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

Boreal Toad *(Anaxyrus boreas* ssp. *boreas)*, a subspecies of Western Toad *(Anaxyrus boreas)* on trail during Run #3 of Auditory Amphibian Survey (see Summer Student story).
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Marl Pond Trail Open

Following record-breaking rainfall and excessive runoff, we were forced to shut down access from June 21 until July 8.

Water levels at the gate were the highest we have ever seen.

Happily the natural area is now open and we look forward to inviting visitors back!

2026 Activities

Weed Pulls: on Sat./Sun. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. August 8—9
Nature Conservancy Weed Pull: Wed. July 15

Fall Clean-up Day: Sat. Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For every activity, plan to meet at the Wagner parking lot. RSVP at info@wagnerfen.ca

Summer Student 2026

By Sierra Himer

Hello to all our lovely Friends of the Fen, it is a pleasure to meet you all. I am Sierra Himer, and I am delighted to introduce myself in the new position of Conservation and Reclamation Specialist. I want to start by extending my thanks to the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, which have graciously provided the Wagner Natural Area Society with a portion of funding, allowing me to expand my skills and be part of caring for Wagner Natural Area. To further introduce myself, I have recently completed the first year of the Conservation Biology Diploma program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. I will be continuing my studies this upcoming academic year. I am a local of Parkland County, born and raised. I have spent countless hours at Wagner walking along the Marl Pond Trail.

I have always seen Wagner as a special place to connect with our natural world. Its convenient location makes for an easily accessible and wonderful walk any day of the week. I still remember the first time I visited Wagner; it was a grade 6 field trip led by our very own President, Dave Ealey. Who would have ever guessed I would be working alongside such a knowledgeable individual, leader and mentor? I was immediately fixated on everything this special area had to offer at a young age, and that fixation only grew stronger as I grew into the young adult I am today. I am fascinated by the unique native flora and fauna, which play a vital role in the functioning of the unique boreal wetland habitat we all share and cherish together as a community.

Many visitors may have noticed the signage along the trail reading “Rewilding in Progress”. When passing through the Central field, you might have noticed that the meadow looks a bit different. This is because the Central field is one of the six sites that are currently being reclaimed. As many may know, WNA was once privately owned by the Wagner family. Originally, part of the land was used to pasture cows by establishing hayfields. Now, with the help of Project Forest, these sections of previously cleared forests are being reintegrated into our boreal forest and fen ecosystem. Over the summer months, I will conduct various surveys and assessments to monitor the reclamation sites and document the rewilding process and overall succession.

Father’s Day Orchid Walk and other events fell victim to persistent June rains. Photo courtesy of Dave Ealey.

Support Us!

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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

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.

In my time at Wagner this season, I have also conducted both Auditory and Visual Encounter Surveys of the amphibians that call Wagner home.

Wood Frog *(Lithobates sylvaticus)* eggs found in South Beaver Pond during Run #1 of the amphibian Visual Encounter Survey.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Various species of frog and toad tadpoles (larvae) in South Marl Pond at Wagner Natural Area.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

I am also planning to conduct surveys, commonly known as Pollard walks, of butterfly populations in Wagner. In past years, Pollard walks were regularly conducted long the Marl Pond Trail. Now, with rewilding in progress, I would like to monitor the butterfly population at Wagner in response to the ongoing reclamation of the hayfields.

Sierra Himer with a Polyphemus Moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*) that crawled onto her hand while photographing it.
Photo courtesy of Lauren Schollie.

So far this summer, I have learned more than I could've imagined, and my time here is nowhere close to being finished. I am excited to see what the future brings and the many experiences I will have in this position. If you see me during your visit, please introduce yourself, as I would love to meet with the Wagner community. I am looking forward to connecting with you throughout my time as a summer student, and I am so thankful for the opportunity.

Web resources provide more information on Rewilding work by Project Forest and the grant received for WNAS summer students:
-- Project Forest partners website: Wagner Natural Area - Project Forest (Jun. 15, 2026)

-- Website. Canadian Parks & Recreation Association (Jun. 15, 2026)

-- Website: Youth Empowerment and Support Services - YESS (Jun. 15, 2026)

Beavers of 4th Spruce Grove Scouts Volunteer for Spring Clean-up

By Sierra Himer

Beavers of 4th Spruce Grove Scouts at the entrance gate after volunteering to remove garbage from the Villeneuve and Atim hayfields of Wagner Natural Area. Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

We want to give a huge thank you to the Beavers of 4th Spruce Grove Scouts for volunteering their time and effort to assist with the spring cleanup of two of our reclamation hayfields, Atim and Villeneuve. The location of these two hayfields is along the north boundary fenceline of Wagner and south of Highway 16 (Yellowhead). Due to their location, these hayfields accumulate large amounts of discarded trash and debris. This wonderful group of scouts and leaders spent the evening of Thursday, May 14, removing garbage from the Atim and Villeneuve hayfields. We cannot thank you enough for your visit to Wagner Natural Area and your help in our never-ending battle against litter.

Wild Rose Ramblers Walking Group Field Tour

By Sierra Himer

Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

As this season unfolds, Wagner Natural Area continues to offer unforgettable experiences. On Tuesday, June 9, the Wild Rose Ramblers Walking Group enjoyed a field tour.

The Wild Rose Ramblers Walking Group is an amazing opportunity for those who enjoy walking in the beautiful river valley and natural areas around Edmonton.

Summer student Xander and I, both guided the group along the Marl Pond Trail and pointed out all the actively blooming flora and some of the wildlife. A guided field tour is an excellent way to learn about Wagner from members of the Society. Thank you to the Wild Rose Ramblers for being such a pleasure to guide and for the lovely morning walk. Thank you to our WNAS member and Wild Rose Rambler Coordinator, Len Slaunwhite, for organizing the tour.

Welcoming Dogs at Wagner

By Sierra Himer

Wagner Natural Area features the scenic Marl Pond Trail, a beautiful 1.5 km route that leads visitors through a variety of habitats. We welcome visitors to bring their dogs with only two simple rules. Dogs must be leashed for the safety of your furry friends and the furry friends that call Wagner home. While a public washroom is available for our human visitors, nature calls for dog visitors as well. Therefore, please bring your own dog waste bags, and if you use a dog waste bag to pick up your dog's waste, ensure you pack out what you pack in. Visitors to our trail enjoy the colours of nature, not the colourful dog waste bags that litter the environment we care for. Please don't dispose of dog waste bags along the trail.

Wagner Natural Area is provincially protected land under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, and Heritage Rangelands Act*. Under this Act, natural areas are protected and sensitive public land is available for conservation, nature appreciation, low-intensity outdoor recreation, education, or any combination of these purposes. Please respect the environment and others so that Wagner can remain a place of preserved natural beauty for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. As a conservation area, Wagner Natural Area does not provide garbage disposal. Depositing any litter, garbage, or refuse in natural areas is prohibited. If you bring it in, you take it out. We appreciate the effort and your respect in this matter, and we hope visitors and their dogs enjoy a safe walk during their visit.

Otis (left) and Martin (right) on the Wagner Natural Area boardwalk while enjoying a walk along the Marl Pond Trail.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Parkland County Rolling Meadows Wetland Restoration Project

By Sierra Himer

Wagner Natural Area is home to calcium-rich, spring-fed marl ponds and groundwater springs are its lifeblood. Wetlands provide many environmental benefits, such as flood reduction, groundwater recharge, water filtration, and temperature moderation. Additional benefits include habitat for pollinators, increased biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. We are proud to call WNA one of Parkland County's environmentally significant areas. The County has been working with the province of Alberta under the Wetland Replacement Program to restore and replace wetlands across the county.

The Parkland County Department of Agriculture and Environment Services recently completed construction of the Rolling Meadows Wetland Restoration Project. The project was led by Kristen Andersen (Professional Biologist at Sweetflag Environmental) and Parkland County's restoration professionals. Located north of Spruce Grove, the Rolling Meadows Wetland Restoration Project aimed to restore three fully functioning wetlands on the site, covering approximately 1.25 ha. The restored wetlands will include both marsh and swamp habitats that can support diverse species, provide flood mitigation for surrounding residential properties, and improve the quality of surface runoff.

On Saturday, May 30, I had the opportunity to help plant native wetland species in and around the newly formed basins by attending the Rolling Meadows Wetland Planting Workshop. The event was such an amazing experience and had a great turnout of local volunteers. It was so inspiring to see the care Parkland County staff and Kristen Andersen had for this project. Since the event, the area has been seeded with wetland plants and will be monitored by Parkland County staff. The public is asked to keep off the area while plants are established. We are grateful to Parkland County for recognizing the vital role wetlands play in biological diversity, water quality, and flood mitigation.

Kristen Andersen (Wetland Scientist and Restoration Ecologist, Sweetflag Environmental) at Site C during Wetland Planting Workshop.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Tristan Folinsbee (Executive Director of Wagner Natural Area Society) and past Natural Asset Project Coordinator at Parkland County, at Site C of the Parkland County Rolling Meadows Wetland Restoration Project during the Wetland Planting Workshop.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

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Species Highlight: The Polyphemus Moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*)

By Sierra Himer

The Polyphemus Moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*) is a native species of moth in the silk moth family (Saturniidae). Polyphemus moths are the most widely spread silk moth throughout Canada, except Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. This moth species occurs in deciduous boreal forests, urban areas, orchards, and wetlands in central and northern Alberta and is local in prairie river valleys and the parkland area. Adults are found primarily from late May to late June.

On Thursday, May 28, during a warm afternoon, we summer students were fortunate to encounter a male Polyphemus moth at Wagner Natural Area. Female moths are larger than males and have slender antennae, whereas males have larger, featherlike antennae. Due to the immaculate condition of the specimen and the moth's vibrating wings, we assume it had only recently emerged from its cocoon that very afternoon. Newly emerged adult moths will spend their first hours drying and expanding their damp, wrinkled wings by pumping fluid into them. Once their wings are hardened, their primary focus is reproduction.

As adults, members of this species are large moths with a wingspan of 10-15 cm. Polyphemus moths have a hairy body and can vary in colour from red-brown to dark brown. Each hind wing has a large yellow “eyespot” lined with blue and black. The center of this eyespot is uniquely transparent. The front wings have a smaller yellow spot. The margin of both the front and hind wings has a black and white stripe.

Polyphemus moth caterpillars (larvae) take only about 10 days to hatch from eggs. Larvae moult five times and grow to their full size in five to six weeks. Once fully grown, they wrap themselves in a leaf and build a cocoon out of silk. Cocoons are oval, 40 mm in length, and 22 to 24 mm in diameter. While in the cocoon, the larvae develop into pupae and will emerge as adults in about two weeks.

Polyphemus moths often mate the same day that they emerge from their cocoons. Females emit pheromones, which can be detected up to 2 km away. The male's antennae are used to detect pheromones released by unmated females. Females lay their eggs shortly after mating. Females lay up to five eggs singly or in groups of two or three on the underside of tree leaves. Eggs are flat, round, and cream-coloured on top with a brown outline. Eggs are laid on leaves that are a good food source for larvae. Otherwise, female moths have no parental involvement with their offspring. Larvae eat about 86,000 times their body weight. Sometimes, they also eat their eggshells after hatching and their freshly moulted skin.

Larvae feed on leaves of deciduous broad-leaved trees and shrubs such as oak (*Quercus* spp.), maple (*Acer* spp.), birch (*Betula* spp.), willow (*Salix* spp.), and alder (*Alnus* spp.). Although larvae consume a large quantity of leaves, little harm is done to trees and shrubs; in fact, in doing so, they contribute to nutrient cycling. Although often overlooked, many moths are pollinators, including the Polyphemus moth.

Adult moths have a reduced mouth, also known as a vestigial mouth, and do not eat. Adults have a very brief lifespan, living only about four to seven days. Their primary purpose during this phase is mating and laying eggs. Their entire life cycle averages about three months. The adult life of the Polyphemus moth is extraordinarily transitory: they emerge, mate, and die within a week. This unique species highlights the evolutionary strategies employed in its quest for survival.

Polyphemus Moth *(Antheraea polyphemus)* found in the east side of Wagner Natural Area. Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

WEED OF THE MONTH:
Orange Hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca*)

By Sierra Himer

Overview: When it comes to non-native plants, Orange Hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca*, formerly known as *Hieracium aurantiacum*) is a vibrant yet problematic invasive species that poses significant threats to ecosystems in Alberta, including Wagner Natural Area. Recent taxonomic revisions have divided hawkweeds into two genera (*Pilosella* and *Hieracium)*. In Alberta, non-native hawkweeds belong to the genus *Pilosella*, while *Hieracium* includes both native and non-native species. Orange hawkweed is in the genus *Pilosella* and is classified as a noxious invasive weed under Alberta's *Weed Control Act*, which states that prohibited noxious weeds must be destroyed and noxious weeds, such as orange hawkweed, must be controlled. A plant that is designated as a noxious weed also includes the plant's seeds. Noxious weeds can spread rapidly and cause severe crop losses and economic hardship. There are eight species of hawkweed (*Pilosella* spp.) designated as noxious under the *Weed Control Act*.

Habitat: Orange hawkweed is a perennial forb in the Aster family (Asteraceae) and is native to Europe. These non-native, invasive hawkweeds were first detected in western Canada approximately 50 years ago and are regionally common in Alberta. Orange hawkweeds prefer well-drained, coarse-textured soils, often low in organic matter. They are commonly found in open fields, disturbed areas, mountain meadows, permanent pastures, along edges and in clearings in forest zones. At Wagner, our reclamation hayfields are at greatest risk for the spread of this invasive species.

Life Cycle: Orange hawkweeds reproduce both by seed and vegetatively through above-ground runners (stolons), shallow rhizomes, and regrowth from root fragments. Species of hawkweed can produce viable seed without pollination, meaning a single plant can establish a new infestation. Orange hawkweeds produce wind-dispersed seeds, and the flower heads can continue to mature viable seed after plants have been pulled, and seeds may remain viable in the soil for up to seven years.

Identification Features: Orange hawkweed is relatively easy to identify because of its striking appearance and distinctive characteristics. It has fibrous roots and produces milky latex in its stems and leaves. See Hawkweed, Orange - Alberta Invasive Species Council to learn how to identify and get more information on the presence of orange hawkweed in Alberta.

Stems: Orange hawkweed plants possess a single stem that sometimes branches near the top. The stems are covered with simple, glandular, and star-shaped hairs (trichomes). The flowering stem is usually leafless and may reach 60-100 cm in height. Flowering stems can have 2 to 25 flowerheads (capitula). The stem (axis) has stolons that can root and give rise to new plants.

Leaves: Orange hawkweed has a circular arrangement of leaves radiating from a central point (rosette), typically at or near ground level (basal). Basal leaves are long

and narrow to oval or egg-shaped (elliptical to lanceolate), with mostly smooth edges and usually narrow where they attach to the axis. Leaves can measure 5-20 cm long and 1-3 cm wide. Leaves have many simple (canescent) trichomes on the upper side, while the lower side of the leaves has both simple and star-shaped (stellate) trichomes. Occasionally, one or two small leaves may be present on the lower stem.

Flowers: Orange hawkweed has compound capitula (radiate), with ray flowers (ligulate) and strap-shaped flowers (tubular), several to many in a relatively small to flat-topped capitulum**.** Single plants can have 20 to 50 orange-to-red capitula arranged in open clusters, bundled together at the ends of small, slender stalks (pedicels) that attach to the main axis. A capitulum base (involucre) is covered with many star-shaped, glandular and simple trichomes. Each capitulum measures about 2-5 cm in diameter and often blooms from June to September. The flowers can reflect ultraviolet light, making them more noticeable to pollinators.

Seeds: After flowering, orange hawkweed produces seed heads resembling dandelions. Seeds (cypsela, an achene-like fruit resembling a seed due to an inferior ovary) are ribbed, narrow at the base, and can measure 1-2 mm long. Each seed is equipped with its own parachute (pappus), which has white or pale brown hairs (capillary bristles) that have evolved as a mechanism for wind dispersal. Small, hairy, leaf-like parts surround seedheads at the base of the seed (bracts).

Look-alike Species: Many of the hawkweed species (*Pilosella* spp.) look very similar. At the early stages of development, an Alberta native wildflower, Philadelphia fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*), can be easily mistaken for orange hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca)*. Philadelphia fleabane is a species of flowering plant that is also a part of the Aster family (Asteraceae). This resemblance between the two species is due to immature fleabane plants having a basal rosette leaf arrangement like that of hawkweeds. Fleabane plants also possess short trichomes covering the leaves. Special attention to the leaf shape is crucial to differentiating between the two species during the early stages of plant development. It is always important to confirm the identity of a plant before removing what is assumed to be an invasive weed.

Impacts: Orange hawkweed poses a significant threat to biodiversity and ecosystem health. It spreads aggressively, forming dense mats that outcompete native vegetation. The presence of hawkweed not only reduces essential food sources for wildlife but also poses risks to other organisms. Even small, easily overlooked patches of this noxious weed can develop into persistent infestations that are difficult to control. Additionally, these weeds release chemicals that inhibit the growth of surrounding plants. Public awareness and action are critical to managing invasive species like orange hawkweed. By recognizing its impact and taking steps to control it, we can protect native ecosystems and preserve biodiversity. Loss of biodiversity is directly linked to invasive species, which have played a key role in 60% of global plant and animal extinctions.

Prevention and Control: Controlling the spread of orange hawkweed requires a multi-pronged approach. You can reduce the risk of hawkweed establishment by maintaining healthy, competitive plant communities and regularly monitoring high-risk areas. Use weed-free products where available, avoid

generic wildflower seed mixes, and obtain seed certificates for large-scale seeding to prevent the introduction of invasive species. Using an integrated approach to address both seed production and aggressive vegetative spread is very effective. Control of invasive hawkweeds requires repeated treatment and continuous monitoring. Plants should be treated before flowering to prevent seed production. If buds or flowers are present, they should be removed and properly disposed of to prevent further seed development. Hand digging for small infestations can be effective when paired with the removal of all roots and stolons. Root systems must be completely removed to prevent regrowth from remaining root fragments. Pulled material must be bagged and disposed of in a landfill or incinerated, as hawkweeds will continue to produce viable seeds after removal. Landowners must manage weeds on their property and stay informed. These plants spread fast and can take over fields and natural spaces; early action is key.

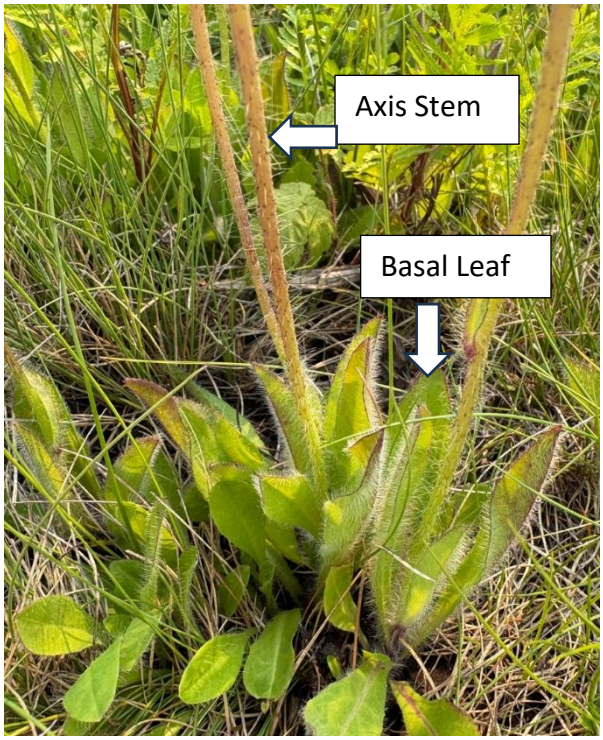
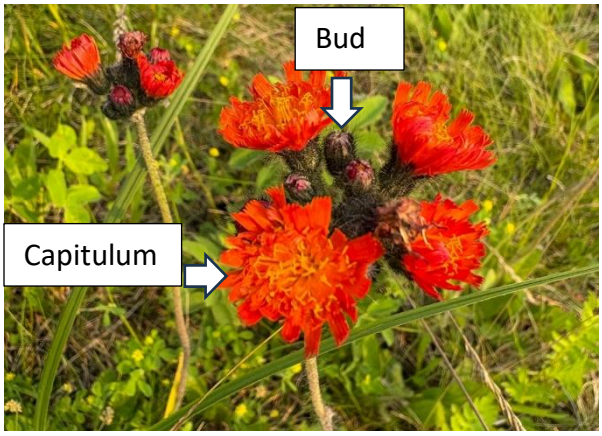


Photo showing leaves and stem of an Orange Hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca*) plant in Stony Plain, AB.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.



Features of an Orange Hawkweed (*Pilosella aurantiaca*) flower from Stony Plain, AB.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Midsummer Photo Gallery By Sierra Himer

White-tailed Deer *(Odocoileus virginianus)* fawn instinctively lying silently in the grass of Villeneuve hayfield at Wagner Natural Area.

Northern Bog Violet *(Viola nephrophylla)*, also known as Kidney-leaved Violet, north of South Beaver Pond at Wagner Natural Area.

Pale Coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*), a saprophytic orchid located in the successional zone of east Villeneuve hayfield at Wagner Natural Area.

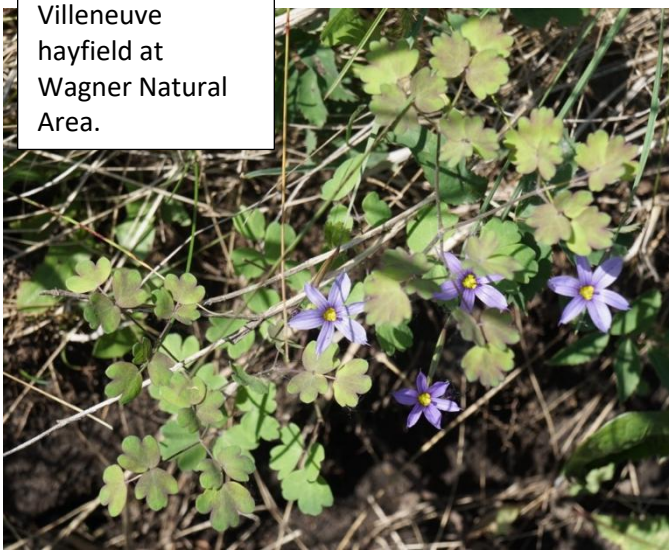
Bishop's Cap (*Mitella nuda*) along the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area.

North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*) den, west of South Beaver Pond at Wagner Natural Area.

English Sundew *(Drosera anglica),* also known as Oblong-leaved Sundew near Hourglass Fen at Wagner Natural Area.

Nevada Bumblebee (*Bombus nevadensis*) on Large-leaved Lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*) along the Marl Pond Trail. [Similar to the Lilac tree (p. 16), this species had been inappropriately planted by an unidentified visitor and was subsequently removed as it is not native to the natural area.]

Common Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*) in the Villeneuve hayfield at Wagner Natural Area.



Animal-Vehicle Collisions Along Highway 16 and Their Effect on Moose at Wagner Natural Area

By Sierra Himer

On Friday, May 8, I visited Wagner and walked the trail with my two dogs. When walking along the trail, I heard a noise come from the trees next to me. That was when I saw a mother North American moose (*Alces alces*) and a yearling moose feeding to my left. I kept moving down the trail, as you never want to be noticed by or startle a mother moose with its calf. On Saturday, May 9, the first day of our scheduled May weed pull event, one of our members was travelling westbound on the Yellowhead and noticed a deceased yearling moose in the Yellowhead's median ditch, west of the Highway 44 overpass. Other volunteers who attended our event confirmed the presence of a mother moose and calf in WNA, which they spotted on Thursday, May 7, feeding on some willows (*Salix* spp.).

It came as a real shock to the Wagner community to learn that the yearling moose had become a statistic in an animal-vehicle collision on the morning of May 9. The image of Wagner being a safe conservation area for wildlife to raise their young was rudely shaken. Wagner borders a section of one of the deadliest highways in Alberta for large animal collisions. The Traffic Injury Research Foundation released an interpretation report in November 2023 of Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions in Canada, using fatality data from their National Fatality Database to examine monthly and seasonal crash trends from 2000 to 2020. Between 2000 and 2020, 570 people died in animal-vehicle collisions in Canada, and out of those collisions, 68.9% (393) resulted from colliding with an animal, and 31.1% (177) occurred from attempting to avoid an animal. When looking at fatally injured victims in collisions involving deer and moose, moose accounted for 62.2% (355) of fatalities compared to deer at 37.8% (215) between the years of 2000 and 2020.

Alberta accounted for 22% (124) of these fatal collisions across our Canadian provinces and Territories. For many Albertans who drive for a living or whose work requires them to be on the road, those risks are even higher. In Alberta, animal-vehicle collisions are among the leading causes of comprehensive damage insurance claims for vehicles and cost Albertans approximately $300,000 each day in direct and indirect costs, including property damage, health care, and highway cleanup.

Remember, the faster you drive, the greater the distance you'll need to stop. Collisions with wildlife can result in serious injury and significant property damage. Animals such as deer and moose are most active at dawn and dusk, when migration most often occurs. When driving on rural highways, it is critical to maintain heightened awareness of nearby wildlife. Some common factors of road stretches with high numbers of collisions involving animals and vehicles include nearby water sources, where creeks or drainages intersect roads, good habitat and forage near the roadside, and long, wide, straight stretches of road.

An assumption can be that when there are good road conditions, such as long, wide, and straight roads, motorists tend to feel safer and more confident and therefore accelerate. This increase in speed reduces the driver's reaction time when an animal is

seen on the road. This past year, I attended the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and commuted to Edmonton from Stony Plain on the Yellowhead nearly every day. As a local, I have witnessed this assumption in effect among other commuting motorists and have seen many other deceased animals along the Yellowhead and the section north of Wagner.

Unfortunately, due to Wagner's location within the Sturgeon watershed, which flows toward Big Lake and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, and the proximity of the Yellowhead Highway, the wildlife using the natural area are at high risk of these collisions. To prevent further incidents and ensure the safety of our visitors, please drive with caution when travelling to Wagner. Safety precautions motorists can take include referring to highway signs and reflectors and actively scanning for animals in both rural and urban areas, as wildlife can be found anywhere. We want to raise public and visitor awareness to be vigilant, react strategically, and drive with great caution when travelling along the Yellowhead.

If an animal suddenly crosses your path, brake firmly but don't leave your lane, as you may cause a collision with another vehicle or animal, or risk going off the road into other hazards. If you can't stop for a large animal, attempt to steer toward its hindquarters to prevent a significant collision gently. If you hit an animal, move your vehicle to a safe place and turn on your hazard lights to warn other drivers. Don't approach the animal, as injured wildlife can be unpredictable and could pose further safety risks. Call 911 if there are any injuries to you or your passengers, or if the animal carcass poses a hazard to other drivers.

If an incident occurs and you are a victim of a collision with an animal or you encounter an animal victim of a vehicle collision, call Fish and Wildlife's Report a Poacher line by dialling 1-800-642-3800 and select the option"report an injured animal". Alberta Wildlife Watch is an Animal-Vehicle Collision Safety Program that aims to improve driver safety on provincial highways by mitigating Animal-Vehicle Collisions and minimizing the impacts of highways on wildlife. Collecting high-quality data enables effective Animal-Vehicle Collision mitigation and future decision-making. Incidents can be reported through the Alberta Wildlife Watch website tool. Visit Alberta Wildlife Watch to discover more about the Alberta Wildlife Watch Program. Please stay alert and drive safely to prevent future tragedies.

Reclamation Hayfields Receive Cover Crop By Drone

By Sierra Himer

Fall rye (AC® Hazlet) was falling from the sky on Thursday, May 21. Our reclamation hayfields received fall rye seed from a drone. The certified fall rye seed is intended to serve as a cover crop for all our recently planted tree seedlings. The seedlings in our hayfield sites face moderate grass competition, and because the sites were dominated by grass, mechanical site preparation was required. The site preparation technique used was mini mounds to penetrate the grass mat and establish microsites. Although this technique can be beneficial, it also increases the risk of weed spread through disturbance. Sowing a

cover crop will prevent weeds from establishing on the exposed mineral soil. Fall rye (AC® Hazlet) is a variety developed by Canadian breeder Dr. Grant Macleod at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. This variety of fall rye is the hardiest and most disease-resistant crop among the wheat cereals.

Hazlet fall rye was chosen because it has great tolerance to drought, although it thrives best in a moist growing environment. Fall rye, compared to other cover crops, is superior in all characteristics associated with cover crops. Other benefits include serving as erosion control and improving soil structure and fertility. Fall rye is an effective nitrogen scavenger that can take up excess nitrate from previous crops, thereby reducing the risk of runoff. Additionally, fall rye has a high nitrogen use efficiency, making it a low-input crop suitable for poorer land. In the past, these hayfields were used for agricultural purposes. As the reclamation of these hayfields takes place, the fall rye will help the succession of our tree seedlings. Once a canopy is established, the fall rye will no longer grow due to limited light, and the plant material will become an excellent source of carbon-rich organic matter, essential for soil health. Thank you, Project Forest and TreeTime Services, for your dedication and hard work. We hope to continue to see great success throughout the process of reclaiming the hayfields of Wagner Natural Area.

Drone spreading the seeds of Fall Rye (AC® Hazlet) in Central hayfield.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Non-native Lilac (*Syringa* spp.) Found Along the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area

By Sierra Himer

Here at Wagner Natural Area, our members work hard to preserve the sensitive and scenic ecosystem and natural features that make WNA unique. On May 14, 2026, during our weekly weed strategy meeting, we were shocked to see a Lilac (*Syringa* spp.) tree on the right side of the trail going into Wagner. After closer inspection, we concluded that an unknown individual planted this tree. As a result, the lilac tree, a non-native species, was removed.

Non-native plants are species that do not naturally occur in a natural range. Non-native species did not co-evolve with the local ecosystem; they do not naturally support local wildlife as effectively as native species do. While lilacs are beautiful and enjoyed by many, their ability to spread seeds allows them to outcompete local understorey plants. These non-native plants can alter soil chemistry by changing the rate of organic matter decomposition and the soil nutrient composition, creating a micro-environment

that may favour other invasive weeds rather than indigenous vegetation. Lilacs often bloom early, are highly fragrant, and can draw essential native pollinators, such as bees and butterflies, away from native plants. Attracting pollinators and drawing them away from native plants can reduce the reproductive success of local natives.

Wagner Natural Area is provincially protected land under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, and Heritage Rangelands Act*. Under the Act, Natural Areas prohibit the introduction into, deposit in, or addition of any material, substance, or organism that is or may be harmful to plant and animal life. We do not plan to take any further action, but we want to raise public awareness that planting any species, especially non-native species, in Wagner is not permitted. We hope to prevent the introduction of non-native species and will continue to protect and preserve our natural area to the best of our abilities for the community's enjoyment.

Non-native Lilac (*Syringa* spp.) that was found along the Marl Pond Trail at Wagner Natural Area, before removal.
Photo courtesy of Sierra Himer.

Rogue Builders

By Dave Ealey (including pictures)

Just as I was storing our trail closure signs in our cleaning supplies shed, on the evening of July 8, I spotted what I thought was a deer running from the Central field into the bush just west of the storage shed. As I started walking down what I thought was a game trail, within 50 paces of our shed I spotted **the largest wall and lean-to complex** I have ever seen on Wagner Natural Area. (I never did see the deer.)

Apparently, some of this construction had been seen earlier by a summer student, without realizing the significance of the deadfall wall. A large part of the area associated with the wall had been worked on very recently, as I found a pile of freshly picked thistles that had likely been cleared within the past week, during the time the natural area was closed to visitors due to the high water and ponding on the Marl Pond Trail.

Further checking out a trail I had never seen before, I found numerous lean-to structures that have been installed. I kept wandering around the area and found the trail finally ended and no sign of further constructions. As I moved back toward the picnic shelter, I discovered many more partial lean-tos that had been constructed. None of the lean-tos located north and east of the picnic shelter had been in place during our cleanup day back in May.

In all, I would say about 15 to 20 structures have been created, which must have taken a fair bit of time. I was gob-smacked at the extent of the building, but also at how this was missed by those of us managing the site.

I provide some pictures of what has been inflicted upon the natural area. Perhaps the only saving grace is that the builders hadn't gotten around to building a fire pit, and there was no sign of camping.

These lean-tos, etc., are a high priority for dismantling, after the July weed pulls.

Typical lean-to.

Freshly picked Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).