



## 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



*Thanks to funding from the Edmonton Community Foundation through their Environmental Operating Grant, it will be possible for us to install new roofing shingles this year on our picnic shelter.*

*Photo courtesy of: Dave Ealey*

## WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

### **\*Advance Notice\*** **Spring Cleanup Day**

**When: Saturday, May 10.**

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

**Where: Meet at Wagner parking lot.**

**Who: Anyone to help tidy natural area after our dynamic winter.**

**What: Litter pickup, trail maintenance, wire rollup, fence maintenance and weed management.**

**Gloves/boots recommended. Dress for the weather. Training, tools, snacks and water provided. RSVP by sending an email to [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca)**

### **Annual General Meeting & Speaker** **Sat., March 15, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

*Wagner Natural Area Society's Annual General Meeting at the Percy Page Centre, 11759 Groat Rd. NW, Edmonton. (Access through back [south] door).*

*Guest Speaker: Derek Johnson, Botanist/Forester Extraordinaire will talk about "From Field, to Fen, to Forest, to Fountain...Monitoring Foliage for Management at Wagner Natural Area."*

*Following the presentation, we will have a brief business meeting, bylaw resolution and election. Then refreshments and networking! Please RSVP to [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca).*

# Executive Director Sought!

Thanks to the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Wagner Natural Area Society has received funding to hire a part-time Executive Director.

The full job description is posted at a link on the front page of our website ([www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca)), but essentially we are looking for an individual who can help the Board and membership build capacity to be ready for our next 40 years!

Strategic coordination and day-to-day management are needed for our conservation activity pillars: site management, research and monitoring, and public education and outreach. And with new initiatives like Project Forest (see later in newsletter), our ongoing weed management and long-overdue fenceline rehabilitation, we have significant challenges for which our volunteer supporters will benefit from having a coordinating leader.

We hope to hire someone to start on or before April 1<sup>st</sup>. The position will be a contract for part-time work averaging up to 15 hours per week. Applicants must submit their resume, contact information for three references, and a cover letter describing in detail how their past experiences qualify them for the position.

Submit applications to the Wagner email address: [info@wagnerfen.ca](mailto:info@wagnerfen.ca). Application review will begin on March 1, 2025, with the position remaining open until a suitable candidate is found.

Please distribute this information widely. Tell your friends. Perhaps you know someone who might be interested...a semi-retired person with an interest in environmental management, a young biologist or parks specialist ready to put their training to work, or a seasoned people organizer with a rural background or enthusiasm for outdoors management.

We're excited to take this next step...are you?

## Support Us!



Photo courtesy of Andy Mueller

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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 ongoing research studies and surveys.

Visit our website for donation/member form.

# Remembering Irl Miller

By Dave Ealey

*The following article is adapted from words I presented at Irl Miller's memorial service in December 2024.*

Wagner Natural Area is a special designated site in a provincial network of mostly small areas contributing to the protection of biodiversity of Alberta. Irl Miller has been our champion for its protection for more than five decades...that's longer than the official site has existed.

Whenever I would talk with individuals or groups from the Stony Plain—Spruce Grove—Parkland County community, I would often hear from someone who knew Irl, had been taught by Irl, had been lobbied by Irl. Everyone respected the considerable knowledge about Wagner Natural Area and its significance that Irl shared, because he knew what he was talking about.

In 1985, Irl joined the formal Wagner Natural Area Society as a representative of the Orchid Society of Alberta. In 1996, when I had to excuse myself from the President's role due to a conflict with my job as a spokesperson for the provincial government, Irl joined our executive and committed himself to the management of Wagner until only a few years ago. Irl had no problem challenging County and Provincial levels of government (administration and political) over ill-conceived land use planning or other development initiatives that threatened the natural area.

Irl was also a keen community-focused ambassador for this environmental gem; he frequently spoke with neighbours to try to solve potential conflicts, to classrooms and outdoor groups to explain the unique environmental features of Wagner, and to

civil servants who sought to understand the peculiarities of a site that they were unfamiliar with, yet were responsible for under the regulatory framework of the provincial legislation.



*Irl gets first Wagner Natural Area recognition mug.  
Photo: courtesy of Dave Ealey.*

In 1994, like many social phenomena that evolved in our Internet age, a small group of college students created the concept of Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, initially built on the premise that Kevin Bacon, as an actor, was connected with any other actor within no more than 6 degrees of separation, i.e., Bacon acted with someone, who worked with someone, who worked with someone, and so on. In my mind, Irl Miller epitomized that phenomenon in the Stony Plain—Spruce Grove—Parkland County community, as well as his wider reach among agrologists, teachers, and orchid enthusiasts.



Irl's reach and influence extended into other areas I was unaware of—I thought I was a good supporter of our health system at over 100 blood donations; Irl's record was over 300 donations! Through my involvement with the Coyote Lake Natural Area in central Alberta, I became familiar with the Coyote Lake Lodge, an outdoor facility designed to assist people with ability challenges and sponsored by the Alberta Abilities Lodges Society...I learned recently that Irl was a founding member of the AALS!

Perhaps we need to recognize another phenomenon: Six Degrees of Irl Miller. There's no doubt in my mind that this could represent a wide and worthwhile community of members. Linking this back to the Wagner Natural Area, it reflects so many of the actions and stories about Irl and his environmental accomplishments. Irl was truly an individual who supported the environmental mantra of "Think Globally and Act Locally."

*Irl entertained, educated and inspired many young students, as well as members of outdoor groups travelling around the Marl Pond Trail. Many WNAS tour leaders and summer students marvelled at Irl's enthusiasm at finding something special to point out to his audiences or telling a convincing story about nature.*





## Winter Shenanigans at Wagner

Following the discovery of Rogue Loggers in early spring 2023 and spontaneous trail-marking in summer 2023, we have had to become more diligent throughout the year with our monitoring. However, we cannot always be everywhere, all the time.

This winter has revealed a trifecta of transgressions upon our favourite environmental gem.

Against Parkland County parking rules, a parked, unattended **trailer** with running generator and a keypad door, and no vehicle attached, was first observed on November 22<sup>nd</sup> at the east end of the Wagner Parking lot. We reported this to the Parkland County and enforcement checked it out. The trailer persisted squatting on the parking lot, generator going continuously, and occasionally with a truck attached. After almost two weeks, the RCMP encouraged the occupiers to relocate. We appreciated the concerned individuals who contacted us through the website email.



*Photo: courtesy of Dave Ealey.*

**Trail flagging** off the Marl Pond Trail was discovered when visitors conducting the Wagner Natural Area portion of the Stony Plain Christmas Bird Count, on December 27, spotted the flagging tape on signpost 11 and on a series of trees extending south. We can only assume that the trail-makers figured that they don't need to follow the conservation rules established to protect the sensitive parts of Wagner Natural Area.

While winter conditions generally protect vegetation and wetlands when they are frozen and snow-covered, repeated traffic on random trails may still damage these sensitive features. Also, we don't want to see trails established with unsightly marking that end up being revisited after winter. Consequently, most of the trail markings (143 flags!) were removed on December 29.

**Removal of an abandoned shelter** in a dense part of NE Wagner Natural Area turned out to be the most worrisome (and greatest amount of work!) of these intrusions to deal with.

We were alerted by one of our Osborne Acres neighbours in late fall about the large shelter that had been abandoned inside the natural area boundaries. This shelter was not far from the area where the rogue loggers were active in 2023; perhaps it was related to that intrusion. Nonetheless, it was still a surprise because it was within a hundred metres of the fence rehabilitation and invasive species removal work that we were conducting in 2024!



That part of the natural area is densely forested and has extensive shrubby vegetation that would have kept the shelter from being noticed, until the leaves dropped.

It took several hours to dismantle this abandoned shelter, and more work will be needed to remove the remaining wood and fill in the hole dug into the moss and dirt.



*Photos: courtesy of Dave Ealey.*



Andy, one of our summer students from 2024, bravely volunteered to help with the dismantling effort during his winter break. It was a bitter cold day in early January, so his contribution was much appreciated.

There is no record of anything built onto the natural area as large as this, so we will be doing more extensive monitoring, especially in the denser regions of the natural area, to make sure there are no others.

Thanks to Parkland County and some funding they provided in 2024 for surveillance cameras, we will also be able to install video monitoring now. We hope this will enable us to prevent further intrusions.

# Project Forest Initiative

At the Annual General Meeting in April of 2024, we learned about Project Forest through Mike Toffan, their Executive Director. This was a good opportunity to introduce the concept to members of “rewilding” previously disturbed areas, and Mike illustrated a number of projects that the Project Forest organization has been working on for a few years.

As any of our regular readers will know, we have been tackling a significant invasive species problem on Wagner Natural Area. Over a number of years, we have organized weed pulls, conducted some authorized spraying of prohibited noxious and noxious weeds, created a few eco-islands, and have even targeted some horticultural invasive tree species (Manitoba maple, European mountain ash).

Our most intensive weed issues are associated with a number of legacy hayfields, including some originally created from logged areas on the driest parts of the property in the early to mid-1900s. Some of those hayfields were more intensively cultivated, and they have become even more prone to weed growth.



Hayfields outlined in blue.

We hope to be able to bolster our strategic weed management efforts through re-establishing a forest canopy on our legacy hayfields. This would be a long-term project, potentially starting in fall 2025, and must gain approval from the provincial Public Lands Division.

We have taken steps to incorporate the concept of forest restoration into the Wagner Natural Area Management Plan. This planning document accompanies the Recreational Lease that authorizes Wagner Natural Area Society to manage the natural area for passive recreation and education. The Recreational Lease was recently approved for at least another 10 years.

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**Wagner was on display at World Wetland Day, Sunday Feb. 2, hosted by Council of Canadians, Edmonton Chapter. Other environmental groups and the Raging Grannies attended.**



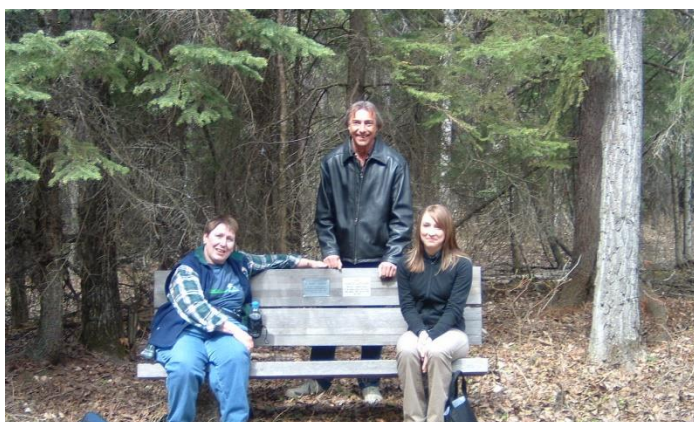


## In Memoriam -- Beth Jenkins

We are saddened to report a long-time member and Director of Wagner Natural Area Society, Beth Jenkins, passed away mid-January. She will be dearly missed by many in the Wagner family.

For those who did not know Beth, we invite you to learn about an individual who made a difference, through her own words (Beth Jenkins, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2008). Take a moment to read the articles she wrote in newsletters that are easy to find on website ([www.wagnerfen.ca](http://www.wagnerfen.ca)). Particularly touching is Beth's (1999) "Personal Perspective..." which starts:

*Wagner Natural Area is more than a pretty piece of land for the Jenkins family. It is a place associated with family togetherness, special friendships, personal growth and a sense of wonder and renewal.*



Beth (left) reminisces with Cantafio family at Wagner memorial bench bearing plaques for Barry Jenkins and Janice Cantafio, former Directors.



Beth weeding wild caraway trying to invade the natural area.

With her friendly smile and engaging personality, Beth easily shared her knowledge of the history of Wagner Natural Area, as well as the protocols of bylaws and meeting procedures, for new Directors and forgetful ones. She served as Secretary for many years and helped us keep track of our obligations as a Society and Charity. Farewell, friend.

### References:

- Beth Jenkins. 1999. Meanings and Memories: A Personal Perspective on Wagner Natural Area. Wagner Natural Area Newsletter, 13(1), April 1999, p. 3.
- Beth Jenkins. 2003a. Pat and Dick Clayton Win Prestigious Emerald Award for Individual Commitment! Wagner Natural Area Newsletter, 17(1), July 2003, p. 1.
- Beth Jenkins. 2003b. Wagner Natural Area Recognized by Alberta Community Development for its Efforts to Protect the Environment. Wagner Natural Area Newsletter, 17(1), July 2003, p. 7.
- Beth Jenkins. 2008. Changes to the Wagner Bylaws Affecting Membership. Wagner Natural Area Newsletter, 22(2), October 2008, p. 5.