

WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEWSLETTER

Volume 20 Number 1 June 2006

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



It's official! Wagner Natural Area has grown again with the addition of the Nature Conservancy's "extension"

June 21, 2006, a perfect summer day for both the solstice and an outdoor ceremony, will go down as another significant date in the history of Wagner Natural Area. **Ben Rostron**, president of the Wagner Natural Area Society, and **Tim Hodgson** representing the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), signed a stewardship agreement indicating the terms under which a further 80 acres (32 hectares) added to existing Wagner land will be managed and stewarded by the Society. The audience included individual donors to the land acquisition project and fellow stewards and naturalists, as well as partners and representatives of the major donors. **Roger Smith**, Alberta Board member of the NCC, MC'd the event and Dr. Rostron provided the welcome. Following the addresses and signing of the agreement past-president **Alice Hendry** assisted with unveiling of the new "Wagner extension" sign. Refreshments and guided tours of the Marl Pond Trail rounded off the event. Many people took the opportunity to pick up a free copy of the orchid poster painted by local artist **Rayma Peterson**, a member of the Wagner Natural Area Society, and to browse the display of natural history exhibits in the picnic shelter. (See page 2 for a further report of the event and page 5 for more photographs.)



Signing the stewardship agreement. From left:
Renny Grilz, Ben Rostron, Tim Hodgson

Photo credits: Derek Johnson

**Edgar and Jeanne Jones win the Emerald Award
for Individual Commitment! See page 3.**

Wagner Natural Area Society Newsletter ISSN No. 1712-2767



The new interpretive sign for the extension property

Contents of this Issue

More Ceremony	page 2
President's Report	pages 2 & 7
Wagner Grapevine	pages 3, 4 & 7
Ceremony Pictures	page 5
Editorial, Biophysical Inventory	page 6
Wildflowers of Wagner # 26	page 8

Extension Ceremony (continued from page 1)

Phyllis Kobasiuk, Mayor of Parkland County, expressed both the County's and her long-time personal support of Wagner Natural Area, as well as that of councillor **Dr. Pat Brennan**, whose ward includes it. The initial bequest that enabled the NCC to purchase the land was made to the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) from the estate of the Chevalier family. **Sandy Baumgartner**, representing the CWF and based in Ottawa, spoke of CWF's mandate to reconnect Canadians, especially young people, with their natural heritage, through education and increasing awareness. **Shannon Campbell**, executrix for the estate of **Cec and Laurence Chevalier**, provided insight into the couple who made this bequest. She said that other worthy recipients were considered but she chose Wagner because of her conviction of the suitability of the site and the stability of its protected status.

Glen Semenchuk, executive director of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, explained FAN's role as facilitator of the negotiations and administrator of donations, as well as that of the **Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)**, another major donor to the land project. This prompted Roger Smith to reflect upon the importance of partnerships in land acquisition and stewardship. **Renny Grilz**, director of stewardship for the NCC, Alberta Region, reminded us of the NCC's prior involvement in Wagner Natural Area, as a contributor towards the 1972

purchase and again of the Oxley property in 1989. He noted that further protection will be given to the "Wagner extension" when the NCC and ACA co-sign a conservation agreement for it. Parkland County's change of zoning from agricultural to recreational will add further protection for the Natural Area. Other NCC involvement in land ownership and stewardship in the region includes the Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary and Eric and Doris Hopkins' donation to the Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary. **Larry Simpson**, regional vice-president of the NCC, spoke of the importance of natural areas from the anthropocentric viewpoint of providing a high quality of life that will attract "intellectual capital," the gifted people who will move society forward in the future. **Doug Marvin**, Head of Stewardship Services, Department of Community Development, and **Coral Grove** of the Volunteer Stewards' Program, under which Wagner Society is a steward, attended on behalf of the provincial government. The ceremony comes almost five years to the day when the provincial government held a similar event – under much less cooperative weather conditions – to mark the expansion of the Natural Area by a further 160 acres. The total area of Wagner now stands at over 620 acres or 250 hectares.

President's Report to WNAS Annual General Meeting, March 20, 2006, by Alice Hendry

WNAS received an award in the mail early in March of 2006. The award is a nicely-framed original cast paper reproduction of the Alberta Parks and Protected Areas Volunteer logo. The award was sent by Alberta Community Development, the Alberta government's current administrator of the Natural Areas Program. The words on a metal plaque, positioned beneath the logo, state, "In appreciation for 15 years of dedicated service." Actually, this award recognizes a fraction of our years as volunteer stewards for Wagner Natural Area. It recognizes the period of time from 1987 to 2002.

This award has caused me to reflect on the history of the WNAS and on the nature of what it means to be a volunteer steward. The history begins with the first three meetings of what was to become the WNAS in November and December of 1982. In January of 1983, 23 years ago, the fledgling society elected its first board of directors.

The history of the Wagner site as a natural area goes back even further in time. The original 320 acres of what was known as the "Wagner bog," were purchased by the provincial government in 1971. In 1975, Wagner, known by some of the locals as "that polly-wog bog," was administered as part of the provincial Natural Areas Program. In 1986, WNA became an official Natural Area through an order-in-council. The provincial government's Volunteer Steward Program officially began in the fall of 1987. In 1987, the WNAS had already been acting as the volunteer steward of WNA for four years.

During our now 18 years as official volunteer stewards in a recognized government program, and as unofficial stewards for the Alberta government for four years before that program, our society has managed WNA with one primary goal in mind – preservation.

What does being a volunteer steward involve? The vision statement contained in Alberta Community Development's 2005 *Volunteer Steward Handbook* describes volunteer stewards as "Citizens actively involved throughout Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas to help ensure the preservation, protection and enjoyment of our rich natural and cultural heritage, for all time." This is a necessarily dry and brief description of what WNAS has accomplished in its role as steward for WNA. A dictionary definition gives "Our responsibility as stewards of the earth's resources," as an example of what it means to be a steward. Again, this is a necessarily brief description of stewardship.

As I have a captive audience this evening, and more space than a handbook or a dictionary has for defining the word "steward," I would like to propose a new, Wagner-specific, definition. The word "steward" is seven letters long. Each letter has a special meaning for what WNAS has accomplished in the months since our last AGM in March of 2005.

"S," the first letter in the word, stands for science. The more we learn about WNA, the better we can protect it. This year, we revisited the 18 20 m x 20 m permanent monitoring plots established in the 2000 soil and vegetation inventory. This meant a lot of work ("S" also stands for sweat) for Derek Johnson, Patsy Cotterill and several volunteers. Each plot had to be monitored for changes in vegetation. Derek also established a tree growth study to monitor the growth rates of spruce tree seedlings. Monitoring of spawning frogs and toads, of plant species in bloom, of breeding birds and of orchids also continued this year. Perhaps our grandest foray into science occurred in the area of hydrogeology, but more about that research when we get to the letter "W." (continued on page 7)



The Wagner Grapevine



Natural History Events

Frog and Toad Walk. Wayne Roberts, herpetologist, contributed the following after his annual monitoring walks in late April and early May this year.

“In the 21 years I have visited the Wagner Natural Area to watch and listen for frogs and toads I have never seen the marl ponds so dry in late April/early May. By the last week in April wood frog spawning was completed in the area although there were a few wood frogs still calling from the creek and woodland ponds. Males will call for days after the females have stopped coming to spawning sites. They started early (mid April this year). Chorus frogs were singing and we did hear one western toad (deep in the woods SE of the big marl pond). On May 12 there was more water in the large marl pond and a pair of toads were spawning and two other males were calling a few metres away. Whether or not the eggs hatch successfully and the tadpoles survive to transform into toadlets depends on the weather. If we are blessed with more rain there may be sufficient water in the marl pond for successful development of the tadpoles. While the marl ponds along the trail provide the best viewing of toad and wood frog spawning they are not the only spawning

sites available. Quiet reaches and beaver ponds along Atim creek are used by boreal chorus frogs, tiger salamanders, and some of the wood frogs and western toads. Other less accessible ponds are used by western toads and wood frogs. Some successful reproduction likely occurs even in a dry year. Wet years produce an abundance of young frogs and toads. Successful reproduction is not necessary every year although there is some successful reproduction in most years. Delayed maturation (in second or third years of life, especially in males) occurs in all of the amphibian species present and they may be long-lived (five years or more) if they survive their first year. The well-being of this year’s crop of young amphibians really depends on good rainfall in late May and June. Wood frogs are now *Lithobates sylvaticus* and western toads *Anaxyrus boreus*, the large genera *Rana* and *Bufo* having been split into a number of genera each, better reflecting the relationships within these taxa.”
(Editor’s note: Well, we got the rains in June, and tadpoles are now frequenting the marl ponds. Can they win the race to transform before the hot days of July and August dry up the ponds?)

Bug Blitz and Feralia Moth Hunt, May 13

Another insect foray took place in Wagner Natural Area May 13 from 10 a.m. until after midnight. Dave Lawrie of the Alberta Lepidopterists’ Group led the event which was organized by Alana Broomfield of the Edmonton Nature Club. A bug count will be available for the next newsletter.

May Count of Species in Flower, 2006

We had a good turnout for our count on May 28 this year: Pat Clayton, Patsy Cotterill, Alice Hendry, Josephine Singh, Ted Smandych and Calvin Wong, with Alice as route director and Patsy as compiler. Hiking under mixed sun and cloud and a pleasant temperature of 13°C, we recorded a total of 67 species in flower (i.e., at any stage from beginning flowering to “fading”, which means that in populations of the given species variable proportions of plants had stamens that were still shedding pollen and/or stigmas that were fresh enough to be receptive to pollen). This number compares favorably with totals of 60 species for both 2004 and 2005, but is more than twice those recorded in the very cool, late springs of 2002 and 2003.

We noted several patches of pale coral-root (*Corallorhiza trifida*), which was in peak flower and very photogenic at the end of May this year; likewise, heart-leaved twayblade (*Listera cordata*) appeared abundant and in full flower in appropriate habitat in several locations. Yellow lady’s-slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*),

which we estimated to be only 25% in bloom, was also prominent and promised to put on an excellent show. Before finishing the day-long trek Alice and Patsy made the usual pilgrimage to the central watercourse near Jones’s Pond to check on buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). Sure enough it was just beginning to flower, growing as it always does right in the stream itself. As we began the return journey we got an unexpected reward: Alice spotted the unmistakable two large round of leaves of round-leaved bog orchid (*Platanthera (Habenaria) orbiculata*), a species we have not seen in Wagner for several years. There was no sign of a flowering stem, but we made a note to return and check on it later in the season.

One advantage of doing a survey of approximately the same area at the same time every year and recording the results is that one notices trends in plant populations. The fate of various populations and species is often puzzling, at worst discouraging. For example, last year mud sedge (*Carex limosa*) was in full flower at the marl ponds in the southeast corner of Wagner (old property) but this year we could not find a single specimen despite searching. My impression is that it has been receding in Wagner for some years now. Northern valerian, (*Valeriana septentrionale*), which once formed several extensive patches along the north end of the Marl Pond Trail, appeared reduced to a single plant in flower. *(continued on page 4)*



The Wagner Grapevine



May Count (continued)

We were disappointed not to find any leaves even of long-spurred violet, *Viola selkirkii*, a rather rare species that occurs in the northeast part of Wagner. However, clearly we need to look for it in the middle of May when it is normally in full bloom to ascertain its fate.

Where trees or shrubs distinguish themselves in some way (or are merely accessible) it is of course possible to keep track of individuals. A specimen of autumn willow (*Salix serissima*) near the main gate, which was covered in fruits last year to the point where it appeared totally white, seemed to have few leaves on it this spring and no sign of flowers. Was last year's abundant flowering its last fling before heading downhill into decadence and death? I am sure we could learn a lot by tracking individuals, and indeed, this is one objective we are undertaking in our permanent monitoring plots.

One of our more intriguing observations concerned the small white spruce saplings that the Junior Forest Wardens planted last spring under the supervision of Derek Johnson. Especially in the Villeneuve field, many had soil mounded up along their short stems, and some of this soil clearly contained ants. Derek's view is that digging out a hole for the transplant provides the ants with easy access to moveable soil, and they can then use the tiny sapling's trunk as a prop around which to build their dome of a nest. This likely does not bode well for the fate of the tree, and again this is something that needs to be monitored. (Derek will provide a report on the spruce transplant in the fall issue of the newsletter.)

Annual Orchid Walk, June 18

Our annual orchid walk took place under sunny skies this year, with **Irl Miller, Beth Jenkins, Derek Johnson and Patsy Cotterill** on hand to lead groups of visitors around the Marl Pond Trail. There were plenty of flowers (and butterflies and moths) to be seen but since the yellow lady's slippers were past their peak of bloom and this seems to be a continuing trend by late June, we are considering holding this event earlier next year.

People, Events

Eddie and Jeanne Jones win Emerald Award

Congratulations to **Eddie and Jeanne Jones** who won this year's Emerald Award for Individual Commitment at ceremonies June 14 in Edmonton. Other contestants in this category were Paul Bohnert, a Lethbridge environmental educator, and Margaret Coutts, a naturalist and conservationist with the Red Deer River Naturalists, Federation of Alberta Naturalists and the Alberta Environmental Network. Kudos also to **Irl Miller** of Wagner Society, who was responsible for nominating the Jones. Their entry in the awards program reads as follows:

"Edgar (Eddie) and Jeanne Jones have used their passion and their incredible images of birds – pictures both still and moving – to create awareness and educate people of all ages about conservation. They have traveled across North America, giving talks, serving as conduits of information from one organization to another, facilitating communication and mobilizing an extended network of support among members of the conservation community.

Edgar's meticulous record-keeping, with supporting history, as he and Jeanne jointly banded approximately 115,000 birds covering 310 species has had significant impact on the scientific database in terms of population studies, breeding areas, migration routes and longevity. Edgar and Jeanne have provided extensive service to a number of local community groups as well, including the Wagner Natural Area, the Provincial Museum and the University of Alberta."

Eddie is no stranger to awards, having won many environmental ones as well as an Honorary Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Alberta, and the Order of Canada in August 2001. It is fitting, however, that Jeanne has now also been recognized for her contribution as Eddie's helpmate and support throughout the greater part of his career. (Eddie and Jeanne celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in April, 2000.)

Eddie has been frequenting the Wagner area since the 1950s but in the late 1960s, under the auspices of the Alberta Wildlife Foundation which he founded, he lobbied the government to set aside Wagner Natural Area and helped raise funds for the purchase of land. A large marl pond in the centre of the natural area is named after him. Many of us in Wagner know Jeanne best for the superb desserts she serves up after Wagner Society meetings at their home!

Another husband-and-wife team, **Dick and Pat Clayton**, won the Emerald Award for Individual Commitment in 2003, in part for stewardship services to Wagner. The Wagner Society won in the Community Group category in 2002.

Thank you to all our individual donors

who raised just less than \$20,000 towards the purchase of the additional 80 acres. A superb effort! Donors are recognized with plaques on the wooden display board at the beginning of the Marl Pond Trail.

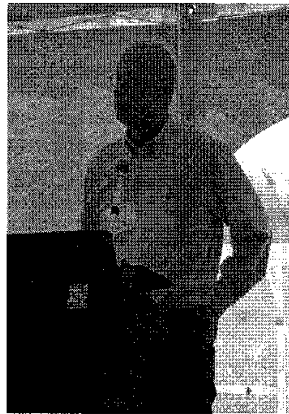
Welcome to new voting member **Leslie Treseder!**

Wagner Natural Area Society
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Visit our website at <http://www.wagner.fanweb.ca>

Nature Conservancy – Wagner Extension Ceremony, June 21, 2006



Phyllis Kobasiuk, Mayor of Parkland County



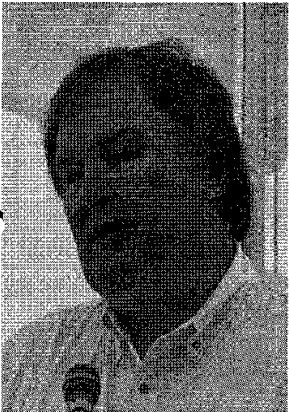
Roger Smith, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Alberta Board



Ben Rostron, President, Wagner Society



Sandy Baumgartner, Exec. Director, Programs & Communications, Canadian Wildlife Federation



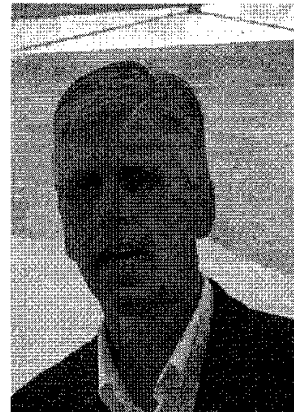
Glen Semenchuk, Executive Director, Federation of Alberta Naturalists



Shannon Campbell, Executrix, Chevalier Estate



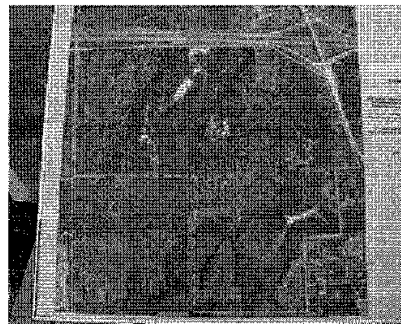
Renny Grilz, Director of Stewardship, NCC, Alberta Region



Larry Simpson, Regional Vice President, NCC, Alberta Region



Acknowledging Rayma Peterson as the artist of the orchid poster



Map showing additional 80 acres in southwest corner, with thick line and dotted line



Solitary sandpiper – star of the CBS news item, loudly protested the intrusion of visitors on its territory along the Marl Pond Trail

Photos: Derek Johnson

Editorial: The Chevaliers' Gift of Nature to Canadians

Most of us in Wagner Society still can't believe our luck: in five years Wagner Natural Area has grown by 240 acres, and has almost doubled in size since the original half-section (320 acres; 130 ha) that was set aside in 1975! Of course we know that virtually nothing happens by luck alone: the Alberta government's decision to purchase of 160 acres in 2001 was at least in part due to their new policy of accreting more land around existing natural areas. And chance favours those who are prepared, if I can adapt the saying about scientific discoveries. As a stewardship team we have put in a lot of hard work and dedication in the 23 years of our existence, not to mention recent heroic efforts in the "Project Land" campaign spearheaded by Irl Miller, Pat Clayton and Alice Hendry. But still, to be on the receiving end of the generous donations and grants that have enabled us to gain a further 80 acres (32 ha) of the Kichton property has us pinching ourselves. When we learned more of the intricacies of the two-and-a-half year process of the recent land acquisition during the "Extension" ceremony on June 21, the thought that we were "the right place at the right time" came to mind!

Only recently did we get to hear some details about the two donors – a husband and wife named Laurence and Cec Chevalier – whose bequest provided the greatest share of the purchase price. The Chevaliers thought of themselves as just an ordinary couple, says Shannon Campbell, executrix of their estate. Ordinary, perhaps, in the sense that many good Canadians believe in sharing their accumulated wealth and doing their best to make the world a better place. Laurence was a qualified motor mechanic and Cec had a talent for sewing and crafts, which she often used for the benefit of others; both were extraordinarily neighbourly and community-spirited. Most important for us, however, the couple loved nature and grasped the simple concept that without habitat there will be no nature. They were keen nature-watchers and as farmers in the Onoway area they did their best to ensure their farming practice was compatible with the welfare of wildlife. They also believed in the importance of education. They endowed a scholarship in Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta with the idea of encouraging young people to follow careers that could help protect the environment. And they did not confine their vision to the local scene. They made a bequest to the Foster Parents Plan to support the education of girls in East Africa. After the death of his wife Laurence specified that their final gift should be directed towards protection of habitat, especially where that protection could be combined with an educational component.

The Chevaliers' gift was made initially to the Canadian Wildlife Federation, who partnered with the Nature Conservancy and consulted the estate on how to disburse the money in the most appropriate way. Ms Campbell said several options were considered, but Wagner was chosen because of the security of its protected status and its accessibility to the public and opportunities for nature education.

It is sad to think that Cec and Laurence Chevalier will never see Wagner and the land they have been so instrumental in protecting. But I have no doubt that the Wagner society, along with our partners and well-wishers, will do our best to honour their vision and intent. Of course, the Society is profoundly grateful to *all* our donors, and we will continue to work hard to justify their belief in us. That belief, like the Chevaliers', is that ordinary people, working together and through others, *can* create a better world in which nature still has a place.

PJC

Laurence Chevalier July 8, 1913 – July 19, 2002;

Cec Chevalier December 14, 1915 – August 29, 1998

Biophysical Inventory for the "Extension"

The Nature Conservancy of Canada has engaged the environmental services consultant Rangeland Conservation Service (RCS) of Airdrie to do a soil and vegetation inventory of the Wagner Natural Area "Extension Project." This includes the 160 acres purchased by the Alberta Government in 2001 and the newly acquired 80 acres of Kichton property. The soils component will be completed by Larry Nikiforuk of Soil Info Ltd, who also surveyed the soils for the first official inventory of WNA, done by Geowest Environmental Consultants Ltd in July, 1999. Methodology for the new survey will largely follow that used by Geowest as well as EMAN protocols.

Approximately 40 reconnaissance plots will be established at intersections along a 100-metre (west/east) x 200 m (north/south) grid. The percentage cover of vascular and non-vascular plant species will be visually estimated in 20 m x 20 m plots in forested areas, 10 m x 10 m plots in shrub communities and 5 m x 5 m plots in open fields. Belt transects may be used in open fen areas.

Based on their findings from the reconnaissance plots the survey team, led by Kathryn Hull, proposes to set up 10 permanent 20 m x 20 m plots that will serve for continual monitoring of the vegetation over time. (This compares with the 18 permanent plots set up by Geowest covering approximately 380 acres.) The centre point and corner survey stakes of these plots will be determined by a qualified surveyor. A plant community classification for WNA and accompanying maps will be developed using the collected data. As time permits, nested plots of 5 m x 5 m will be set up within the 20 m² plots, in which canopy cover, distribution and vigour will be assessed for small trees and for shrubs. For small shrubs and herbaceous plants 1 m x 1 m nested plots will be established to measure similar parameters. Miscellaneous data on individual plants or populations will also be determined if time permits. The reconnaissance part of the survey is expected to be carried out June 17-20, 2006, and the permanent plots in July. Consulting botanist Dr. Ian Macdonald will verify plant identifications and Derek Johnson has volunteered to identify non-vasculars. Any specimens collected will be deposited in University of Alberta herbaria. Wagner Society provided historical and geographical information on Wagner and sampling advice (Derek), with Samantha Hines-Clark representing the NCC, at a meeting with RCS on June 16.



The Wagner Grapevine



Wagner in the Media

The extension ceremony organized by the Nature Conservancy stimulated a plethora of media reports for the natural area and the Society. *The Edmonton Real Estate Weekly* (June 28) featured a lengthy, well-researched article by Lawrence Herzog, and a front-page photograph. Kevin Ma, reporting for *The St Albert Gazette* (June 24), produced a well-balanced, largely accurate piece that referred to Wagner as a "fabulous fen." *The Edmonton Journal* ("Conservation groups expand Wagner Bog," June 21) got the name right (it later corrected the headline) along with most of its other facts, but referred to the area as a "swamp." Strangely, the Nature Conservancy, in publicizing its "Gifts to Canadians" program, in which Wagner represented the NCC's gift to Alberta for this year, did least well in the accuracy stakes. A one-paragraph entry in its newsletter *The Ark* contained at least three errors. Calling it "Wagner Bog Natural Area" (leave out the *bog*, please) the NCC said it was "one of the few remaining calcareous spruce wetlands in the province." There are many calcareous wetlands in the province, including in the national parks, and undoubtedly all of them have spruce. It would have been more accurate to say it is one of relatively few *spring-fed* calcareous wetlands. The wording also included a reference to "unique (hardly) marl ponds and ferns" (which should have read *fens*). Clearly, we have a good way to go in educating both the general public and our conservation communicators about the nature of peatlands, and in making the word *fen* more familiar! The Extension ceremony also brought out the local CBC TV cameraman, and evening news clips featured brief interviews with **Renny Grilz**, **Ben Rostron** and **Alice Hendry** and stunning pictures of the natural area.

President's Report (continued from page 2)

"S" stands for success. Our efforts to obtain the 80 acres of Project Land as a buffer for WNA were concluded in late December when the land title was transferred to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). WNAS is now negotiating a stewardship agreement with the NCC so that WNAS can manage the NCC land as part of Wagner Natural Area. WNAS is also working with NCC to establish a biophysical inventory of the NCC property and the 160 acres of WNA to the east of the NCC property.

"T" stands for time. Managing WNA this year, as in previous years, required many hours of time spent on site monitoring, cleaning up garbage, pulling and mowing weeds, participating in special events and leading groups of visitors. Additional hours were spent at meetings (both WNAS board meetings and meetings with the Alberta Department of Environment, the NCC and at the Parkland County office) and workshops. Many other hours were

spent on letter writing, minutes and newsletters. Pat Webb, our new treasurer, worked long hours to balance the books and to satisfy government requirements. In view of our 23 years of managing WNA, "T" should also stand for tenacity and teamwork.

"E" stands for education. WNAS members attended numerous events this year in order to educate the general public about the special characteristics of WNA. Our Annual Members' Night, held on October 27, featured Renny Grilz, Manager of Stewardship, NCC, Alberta Region. Those who attended learned a lot about land conservation in Alberta. Many groups, from as far away as China, were guided through the natural area in 2005.

"W" stands for water, WNA's most important resource. Ben Rostron and graduate student Cate Hydeman furthered our knowledge of Wagner's water source in the summer and fall of 2005 with electro-resistivity tomography studies and with the drilling of seven additional research wells in January of 2006. The more we know about Wagner's groundwater source, the better we can protect that source in the future.

"A" stands for advocate. Although this word is in rather "bad odour" in some circles, it is a reality for the WNAS. We cannot protect WNA, and particularly the water source of WNA, if we do not speak out about our concerns. WNA is in the middle of a rapidly developing commercial area. The City of Spruce Grove announced in 2005 that it plans to annex property from Parkland County so that the city can extend to within half a mile of the natural area's western border. We are also concerned about development that took place to the north in 2005. Development has already taken place, and continues to expand, to the south and to the west in Parkland County's Acheson Industrial Area. If WNAS did not speak out, as an advocate for WNA, no consideration would be given to WNA and to protecting its all-important water source.

"R" stands for rewards. For this year, the 15-year volunteer steward award is a good example of a meaningful reward for all of our efforts, as is the knowledge that the 80 acres to the south of WNA is now protected from development.

"D" stands for dedication, the kind of dedication that is recognized by the 15-year volunteer steward award. Any volunteer organization, especially one as small as ours, depends on dedicated members. This has been my last year in my three-year term as President of the WNAS. I know that my successor and the other members of the new board of directors will continue to be dedicated stewards, in every sense of the word, for wonderful Wagner. ❀❀❀

Many thanks to outgoing president Alice Hendry for all her hard work and excellent leadership over the past three years. Best wishes and welcome to new president Ben Rostron and V-P Derek Johnson.

Wildflowers of Wagner No. 26

Carex vaginata Tausch Family Cyperaceae

Anyone walking in moist coniferous or mixed coniferous-deciduous woods at the right time in May is likely to be struck by what looks like yellow paint brushes arising at intervals from patches of lush green on the forest floor. These are the spikes of sheathed sedge when the male flowers are opening and shedding pollen from the ripe anthers. Closer examination of the flowering stems will reveal the female flower spikes developing below.

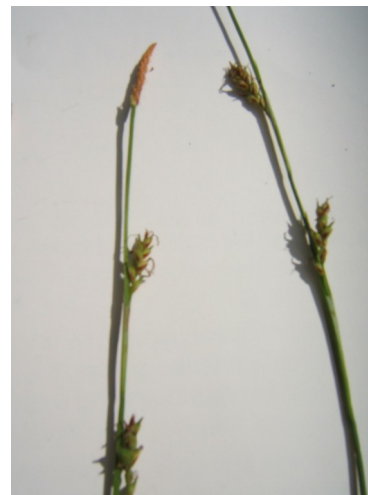
This sedge spreads by means of horizontal rootstocks or rhizomes below the surface of the ground, and in spring sends up fertile stems reaching 30 cm or more in height. Most of the leaves on the plant are basal and relatively wide at 4 mm across. They have low ridges on either side of the mid-vein, giving the leaf a cross-section like a shallow “M”.

Reduced leaves (bracts) occur along the stem and at the base of the female spikes, enclosing the stems with a pale sheath that can be up to 3 cm long — hence the name of this plant (*vaginata* means “sheath” in Latin). The single male spike, always at the tip of the flowering stem on a sturdy stalk, is about 1.5 cm long. The two or three elongate female spikes are widely separated from each other, the gap between the spikes increasing as the flowers mature, to as much as 3–4 cm. The basal female spike in particular has a slender stalk.

The stamens in the male spike, three per flower, shed pollen before the stigmas of the female flowers are receptive to it. The female spikes are made up of 6 to 12 flowers each of which consists of a perigynium and its contents. In sheathed sedge the perigynium looks like a tiny green “bottle” and sits in the axil (angle) of a scale leaf that has brown edges and a broad green midvein. It is about 3–4 mm long at maturity, smooth and slightly ridged where it accommodates the three-sided fruit or achene within. It has a beak about 1 mm long that in turn encloses the thick green style arising from the top of the achene. Three fuzzy stigmas, white when receptive to pollen, protrude from an oblique opening in the perigynial beak.

Carex vaginata is a common boreal species that can be found throughout north and central Alberta wherever there are coniferous forests, and in the mountains. Globally, it has a circumpolar distribution. It is common in Wagner and occurs along the Marl Pond Trail in association with black and white spruce. Its fruits and dark-green leaves remain obvious throughout June. Why not make a point of identifying it this season?

Sheathed Sedge Sedge Family



Carex vaginata: male spike at top, widely separated female spike showing developing perigynia below.

Photos: P. Cotterill