prematurely froze that smile, those accomplishments and ambitions, depriving us all.

Patsy Cotterill

In his speech on behalf of Wagner Society given at her memorial service on August 1, *Peter Lee*, of Natural Areas, Department of Environmental Protection, paid tribute both to Janice's personal qualities and to her contribution towards Wagner over the years. He said that the protection and enjoyment of Wagner by the local community will be an ongoing legacy that Janice would have wanted to leave. He also praised her work as accountant for a province-wide Volunteer Stewards Conference held in Bow Valley in 1993. Lessons we might learn from her sudden death, he said, are to let our friends and colleagues know how much they are appreciated, and to make the most of our lives, as Janice did.

Membership in Wagner Natural Area Society

The membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. Please consider renewing promptly to continue your support of the Society and Wagner Natural Area. Fill out the membership/renewal form below and mail it with a cheque to Wagner Natural Area Society. Do the same if you are joining the Society for the first time. As a member, you will receive two newsletters per year and an invitation to the Annual Members' Night in October. Field trips and other activities are organized from time to time. Donations are tax deductible. For more information, contact Patsy Cotterill at 481-1425.

Please include me as a member of the Wagner Natural Area Society!

_____ Family/Organization $12 _____ Individual $10

_____ Student $ 8 _____ Senior $ 8

Besides my membership fee, **I enclose a gift** to support the activities of the Wagner Natural Area Society: _____.

Name _____

Address _____

Town/City _____

Telephone No. _____

Mail to: Treasurer, c/o Wagner Society,
Box 3100, Stony Plain, Alberta T0E 2G0

Wagner Summer Students—An Update

We thought it might be interesting and fun to find out how and what our former Wagner summer employees are doing. All are busy, many still preparing for or entering careers to do with the environment. We wish them all the best in their endeavours and hope they will keep in touch.

Andrew Hendry (1987), a keen fisherman and outdoors enthusiast since his early youth, is now well on his way to becoming a professional biologist, specializing in fisheries. Many of his studies, undertaken in B.C. and Washington, have centred around salmon reproduction. He graduated in 1991 with a first class B.Sc. degree in Co-op Biology from the University of Victoria, where he gained experience in forest pathology, fish farming and aquaculture. Andrew completed his M.Sc. in Fisheries at the University of Washington in 1995, where his studies of salmon spawning took him to Alaska and Lake Washington. He is now taking his Ph.D. in Fisheries at the U of Washington and continuing his research work at Lake Nerka in Alaska each summer. Andrew is a licensed private pilot and a SCUBA diver, and he enjoys photography and–of course, fishing!

Pam Espedveidt, now Pam Fristic (1988), graduated from the University in Alberta (U of A) with a B.Sc. in zoology. She was working in the school system for a while until she landed her current job as a lab technician at Strathcona Composite High School. She is presently on leave, however, having recently given birth to a baby girl. She still enjoys walking in and taking visitors to Wagner.

Mike Jenkins worked at Wagner for "two glorious summers", 1989 and 1990, where he took special interest in aquatic invertebrates and made himself a useful interpreter of pond life to a curious public. The following summer (the worst possible year for mosquitoes, he notes—there were none!) he got a job with the City of Edmonton's mosquito control program and has continued with this every summer since. While working for mosquito control he has done some experimentation in and around Wagner, mainly testing the efficiency of various mosquito predators. Mike graduated from the U of A with a degree in paleontology but seems to be an entomologist at heart. He is still actively involved with the Wagner Society.

Aileen Rhodes (1991), who spent many happy hours sampling Jones's Pond in search of diatoms (a type of algae), graduated with a B.Sc. in biology from the U of A in 1994. She is now in the final stages of an M.Sc. in botany, specializing in paleoecology. She studies the diatoms, fossil pollen and macrofossils (seeds of aquatic and terrestrial plants) found in lake sediments to deduce information about changes in lake levels and past climates. Aileen is not sure what the future holds but the options she's considering include tackling a Ph.D., continuing with work she has done as a contractor counting algae for water quality assessments, or switching her focus to vascular plant taxonomy and going to foreign fields to chart new floras!

Paul Sparrow-Clarke (early summer of 1992), who has since been employed with the provincial government's Natural Areas group, now puts his educating and writing talents to work as co-director of a desktop production service, Hemingway Green Inc.

Kelly Redinger, who took over from Paul Sparrow-Clarke in the summer of 1992 and quickly became fascinated by our orchids, is now in the last year of a business degree at the U of A. However, Kelly is currently working for Environment Canada under the Business Cooperative Education Program in which students alternate periods of study with time spent gaining experience in the workplace.

Sandra Tober (1994), whose art has graced the pages of Wagner newsletters, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary in April. Sandra has worked on a game farm near Bowden all summer, but is now ready to embark on a career in documentary film-making as a way to unite her interests in science (she already has a B.Sc. from the U of A) and fine arts. She has applied for a grant from the National Film Board which would allow her to join a

production house (hopefully here in Edmonton but Ontario or B.C. are other possibilities) and train on the job. She would ideally like to set up her own studio, making documentaries.

Natasha Klingsh (1995), is in the third year of the Environmental Conservation and Science Program in the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics at the U of A, having transferred into second year from Concordia University College. She is majoring in Conservation Biology and Management and thoroughly enjoying her courses. Natasha's goal is to work in environmental education: "I want to inspire people to care about nature," she says. To gain more interpretive experience she has applied to volunteer at the John Janzen Nature Centre in Edmonton. She is also active in the Edmonton Natural History Club (ENHC) having this year co-founded with John Acorn the Bug and Spider Group. Natasha frequents Wagner often.

Glenn Jenkins, our employee for the first part of summer 1996, continues the family tradition with his interest and involvement in Wagner. He is in his third year of an Environmental Economics and Policy degree at the U of A, and hopes to become a policy-maker in the field of environment and conservation. He has previously worked in environmental testing in a lab, and went back to it again briefly this summer, before realizing that the only way to achieve his goal is to complete his education. Earlier this year Glenn co-authored a course report on Wagner's hydrological regime. We look forward to being able to tap into his expertise one day!

Jeanne Oh, our summer student who took over from Glenn for the second half of 1996, is in her fifth year of university. She started out in the Faculty of Science at the University of Alberta and then transferred to the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics, where she is now in her third year of a degree in Environmental Policy and Economics (like Glenn). However, Jeanne says her interests are now veering more to the conservation and management side of environmental studies, in which she might like to take an after-degree. She enjoys being in the field and would like to work on environmental impact assessments. She plans to continue her involvement with Wagner.

Jennifer Thompson, who hasn't been a summer employee, but has attended Wagner meetings and attended walks and work-bees as a volunteer, worked at the Vegreville reseach station this summer on biological control of a weedy bedstraw. She enjoyed the work and is hoping for more.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to reach **Terry Friedrich**, who was our first employee in 1986 and our secretary for part of 1987, or **Tara Normand** (1993) recently. If anyone knows of their whereabouts, please let us know.

Information/Emergency! For further information on Wagner Natural Area or other Natural Areas in Alberta, or to report information or emergency situations in Natural Areas, please call Alberta Environmental Protection at 427-5209.

Thank You

A big thank you as always to all our donors. However, singled out for special mention are:
Leota Cummins, who made a donation to the Society in memory of member Mrs. Betty Horton;
Everyone who donated to Janice's Wagner **Memorial Fund**. We will be mailing out receipts soon; and
Ms. Marianne Rogers' grade 8/9 class in environmental education at High Park School, Stony Plain. They have been studying the Natural Area and each class member recently donated a dollar towards the upkeep of Wagner, for a total of $35. A nice gesture! We hope you enjoy your studies, class!

The Wagner Grapevine

May Count of Species in Flower

Held on May 26 this year the May Count (led by **Patsy Cotterill**) almost had as many participants as species in flower! That's an exaggeration, but a record 14 people attended for varying lengths of time and only 37 species were recorded as being actually in flower. This low score can be attributed to the continuing cold, wet weather. Unfortunately, the very early-flowering species, such as the willows and sedges, were not sufficiently held back by the weather to make up for the plants normally listed in bloom by the end of May.

Rather similar experiences obtained on the Frog-and-Toad Walk on May 9, led by **Wayne Roberts**, and the Annual Bug Walk on July 21, run by **Terry Thormin** and **Natasha Klingsh**. Here again attendance was good but nature did not cooperate. Does this tell us something? That there's too many people and not enough nature?

Perhaps another sign of the demographic times was the couple of Canada geese that were very much in evidence, and possibly nesting, on the night of May 16 during a follow-up to the Frog Walk.

Richardson Ground Squirrel Survey

If anyone was wondering what those stakes were in the Villeneuve field this spring, the answer is that they were part of a study undertaken by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development at various sites to determine the seasonal feeding preferences of Richardson's ground squirrels. This information will hopefully provide farmers with some options to having their pastures become gopher metropolises. We look forward to hearing some of the conclusions drawn from this study.

Summer Students' Projects

Glenn Jenkins, our summer student until July, completed our annual breeding bird survey this year. When **Jeanne Oh** took over from Glenn she continued the study on snails he had begun at the suggestion of **Joyce Gould** of Environmental Protection's ANHIC biodiversity project. Some of Jeanne's work will be on display on Annual Members' Night. We expect to have an analysis of both students' studies available for next spring's newsletter.

Good-Neighbour Gardening!

To keep our promise to our Dept. of Agriculture representative, we held a couple of work bees (June 25 and July 10) to pull Canada thistles from the Villeneuve field and vicinity and the central fields and path area. This time the weather worked in our favour, making the pulling easy!

Bouquets

To president **Pat Clayton**, for leadership and exceptional epistolary efforts during the service road issue.

To **Irl Miller**, who organized and chaired the memorial service for Janice on August 1 at Stony Plain Community Centre. The hall was full and people spoke of Janice with sincerity and eloquence.

To **Dave Ealey**, a very busy man who has nevertheless taken over Janice's duties as treasurer.

To **Alice Hendry**, author of a comprehensive synopsis of Wagner Natural Area Society, appearing in Special Issue No. 3, Fall 1996 of the *Alberta Naturalist*, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (pp.41-43).

And last but not least, to **everyone who has written letters** on our behalf regarding the road issue. Your interest and support is much appreciated.

New Members

Thank you for joining and welcome to our new members Dr. **Bill Fuller** of Athabasca and **Elsie Harrold** of Edmonton. Dr. Fuller is a former U of A professor and a well-known environmentalist of long standing.

Wildflowers of Wagner No. 10

Marsh Aster
Composite Family

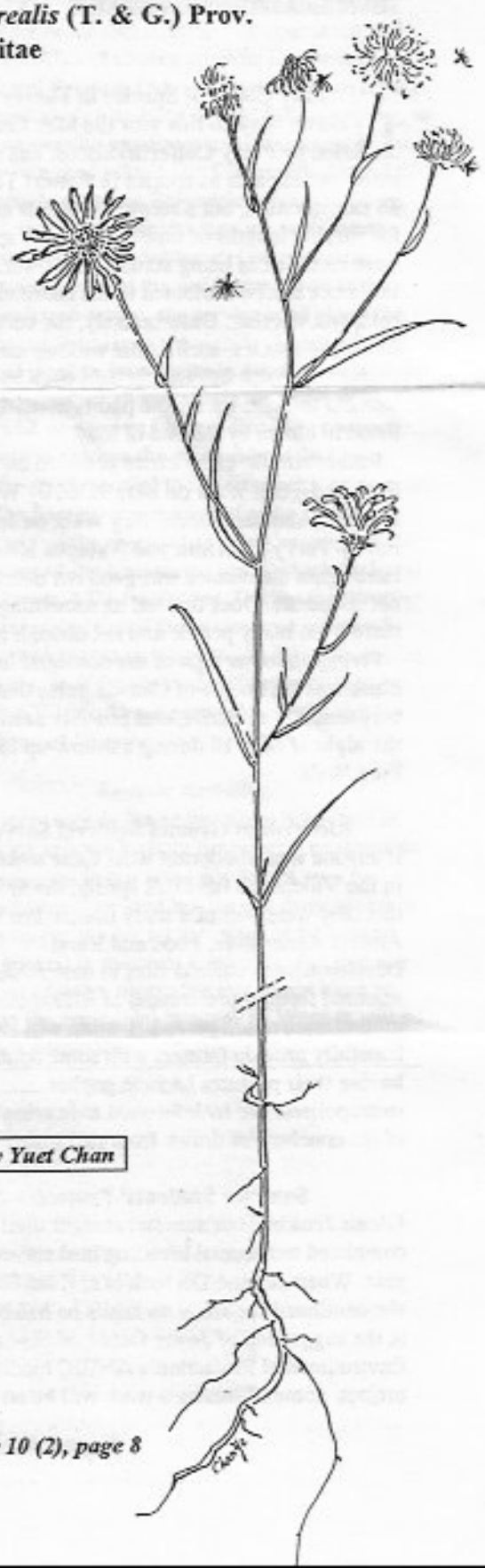
Aster borealis (T. & G.) Prov.
Compositae

This slender white aster is common in Wagner fens, as indeed it is in calcareous wetlands throughout the province, and flowers in July to early September. Its habitat provides the best means of recognizing it, for none of the eight other species of aster that occur in Wagner so clearly prefer the fens.

The leafy, flowering stems of marsh aster arise singly from a long, creeping, perennial underground stem or rhizome up to 2 mm thick. The thin, purplish-red aerial stems grow from 20 to 80 cm (but often average 30 cm) tall, and are inconspicuously hairy with the hairs running in lines down from the leaf bases. The alternate, hairless leaves are 3 to 8 cm long and narrow, only about 3 mm wide, with edges minutely roughened by tiny teeth. The leaves have pointed tips but broader bases where they attach directly to the stem.

The flower heads are borne singly or in clusters of 2 to 4 at the tops of the stems. Each head has the typical radiate structure of the composite family, with an outer ring of showy ray florets and a yellow centre (disk) of tubular or disk florets. Each ray floret consists of a white or pale mauve ray or ligule with a female (pistillate) sex organ only, whereas the disk florets with their petals joined to form a yellow tube have both stamens and a pistil. All florets are fertile, producing a one-seeded fruit or achene that is topped by a parachute-like pappus of fine white bristles. The pappus provides an efficient means of fruit dispersal by wind. As in all asters, the green bracts enclosing the base of the flower head are arranged in several overlapping series to form a cup-like structure that opens and bends back as the fruits disperse.

In Wagner, marsh aster is most likely to be confused with western willow aster, *Aster hesperius*, which is typically a much taller and more robust plant, with numerous white or mauve flower heads and wider leaves, up to 1 cm broad. This plant also has different habitat preferences, occurring in moist (but not calcareous) ground, along ditches and banks.



Drawing by Yuet Chan