



# *The Alberta Wildlifer*

Official Newsletter of the Alberta Chapter, The Wildlife Society  
Summer 2007, Vol 18 No. 2.,  
Editor: Lisa Wilkinson

## **President's Message**

I'm very pleased to be President of the Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society for the next year. The Chapter has a long history of fostering wildlife conservation and management, and brings together a broad spectrum of professionals and students from numerous organizations. The annual conference is a wonderful venue to share ideas and learn about new research.

This year's conference in Canmore had the great fortune of having several well-respected and thought-provoking speakers. The plenary session on stewardship success stories kicked the conference off with a bang, followed by a series of symposiums on topics ranging from ecological integrity and land use to advocacy, grizzly bears, and grass-roots stewardship programs. These symposiums generated a lot of discussion during the open forum periods and long after the sessions were finished. The quality of student presentations and posters was also very high again this year. I'd like to thank all those who attended the conference, with special thanks to the volunteers and speakers.

Several issues were raised at the Annual Business Meeting that the Executive will need to address in the upcoming year. These include correcting problems with the Chapter's website, increasing interest in student scholarships, and raising the profile of the Chapter. Moreover, under the direction of Blair Rippin, the Conservation Committee will continue its excellent work on responding to conservation issues on behalf of the Chapter.

I'm pleased to welcome two new members to the Executive, Brad Taylor and Tammy McMillan. Both are very welcome additions.

If you have any concerns, ideas or questions that you'd like to bring to the Executive's attention, please feel free to contact me. All comments are appreciated.

Cheers, Anne Hubbs

## **Editor's Note**

After several years at the helm of the newsletter, Dave Hobson has resigned as editor. Sincere thanks to Dave for keeping the newsletter afloat. Dave was recently recognized for his contribution to the ACTWS with the 2007 Dedicated Service award.

I have taken on the position of editor, so expect to hear from me periodically, cajoling you for articles. The ACTWS newsletter is a great way to spread information to a variety of people.

I'd like to thank the people who took the time to provide excellent articles for this issue. Blair Rippin provided an update on the Conservation Committee, and hopefully Blair will continue to provide updates from time to time. Margo Pybus provided a thank you letter for the William Rowan award since she was unable to attend the annual meeting – congratulations Margo! The remainder of the newsletter focuses on charismatic microfauna: amphibians. Thanks to Kris Kendell from ACA, and Connie Brown from the University of Alberta, for providing interesting articles. Finally, there is a list of award recipients from the annual meeting, and a job posting from Golder Associates. A list of new wildlife publications from ACTWS members will appear in the next issue.

Submissions and suggestions for the newsletter can be made to me anytime throughout the year.

*Lisa Wilkinson ( [lisa.wilkinson@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lisa.wilkinson@gov.ab.ca) )*

## The ACTWS Conservation Committee Progress Report

by Blair Rippin, Chairperson

The previous ACTWS newsletter (Summer 2006, Volume 17, Number 2) contained a summary of renewed efforts to improve our role in environmental advocacy. It outlined the revamped structure of the Conservation Committee (CC) and provided objectives, criteria, and procedures we hoped would lead to greater effectiveness in our efforts to enhance public understanding of natural systems and the value to wildlife, and society, of maintaining essential ecosystem components and their functional connectiveness.

The Committee has now progressed through one year and, in conjunction with our recent annual general meeting in March 2007, held a meeting to review progress. The following is a brief summary of the meeting results.

- CC members expressed satisfaction with the significant progress that had been made over the past fiscal year. The system of having a coordinator with sufficient time and energy along with a supporting group of 5 to 6 members has proven to be a good combination.
- All agreed that we could improve our communication with periodic (rather than regularly scheduled) conference calls. Offers were made to facilitate that action.
- Other areas of possible improvement were:
  - a) provide regular feed-back to members who expressed an interest in becoming involved with the Committee at the 2006 AGM;
  - b) provide periodic updates to the ACTWS Executive, newsletter, and web site;
  - c) having time lines for CC member feedback and establishment of milestones and/or deliverables as a way of tracking progress in actions taken.
- Issue generation may also be enhanced via the above contacts.
- Our future effectiveness may improve with follow-up letters upon learning of success/failure to effect a requested change.
- Our effectiveness may also be improved via including comment on supportive and/or positive positions where possible.
- It was agreed that the previously established Committee turnover of six months was a bit too short to maintain continuity. Although it was agreed we should replace any members wishing to leave at any time, but explore a staggered one year term with the break being in the fall. (Lisa Wilkinson offered to be replaced because of her commitment to take over the ACTWS newsletter duties and Ken Crutchfield offered to become a member as he recently expressed a specific desire to do so this term).
- A suggestion was made after our meeting that also has merit - that is to prepare a questionnaire for the general membership to learn their individual areas of expertise and willingness to act as resources for and/or participate in specific advocacy actions.

During the past fiscal year the Committee considered the following issues and took action as indicated.

***Support for Pembina Institute's concerns relative to InSitu Oil Sands operations***

A letter was prepared and sent (October 3, 2006) to Oil Sands Consultations, Alberta Department of Energy , which had invited public input relative to InSitu Oil Sands development. The letter basically supported concerns expressed by the Pembina Institute and called for a slower, orderly development that would give primary consideration to the protection of the boreal forest ecosystem and its constituent wildlife components.

***Hiring of new a Director of Wildlife for the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division***

Upon the retirement of the then existing Director of Wildlife (who had no formal training in wildlife management), a letter was prepared and sent (early October 2006) to the Honorable D. Coutts, Minister of Alberta Sustainable Development (at that time), urging recruitment to the position with an experienced, formally trained wildlife biologist. Although this action falls in the realm of advocacy, it was done through the efforts of ACTWS Executive members.

***The Alberta Grizzly Bear Plan***

The recovery plan for Alberta grizzly bears was completed by the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team and submitted to the Minister of Alberta Sustainable Development two years ago but no action has been taken to implement its recommendations. As a result, a letter was prepared and sent (March 4, 2007) to the Honorable Ted Morton, Minister of Alberta Sustainable Development. It urged immediate action to have the recommendations implemented.

***Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Alberta wild cervids***

Combating the spread of CWD in Alberta has become a major undertaking, with significant cost in manpower and resources. As an advocacy issue, the Committee involvement to date has been limited to obtaining information on the workings of the program in Alberta and Saskatchewan in an attempt to discover if ACTWS can play a role in facilitating or enhancing interprovincial coordination in the areas of staffing, funding, and/or enhancing the profile of preventative efforts in the public or political realm. Any action taken will be contingent on the findings of our information gathering phase.

***EnCana proposal for additional gas well drilling in the Suffield National Wildlife Area***

This issue is considerably complex. There appears to be no clear action that we could formulate at this point to be effective as an intervener in the existing review process. After considerable discussion and updates we agreed to wait until the environmental impact assessment and its regulatory review was completed (possible by June or July). At that time an assessment would be made about a possible course of action.

The Conservation Committee welcomes new suggestions for advocacy action and would appreciate feedback from ACTWS members on its progress to date. Contact the Conservation Committee at [rippin@shaw.ca](mailto:rippin@shaw.ca).

## **Amphibian habitat stewardship conservation in Alberta**

**By Kris Kendell, ACA**

Wherever amphibians occur, they have an important role in the ecosystem and local culture. Amphibians are perhaps most famous for their biphasic life cycle and ability to live in two worlds – in water and on land. They appear in the myths, legends and fairytales the world over and are often portrayed as important natural and supernatural symbols in many cultures.

At one time, amphibians may have been seen as a relatively unimportant and uninteresting group of animals to many people. Today, amphibians are no longer being ignored. One reason is that people are becoming more aware of this fascinating group of animals through media attention and coverage of the alarming account of a wide spread global decline of many of the worlds nearly 6000 known amphibian species.



Tiger Salamander (K. Kendell)

Amphibians are creatures revered for their adaptability and can be found inhabiting the earth's wetlands, grasslands, rainforests, deserts, woodlands, high mountains and tundra. Of all creatures on the planet, amphibians have evolved some of the most astonishing array of survival strategies, of which many easily rival that of birds and mammals! However, these evolutionary adaptations, acquired over millions of years, have proven no match for modern day human impacts on the habitats and ecosystems of which amphibians depend.

The decline in amphibian populations can be seen here in Alberta. For example, the northern leopard frog has disappeared from much of its historical range in west central and southern Alberta and is currently listed as Threatened under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. In response to this measured decline, the Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development formally initiated recovery efforts for the leopard frog through the formation of the Alberta Northern Leopard Frog Recovery Team, in 2004. Shortly thereafter, the Alberta Northern Leopard Frog Recovery Plan 2005-2010 was drafted, approved and implemented.



Northern Leopard Frog (K. Kendall)

Through a multiple partnership approach, the plan aims to restore viable populations of leopard frogs throughout their historical range in Alberta through habitat management, information and education, research and reintroduction of populations into vacant areas of the species' historical range.

Habitat loss and modification are arguably the most pervasive threat to amphibians on a global and local scale. None withstanding, habitat loss is believed to be one of the factors associated with the decline of northern leopard frogs in Alberta. Landowners and producers can play an important role to alleviate habitat threats that impact northern leopard frogs in Alberta. In fact, the careful use and management of these habitats benefit wildlife and humans alike.

During the summer of 2006, the Alberta Conservation Association led the assessment of select leopard frog sites for stewardship opportunities. Confirmed breeding ponds at each site were targeted to receive possible stewardship attention because they represented areas of habitat that were definable and considered vital to the recruitment and maintenance of the local leopard frog populations of interest. All sites were managed by landowners that were interested in, and receptive of, implementing stewardship activities to help improve habitat conditions for leopard frogs on their properties. Of the sites evaluated, two were ultimately selected to receive stewardship projects involving fencing and the installation of an off-site water system, at one site.

The ultimate success of any mitigation activities at these stewardship sites may only be obvious when evaluated over the long-term. However, in the short-term, increased bank vegetation, and plant structure and diversity surrounding the breeding ponds will provide initial evidence of success. A more immediate success of the 2006 stewardship campaign was the fact that the landowners, land-managers and producers involved in these projects increased their awareness of the leopard frog. This awareness led to their cooperation in the initiation and successful implementation of stewardship activities on their land, allowing them contribute to the well-being and survival of northern leopard frog in Alberta.

## **Hibernation Sites of Western Toads in Alberta**

**By Constance Browne, Ph.D. Candidate, and Steve Symes, Research Technician**

**Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2E9**

Hibernation sites for western toads (*Bufo boreas*) may be limited in northern regions (e.g. Alberta) because toads are not freeze-tolerant. Wood frogs (*Rana sylvatica*) and chorus frogs (*Pseudacris maculata*) can withstand temperatures below 0°C. Toads however cannot, and must find a suitable site below the frost line. The hibernation locations of western toads in Canada have not been investigated. One of our research goals was to locate and describe hibernation sites of western toads in Alberta.

We radio-tracked 116 toads from 2004 to 2006 at three study sites: Elk Island National Park (2004), an agricultural site located in Strathcona County (2004 & 2006), and a site in the boreal forest north of Lac La Biche (2005). Transmitters weighing 1-2 g were attached to the toads using a waist belt. We captured toads in the spring while they were at breeding ponds and recorded their location and data describing their habitat use twice a week until they settled into their hibernation sites (October). Fifty individuals were followed to their hibernation sites.

All 50 toads selected pre-existing tunnels or cavities for hibernation. No toads dug into the sand or used ground squirrel tunnels even though these options were abundant. Western toads used cavities in peat hummocks, red squirrel middens, natural crevasses, decayed root channels, cavities under spruce trees, abandoned beaver lodges, and muskrat tunnels. The cavities in peat hummocks and decayed root channels seem to have been created by tree stumps and roots that decayed leaving cavities. Natural crevasses were found in two locations, one in Elk Island National Park and the other at the edge of a woodlot and agricultural field. These crevasses were 2 to 5 cm wide and went several meters deep, branching off in many directions for several meters. It appeared that these locations were dried up wetlands, and the crevasses were created by the soil cracking as the ground dried.

One of our most interesting discoveries was that the majority of the toads hibernated in communal hibernacula. At least 68 % of our toads radio-tracked were found in hibernation sites with others. In three cases, toads that were captured at the breeding pond and radio-tracked the entire season entered the same hibernation site. We believe that these occurrences are evidence that hibernation sites are limited; the odds of two toads moving independently the entire season then entering the same hibernation site by chance is unlikely.

Our research has provided the first information on western toad hibernation sites in Canada. It appears that hibernation sites are limited in this region; therefore, efforts should be made to protect them. Western toads can live in altered landscapes (such as agricultural sites and cutlines) providing essential habitat features are present. Development in areas where western toads occur could cause disproportionately large impacts on populations if essential habitat features are destroyed (e.g. hibernation sites or breeding ponds). Therefore, developers should aim to manage land in ways that allow human use but also protect toad populations. Although we have learned a great deal about hibernation sites, more research is needed so we can develop methods to easily identify them in the future.

**Acknowledgements:** Many thanks to our field assistants Carol Browne, Leanne Harris, Katie Thompson, Michelle Mark, Dru Osterhout, Leah McGraw, Eric Brownrigg, and volunteers. Cindy Paszkowski, Lee Foote, Erin Bayne, Ross Chapman, Kris Kendell, and the PT lab group provided useful advice throughout this project. We especially want to thank the landowners (Gaberts, Ginthers, Radkeys, Schepps, Sheers, Charles and Kelly, Strathcona County, EINP, AL-PAC, and the town of Lac La Biche) who gave us permission to conduct our research on their land. Financial and in-kind support was provided by The Friends of Elk Island Society; Parks Canada; NAWMP, ACA, ABSRP&W, MEC, CBAR, NSERC, ACCRU, AB Fish & Wildlife, and many people/programs at the University of Alberta.





**Chance: A toad wearing a radio-transmitter belt. Chance was tracked at our agricultural site from May to October in 2004.**



**Underground Crevasses.**



*An open letter the Alberta Chapter TWS members, from Margo Pybus*



WOW. What a tremendous honour! Recognition by peers is an extremely overwhelming event. To think that what I do has affected others in such a way as to have you tell me in such a grand and glorious manner that it was worthwhile.

It is an old cliché, but as true as ever, that science builds on previous efforts and generations perch on the shoulders of ancestors. Wildlife management in this province has some wonderful ancestors and prominent among them is Dr. William Rowan. For the youngsters reading this, take the time to read his biography – it is truly amazing what he was able to accomplish and the breadth of his talent, knowledge, and dedication to wildlife. To the oldsters who had the good fortune of knowing Dr. Rowan, you learned well, you taught well, you continue to provide a direct connection to the knowledge and passion of those early days when the seeds of current wildlife management in Alberta were planted firmly and infused with life. You nurtured those seeds, guided their growth, and helped them bear much fruit. For those of us in between, we have only to open our minds and our hearts, to soak in the wisdom, to apply sound principles, and to expand on new ideas, in order to push the bounds of good wildlife management and make those early seeds bear more and more fruit in the goals of wise stewardship of wild

species and spaces. From our viewpoint on the shoulders of previous achievers, we have the luxury of cumulative knowledge to guide our endeavors ... yet we can still dare to be different. And lead by example. The challenges facing our province demand no less as we strive to maintain the foundation pillars of sound social, economic, and environmental health.

I truly regret that I was not able to attend the meeting in Canmore. The annual ACTWS meetings continue to be our best opportunity for Alberta's wildlife professionals – past, current, and future – to maintain the critical connections that we all need and thrive on. Dedication to one's work can have its drawbacks, and missing the annual March gathering of the clan is a significant drawback to my decision to stay with our chronic wasting disease winter control programs. With the complexity of the program, the lack of good road connections from northeast to southwest, and freezing rain then snow on the day I should have traveled to the meeting, it seemed the right thing to do. Now, if only we could entice next year's organizers to choose a location somewhere on the eastern side of the province....!

All jests aside, I am thrilled by this award and grateful of your support. I am awed by the respect I have for you all and your choice to honour me among so many deserving members of the wildlife family in this province. I am humbled by the company I now keep among Rowan Award winners.

Respectfully

*Margo Pybus*

*Rowan Award recipient 2007*



## **2007 ACTWS Award Recipients**

### **ACTWS Service Awards:**

Dedicated Service Award – Dave Hobson

William Rowan Distinguished Service Award – Margo Pybus

### **Scholarships:**

Post Graduate Scholarship - Justin Pitt University of Alberta

Robert (Bob) Goddard Scholarship - Jason Calvert - Lakeland College

Ian Ross Undergraduate Scholarship - not awarded

### **Student Awards:**

Best Student Paper – Matthew Pyper

Best Student Poster – Nate Webb

## Job Postings

**Position:** Wildlife Biologist (with Golder Associates Ltd.)

**Location:** Calgary, Alberta

### Responsibilities:

Due to expanding operations, we are seeking the following individual to join our team of scientists and engineers in our Calgary office. As a Intermediate Wildlife Biologist, the candidate will be expected to:

- Co-ordinate and mentor junior staff
- Participate in and coordinate wildlife projects
- Effectively scope wildlife work requirements
- Write reports and proposals
- Manage small projects or components of large projects
- Ability to thrive in an atmosphere that requires cooperation and teamwork to provide quality, solution oriented consulting services to clients in Canada and internationally.

This position will initially involve working under the supervision of senior team members, with the opportunity to assume increasing autonomy and responsibility.

### Requirements:

Golder Associates Ltd. is a strong advocate of the team approach to undertaking projects and problem solving. Accordingly, the candidate will be expected to interface with and work in multi-disciplinary teams in which the contribution of each member is valued.

- University degree(s) in wildlife biology, ecology or related discipline
- Minimum 5 years experience in Wildlife Biology including habitat classification and evaluation
- Minimum 2 years project management and detailed report preparation and finalization
- Strong writing and communication skills
- Wildlife habitat modelling and statistics would be an asset
- Experience in environmental consulting would be an asset

Interested applicants are encouraged to apply on-line at [www.golder.com](http://www.golder.com) in the Career/Canada section. No phone calls please, only those candidates whose background closely matches the opportunity will be contacted for an interview.

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Competition will close on **May 31, 2007**

Thank you for your interest in Golder Associates Ltd.

## Upcoming Events

4th North American Reservoir Symposium:  
Balancing Fisheries Management and Water Uses  
for Impounded River Systems

June 6-9, 2007 / Atlanta, Georgia, USA

<http://www.sdafs.org/reservoir/symposium/index.html>

Greening of Industry Network Conference  
Sustainable Ecosystem and Social Stewardship

June 15-17, 2007 / Waterloo, Ontario

[http://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp\\_id=1685&p=5793](http://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=1685&p=5793)

XXVIII International Union of Game Biologists  
Congress

August 13-18, 2007 / Uppsala, Sweden

<http://www-conference.slu.se/iugb2007/>

Wild Trout IX: Sustaining Wild Trout in a  
Changing World

September 16-19, 2007 / West Yellowstone,  
Montana, USA

<http://www.wildtroutsymposium.com/>

For information on these and other conferences, check the following website.

<http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/library/conf.html>

## ACTWS Executive Contact List - 2007/8

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