



## 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



### The Genesis of Wagner Natural Area Society – 1982

Key moment in creation of WNAS occurred in the summer of 1982. Pictured from left to right are Wes Smart, Linda Duncan, Peter Lee, Terry Thormin, Dick Clayton and **Pat Clayton (see story inside)**. Photo by Alice Hendry. These individuals went on to spearhead efforts to establish the Society.

## WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

### Upcoming Event – Annual General Meeting

**Who:** Supporting and Voting Members required; non-members also welcome.

**What:** Brief business meeting and election of Directors. Speaker TBD. Networking and social time; refreshments provided.

**When:** **Saturday April 13, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.**

**Where:** **Percy Page Centre, Edmonton. 11759 Groat Rd. NW**

**Why:** The AGM will meet Society Act requirements. Bylaw changes to be discussed and input sought from membership.

**A good time will be had by all!**

### Spring Clean-up Day

**When:** **Saturday, May 4**

**9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Trail, access road and hwy fence edge litter pick up; some fence rehab;

Manitoba maple extraction along MPT.

Anyone willing to lend a hand is welcome to join!

**Training, water and refreshments.**

# The End of an Era

## Pat Clayton: 1932-2023

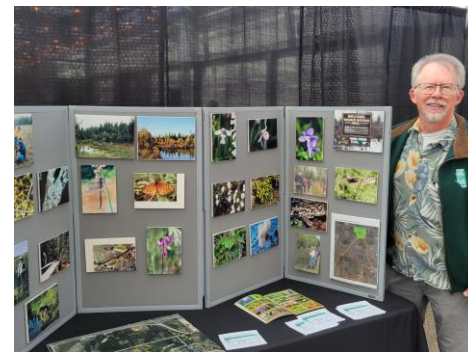
By Larissa Clayton (granddaughter and current WNAS Director)

We are sad to announce that Patricia Jean Clayton passed away at age 91 (1932-2023) in her home on Sunday morning, October 29. She was living independently to the end with limited help from family. She had just returned from a trip to Scotland and Northumberland to see her brother and other family. So, while she was slowing down a bit, she was energetic and seemed in fine health. She was sending off emails for the coming weeks minutes before she passed away. After 30 years of successfully fighting cancer, we had come to think of her as indestructible, so it was a shock for us, but a life well lived. In her later years, Pat loved her collection of orchids, birding from her windows, overlooking the neighbourhood lake, sharing her extensive book collection with family and friends, spending time with her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and like any good Brit, enjoying a strong cup of tea.

Richard/Dick Clayton, who turned 97 in December, is doing well in the Kipnes Centre for Veterans a few blocks from their home. He has severe dementia and is confined to a wheelchair but continues to enjoy his meals and chatting to visitors. Pat is also survived by her two sons, Carl and Glen (Edmonton), her six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Pat and Dick shared a deep love for the natural world and dedicated countless volunteer hours to numerous naturalist groups within Edmonton and area. Pat and Dick joined the Edmonton Natural History Club (ENHC) in 1971 with Pat serving as president for one year and both remained active members for many years following. During her presidency with the club, the Wagner Natural Area Society (WNAS) was formed in 1982. One of the founders of the WNAS, she subsequently served as director, president, and valued member, ultimately receiving Honorary Member status. Without her tireless dedication, Wagner Natural Area might not have retained its official natural area designation. At the WNAS' 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2022, Pat spoke of her fights with encroaching developments around Wagner. Her passion and continued enthusiasm for conservation in her 90s touched the attendees.

## Support Us!



[Displays at numerous events in 2023 contributed to getting out the story about Wagner Natural Area to Parkland County residents]

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 the Society.

Email: [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto: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 9 for the donation/volunteer form.**

In addition to WNAS, Pat and Dick belonged to the Edmonton Nature Club (formerly ENHC), Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary, Nature Alberta (formerly the Federation of Alberta Naturalists [FAN]), the Waskahegan Trail Association and Nature Canada. Her work was not unnoticed, as she received numerous awards and recognition for her efforts, including the prestigious Alberta Emerald Award in 2003 for individual contributions to the environment and the Honorary Life Member Award from Nature Alberta in 2004. From sharing knowledge and expertise to maintenance and monitoring work, to various board capacities, Pat and Dick continued their shared involvement and commitment to conservation groups throughout their lifetime. Pat will be greatly missed by many in the naturalist community.



Pat Clayton (left) and another volunteer at the Spring Clean-up 2018 helping with registration and safety at picnic shelter.

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### Snowless Winter Exposes Active Red Squirrel Burrows

By Dave Ealey



It's rare to be able to hike the Marl Pond Trail in deep, cold winter without any snow. This winter gave the cold-hardy visitor that opportunity. It is unlikely that the frosty circles shown adorning the openings of squirrel burrows (on December 14) would have been



visible during a regular winter. The frequent visitor can always find something new, if you keep your eyes open.

# Wagner in Winter – A Photo Essay

By Patsy Cotterill

(Photos by Patsy Cotterill and Manna Parseyan)

If not for compiling species lists or conducting bioblitzes, winter in Wagner can at least be a good time for exploring or checking on old routes, too wet or buggy to be relished in the summer season.

Our objective in early November was to see if we could re-trace in its entirety a trail called the Cabin Trail that once existed from the south end of the Villeneuve Field to the original south boundary of Wagner Natural Area.

A narrow, overgrown trail is discernible as far as what we call the memorial bench [1], now decaying and lichen-covered, that honours two Wagner Society board members who died prematurely. The trail this far is obviously used by animals, judging by the browsed shrubs, especially red-osier dogwood [3], ungulate poop, and patches of bare, scratched-up earth, but large deadfall [2] in several places effectively forces mere humans to detour.



We did not succeed in our quest despite a lengthy slog southward. Any trail south of the bench has long since become overgrown through lack of use. Walking was difficult. We were either planting our feet with great concentration in wet, hummocky forest, slopping through hollows of marsh reedgrass, or pushing through prickly raspberry on higher ground. However, almost all of these microhabitats had their quota of barricading mazes of horizontal trunks and branches, requiring a gymnastic clambering over that must surely make for the slowest progress in the world!

Still, though navigation occupied much of our opportunity for observation, the route through diverse, mature forest had some lessons to teach us. The more recent deadfall was host to decomposing fungi [4,5], while the older stumps and the long-lying horizontal boughs [6], wet from contact with the ground, had become host to new life, supporting mosses, liverworts, lichens, and even young spruce saplings [7]. Their situation on nurse logs, while supplying moisture, raises them



above the grass and leaf litter of the forest floor which would otherwise smother them and block out their sunlight.



Wet, muddy hollows created by the uprooting of spruce [8], with their huge span of shallow roots, give rise to mini riparian habitats in which we found fresh green American brooklime [10], marsh marigold, the distinctive liverwort snakewort [9], and a number of other liverworts and mosses.



Wildlife was sparse. Surprisingly, despite the remoteness of the forest, we glimpsed only one deer. We heard squirrels, but a single boreal chickadee was the only bird to break the avian silence.

Eventually we reached (and indeed overshot) the original south boundary, which we were aware of only from consulting our Google Map apps, where the boundary was discernible as a hairline disjunction running east-west. There was no obvious cutline on the ground.

Heading east to more familiar territory, we crossed a variety of plant communities [11]: open



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wetlands solid enough to walk on, forests of closely set spruce, without deadfall but requiring careful dodging of interlocking branches, and open fens rimmed with ice but still wet enough to soak un-waterproofed feet.

Emerging from the eastern portion of the original south boundary, we walked the last



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stretch along Highway 44 to our car, picking up the worst of the roadside litter. We were tired, but not so much that we could not stop finally to admire the view looking southeast over Wagner at Morgan Creek; the rosy-tipped sandbar willows and the red-haired birches, with the dark green spruce forming the background, made a bare but beautiful winter scene.

Captions to photos as follows:

1. Memorial bench. 2020.08.08 P. Cotterill
2. Deadfall blocking single-track path on Cabin Trail. 2023.11.02 P. Cotterill
3. Browsed red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) on Cabin Trail. 2023.11.02 M. Parseyan
4. (Probably) horse's hoof fungus (*Fomes fomentarius*) on poplar. 2023.11.02 M. Parseyan
5. Artist's bracket fungus (*Ganoderma applanatum*) on spruce stump. 2023.11.02 P. Cotterill
6. Old log supporting epiphytes of moss, liverwort and lichen. 2023.11.02 M. Parseyan
7. Poplar stump acting as a nursery for moss and spruce seedlings. 2023.11.02 P. Cotterill
8. Uprooted trees in wet, old-growth forest create hollows in which riparian species can survive. Cabin Trail towards the south. 2023.11.02. P. Cotterill
9. Snakewort (*Conocephalum salebrosum*), a liverwort, grows in some of these cool, shady, wet hollows. 2023.11.02 P. Cotterill
10. American brooklime (*Veronica americana*) was still growing in this same hollow. 2023.11.02 M. Parseyan.
11. Open sedge fens and treed fens, west of the south "Villeneuve" cutline. 2023.11.02. M. Parseyan.
12. View towards Morgan Creek from the roadside near Highway 44, showing a thicket of sandbar willow (*Salix interior*) and Alaskan birch (*Betula neoalaskana*), with white spruce (*Picea glauca*) in the background. 2023.11.02. M. Parseyan.

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## Annual Report for 2023

By Dave Ealey, President

What a busy year! In addition to the usual site management, leading of field trips, and keeping track of research initiatives on Wagner Natural Area, we had a few firsts this year—some good, some not-so-good.

On the good side, we had our first WNAS casino in St. Albert in February, thanks to the opportunity provided by the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis to nonprofits and charities. I want to thank all the members and friends of WNAS who served at, helped prepare for or report on the casino, especially Alan Hingston, our Casino Chair, and Melissa Chisholm, our Treasurer, for their efforts to coordinate people, meet the AGLC reporting requirements, and demonstrate to the AGLC that WNAS is indeed a deserving and fiscally responsible organization.

Also on the good side, we hosted with the Parkland County Fire Dept. a FireSmart Community Day in July to engage local residents on best practices to prevent impacts from wildfires, whether human- or natural-caused.

Not so good was our discovery of Rogue Loggers in late March who caused substantial damage to the Wagner Natural Area by felling some live trees and cutting up at least 97 standing dead or windblown trees, apparently with the intent to haul away for firewood or to sell in an unregulated market. This abuse was reported to the provincial enforcement authorities, who

undertook an investigation, caught and charged one of the loggers, who was subsequently taken to court and fined \$3500 for this affront to our precious protected area.

The level of effort required to manage the natural area has been increasing in recent years as has the number of visitors who come throughout the year to hike the trail, take photos of family groups, learn about the environmental features of the site either through a school group or personal tour, walk their dogs (on leash!), gaze at the orchids, or listen to the birds/frogs. At a minimum, there are about 18,000 visitors who spend some time on the natural area over the year.

Highlights and activities for 2023 are listed below as are the numbers of volunteer hours expended by members and associates of Wagner Natural Area Society. I want to thank each and everyone of you who have donated your time and funds to the conservation of this special area.

Thank you!!

### **Highlights and Activities 2023 for Wagner Natural Area Society**

Jan. 10—Board meeting	June 11—Orchid Walk
Feb. 4,5—Casino, St. Albert	June 24/25—Volunteer weed pull
Feb. 21—Board meeting	June 28—Parkland County Fire Dept. site visit to Wagner
Mar. 18—WNAS AGM, Percy Page Ctre	July 1—WNAS display, Edmonton Valley Zoo
Mar. 25—Rogue loggers detected	July 4—St. Plain Hort. So. MPT field trip
Mar. 26—WNAS display, Seedy Sunday	July 15/16—Volunteer weed pull
Mar. 31 to Apr. 2—WNAS display, Orchid Show, St. Albert.	July 22—WNAS display, FireSmart Community Day, Osborne Acres & Acheson
Apr. 18—Board meeting	Aug.5/6—Volunteer weed pull
Apr. 23—ANPC MPT field trip	Aug. 15—Board meeting
May 3—My Path program MPT field trip	Aug. 24—WNAS display, Tri-Municipal Region Fall Info. Fair, Sp. Grove
May 6—spring clean-up	Aug. 26—WNAS display, Edm. Hort. Soc., Bluequill, Edmonton
May 7 —WNAS display at Central Park, Spruce Grove	Aug. 30—WNAS display, Lois Hole P.P., NatureKids event, Nature Alberta
May 8—Tomahawk School MPT field trip	Sept. 19—board meeting
May 13—WNAS display at Lois Hole P.P., Migratory Bird Day	Sept. 21—Champion Pet Foods community volunteers weed pull
May 18—Prescott Learning Centre MPT field trip	Sept. 23—fall clean-up
May 27/28—May species count (birds)(plants)	Oct. 29—WNAS Open House, Pioneer Centre, Spruce Grove
June 2—WNAS presentation at Wabamun School	Nov. 28—Board mtg
June 3/4—Volunteer weed pull	
June 24—first Tree Swallow young banded	

**Volunteer Hours by Wagner Natural Area Society**

- Meetings, admin. -- 517.5 person-hrs
- Site management -- 766.5 person-hrs
- Research & monitor --173 person-hrs
- Education/outreach-- 231 person-hrs
- Updated mgmt plan -- 120.5 person-hrs

**Total Volunteer Time -- 1808.5 person-hrs**

**Summer Student Time**

- Site management -- 153 person-hrs
- Weed strategy -- 132 person-hrs
- Research & monitor -- 91 person-hrs
- Education/outreach -- 69 person-hrs
- Admin. and travel -- 125 person-hrs
- Updated mgmt plan -- 70 person-hrs

**Total Employee Time -- 640 person-hrs**

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Example of additional signage we installed at locations around Wagner perimeter to deter unauthorized entry. Other signage refers to No Offroad Vehicles at points where access might be attempted. This work is directly in response to concern arising from the Rogue Loggers' incident. Thanks to Parks' staff for extra signs.

**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](http://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](mailto:treasurer@wagnerfen.ca)

[August 2023]