

THE ALBERTA WILDLIFER

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ◆ ACTWS annual meeting

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

ACTWS meeting 2017 2

New Executive Director 3

Opinion: Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? 4

Bits and Bites 6

Master's opportunity 7

CWD in Suffield 8

Conservation committee update 10

Mesocarnivores: Wildlife 12

Upcoming events 13

ACTWS President's Report Larry Roy

Isn't the hoar frost, recently present across most of central and northern Alberta, fantastic! Speaking of fantastic, fantastic news that is: thanks to the donation from the Larry Norman Comin estate we finally were able to hire an Executive Director. We welcomed Delinda Ryerson aboard at the beginning of January and her impact has already been felt. She has been a tremendous help in advancing our planning for the upcoming ACTWS conference in Lac La Biche and in initiating the campaign ads you have all recently received.

Your executive approved and sent out letters to ministers regarding draft species at risk policy and caribou range plans. Kudos to Ken Crutchfield for initiating this action and especially to Kirby Smith for drafting our response. As expected, conference planning is now taking up most of our time. Unfortunately, we have been experiencing many problems with our website regarding registration and presentations and are working diligently to fix them. Let me know if more problems arise. Expect to see some major changes to our website over the next few months. The time to get presentations in, to register, to confirm accommodation, to nominate peers for awards and to volunteer to be on the executive is now! Hope to see all of you in Lac La Biche on March 17-19.



Mark
your
calendars

ACTWS Conference 2017

March 17-19, 2017 at the Bold Centre in Lac La Biche.

Plenary: "The good, the bad and the ugly effects of fire on our landscape".

Students: Don't forget to apply for scholarships. This meeting is a great place to present your first talk or poster.

All Members: Consider nominating a colleague for an ACTWS award.

Visit the website for details.

Fund-raising Auction 2017: What's your special donation item?

Hello fellow wildlifersit's not too early to be thinking about the fund-raising auction at our upcoming 2017 Alberta Chapter conference (March 17-19, Lac La Biche). Over the years we have raised many thousands of dollars in support of our various scholarship programs. At the heart of this auction is the spectrum of items that are donated by both sponsors and members.

So as you're going through your office, home or garage consider donating that piece of art, book or other items that you no longer need but that other wildlifers could enjoy. New or used we'll accept all donations J.

Now for the real challenge!!!! I know that many of our fellow biologists have special talents and pastimes that would generate wonderful auction items. We've been enjoying the bird carving talents of Blair Rippin for many years; my wife and I thoroughly enjoy the beautiful Rippin Wood Duck that we acquired at the 2012 ACTWS auction. It's been an honour for me to contribute Dzus custom knives ... I like to think that a piece of me accompanies each knife as it travels the world on hunting and fishing trips. In the past we've had wonderful trips donated for horseback riding trips, Sage Grouse research, and other adventures. Members have contributed salsa, honey, wine and a variety of hand-crafted art pieces of all shapes and sizes. **What's your special talent?** Would you like to donate a fishing, hiking, hunting or photography trip? I know from personal experience that we really treasure auction items that have that personal touch!!!!

There's lots of time to prepare a special item for contributing to our fundraising auction. Please give consideration to donating ... **contact Elston Dzus (780-689-8708 or ecdzus@mcsnet.ca)** if you would like to donate or bring your donation directly to the conference. And of course come with a full wallet to make a 'donation' and become the successful bidder of a special donation.

New Executive Director

Introducing **Delinda (Dee) Ryerson**

Dee has been managing natural resources, environmental projects and people in Alberta for more than 20 years, and anyone that knows her, knows how deeply passionate she is about environmental conservation and wise stewardship and management of natural resources.

Dee managed several projects as a Biologist and Environmental Project Manager with the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute. A couple of these projects include the development of a monitoring program to evaluate the ecological recovery of reclaimed oil and gas well sites, and a fish monitoring program as part of the Joint Oil Sands Monitoring Plan.

As the Manager of the Resource Conservation Function at Elk Island National Park, Dee developed and implemented numerous monitoring and management plans for the park. She worked on provincial fish harvest regulation changes, environmental impact assessments relating to the oil spill at Lake Wabamun, and several TransAlta projects as a Fisheries Biologist with Alberta Fish and Wildlife.

Dee has worked as an independent consultant supporting clients from non-profit organizations, and the provincial and federal governments. She served as a Wildlife Biologist for the Government of Alberta on species at risk, amphibian and reptile programs and as a Field Technician on a large, multi-disciplinary research project determining the effects of forest harvest on biodiversity in the aspen mixedwood forests of Alberta.

Delinda obtained the Project Management Certificate from NAIT and taught project management there in 2016. She has been a Wildlifer for more than 20 years, and is thrilled to be the ACTWS's first Executive Director. Dee also currently serves as the Executive Director for the Alberta Invasive Species Council.



C

Jason T Fisher

Past President, Alberta Chapter – The Wildlife Society

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?

There is an intangible magic to wild animals. Animals pour the foundations of our first childhood thoughts, shaping who we are, and how we think of ourselves¹. Even from an evolutionary perspective this is true: cave paintings suggest animals formed a core part of our infant species' fledging identity². It is no wonder that our personal view of animals, and our relationship with them, should invoke intense passion. In the field of wildlife conservation, divergent passions have evolved into heated discussions over how we value wildlife: as a shared resource for all to preserve and enjoy vs. a pooled resource from which we may individually harvest^{3,4}.

This debate is an inherently social one, with arguments grounded in personal values and ethics - absolute values being so difficult to measure scientifically^{5,6}. The divide between the two viewpoints often falls along political lines, and this divide is non-trivial, especially given the results of the most controversial election in recent history. A small – but to wildlife biologists, highly notable — manifestation of this political and cultural divide arises as the debate around the western Canadian wolf cull.



In Canada, Alberta was an early adopter of wolf culling to stem caribou declines, and British Columbia followed suit. Research on the efficacy of the cull showed that this management technique may (sometimes) be useful in slowing caribou population declines, but that longer-term landscape management is needed^{7,8}. This research and its conclusions fueled a marked controversy. Some researchers recoiled at the research as inhumane and unethical, extending their complaints towards the researchers themselves, demanding a retraction of the work⁹. Others have called instead for "compassionate conservation"¹⁰. (Some cull opponents have also published a position against the anti-predator fence as a viable option ¹¹). A stance against the wolf cull has been echoed by several conservation organizations, with a strident call to end the killing. NGOs in both provinces have shied from research on wolf cull effects, demanded by the membership they are bound to serve; likewise both governments were understandably quiet in their implementation of the cull.

The mounting controversy is certainly not unique to Alberta: the US wolf cull has for years been a bubbling cauldron of dispute¹². Recently I reviewed and supported an article using clever math to suggest wolf culls tend to increase wolf poaching, presumably by giving social license to people to 'help' the government effort¹³. The response ran the gamut from accusations of malignance to statistical incision.

Working in BC and Alberta with wildlife colleagues on both sides of the divide has provided me with a sweeping view of this debate. I personally know and respect the managers who make the hard decision to cull, the caribou researchers who study its efficacy, and the scientists who object to the research. It is difficult to reconcile the two positions. On one hand, taking a life is always a consequential decision. I have signed the death warrants for thousands of Newfoundland caribou, moose, and black bears. I think a profound sense of life's worth separates us from psychopathy. I respect that taking scores of wolf lives by bullet, wire, or poison is a melancholy prospect. On the other hand, wolves end caribou lives with impunity. Given the vast cost of landscape restoration to prevent caribou extirpation^{14,15} – and the impressive time lag before it is effective – predator control has apparently emerged as the best scientifically supported near-term means of protecting caribou lives. The long game requires habitat restoration, but that won't work in the immediate future. Seismic lines need time to regrow.

It has been argued that wolf predation is natural and human predation is not; humans as unnatural elements is a debate is fueled by fires well beyond the wolf cull¹⁶. Quantifying this inherent value is scientifically difficult, so it remains a personal judgment call, and ultimately a societal vote. We *can* however measure the relative value of wolves and caribou to the ecosystem, through research on trophic cascades and food webs – but to date this research does not exist. Some suggest the wolf cull is a pressure valve allowing resource extraction to continue; that by plugging this valve, the subsequent political and public pressure will build and force the restriction of resource extraction, with consequent benefits to climate and landscapes. This may be true, or it may not; we don't know. This kind of socio-economic decision-optimization research does not exist, but is desperately needed.

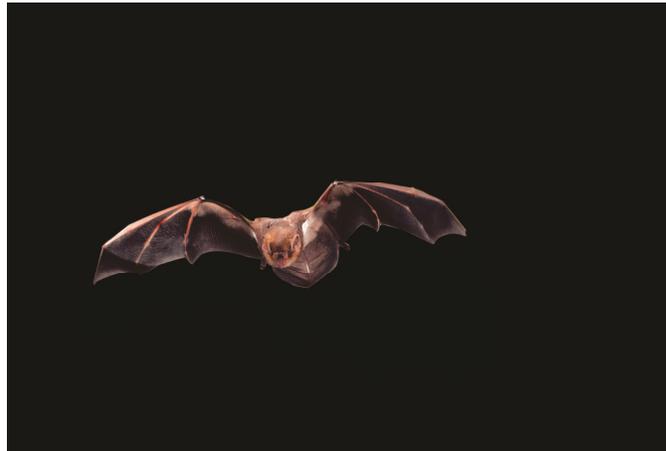
Governments are rightfully wary of broadcasting cull information, and NGOs are understandably wary of betraying their members' core values. Academia is supposed to remain impartial, though are decidedly not, on both sides; humanity and impartiality are mutually exclusive, even among scientists¹⁷. The battle of ethos—to cull or not to cull—is fought in the public arena and ultimately decided as votes. This decision is naturally influenced by emotion, but should be informed by *knowledge*, and the best knowledge we can discover¹⁸. As long as we are afraid of the decision we have made, we will never know if the wolf cull positively or negatively affects ecosystems, biodiversity, social systems, and economics. We can believe, but never really know, whether our core values—whichever way they lay—have done good or wreaked inadvertent harm.

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- 5 [Lewis, P.-M., Burns, G. L. & Jones, D. Response and Responsibility: Humans as apex predators and ethical actors in a changing societal environment. *Food Webs* \(2016\).](#)
- 6 [Callicott, J. B. Whither conservation ethics? *Conservation Biology* **4**, 15-20 \(1990\).](#)
- 7 [Hervieux, D., Hebblewhite, M., Stepnisky, D., Bacon, M. & Boutin, S. Managing wolves \(*Canis lupus*\) to recover threatened woodland caribou \(*Rangifer tarandus caribou*\) in Alberta. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* **92**, 1029-1037 \(2014\).](#)
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- 15 [Hebblewhite, M. Billion dollar boreal woodland caribou and the biodiversity impacts of the global oil and gas industry. *Biological Conservation* **206**, 102-111 \(2017\).](#)
- 16 [Vining, J., Merrick, M. S. & Price, E. A. The distinction between humans and nature: Human perceptions of connectedness to nature and elements of the natural and unnatural. *Human Ecology Review* **15**, 1 \(2008\).](#)
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Bits and Bites

Opportunity to visit TWS Annual Conference

The Leadership Institute is now accepting applications for its Class of 2017! Ten early-career professionals will receive leadership training, mentoring, and a travel grant to attend TWS' Annual Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in September 2017. For more information visit <http://wildlife.org/next-generation/leadership-institute/> The application deadline is 17 March 2017 and can be **submitted online**.



Instructors needed! Junior Forest Warden National Campout

July 1 – 8, 2017 , Blood Indian Park, Big Stone, Alberta.

Our committee is looking for all presenters or instructors that fit our pillars of study; forestry, ecology, outdoor skills and leadership. Our participants range from wee ones to adults and all in between. Feel free to specify your target participants. There is also an artisan fair if anyone has a product they would like display for sale.

Financial compensation is available.

Contact: **Treva Piekema** <trevap65@gmail.com>

MSc opening in Conservation Biology: Forest Fragmentation & Plant Ecology

Organization: Applied Conservation Ecology Lab (www.ace-lab.org)

Dept. of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta (<http://www.rr.ualberta.ca/>)

Position: M.Sc. student

Apply By: 31 March 2017

Start Date: 1 May 2017

Type: Study scope pre-determined. Fully grant funded¹.

Description: The Applied Conservation Ecology Lab at the University of Alberta is seeking a motivated prospective graduate student with a background in ecology to join a dynamic team of researchers studying the effect of forest fragmentation on the biodiversity of our boreal forests in order to better manage and restore human footprints. The successful candidate will embark on a fully-funded, two-year M.Sc. program in Conservation Biology at the University of Alberta beginning in May 2017, consisting of graduate coursework² and a research thesis project focusing on understanding how linear forest disturbances influences the expansion of invasive plant species in Northern Alberta's boreal forests.

Fieldwork for this project will be conducted across two summer field seasons (2017, 2018) from field bases in Fort McMurray and Conklin. The student will collect, analyze and synthesize data from seed dispersal experiments and remote sensing tools on seismic lines to quantify the relationship between environmental factors relating to fragmentation and invasive plant colonization. Additionally, the role of motorized traffic in spreading invasive plant through seed transferral and suppression of native plant regeneration will be investigated.

Supervisor: Dr. Scott Nielsen (<http://www.ace-lab.org/3G/scott.php>)

Qualifications: B.Sc. in a biological sciences or related field (e.g. Ecology, Botany, Conservation Biology, Environmental Science, Plant Science); Minimum 3.0 GPA for last 2 years, or equivalent.

Assets: Good GPA; skills in GIS, statistics and/or plant ecology; outdoor/field experience; full driver's license, strong self-motivation and teamwork.

Instructions: Please submit a cover letter describing your research interests, experience, and qualifications for this position, a curriculum vitae, and contact information for three professional references. Email your cover letter, CV, and reference information to Dr. Scott Nielsen at scottn@ualberta.ca with the subject line "MSc in forest fragmentation and invasive plants". While we thank all applicants for their interest, only selected applicants will be contacted for an interview.

¹ Research funding will cover research expenses as well as a 2-year M.Sc. student stipend. However, students are still encouraged to apply for other grants/awards as they are highly beneficial and meritorious.

² See department website for details: <http://www.rr.ualberta.ca/GraduateProgram/GraduateCourses.aspx>

Margo
Pybus

Wildlife
Bulletin
#17

CWD in Suffield

Since 1998 Alberta has conducted surveillance for chronic wasting disease (CWD) in wild cervids. As part of the program, over 1800 elk harvested by hunters at Canadian Forces Base Suffield (CFB Suffield) since 2012 have been tested. In January 2017 one bull elk from Suffield was confirmed positive with CWD.

Chronic wasting disease is associated with fatal changes to proteins in the brain and lymph tissues of infected individuals of the deer family - deer, moose, elk, caribou. In Canada, CWD occurs in wild deer in some parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta. General information about the disease can be found on our wildlife disease web pages.

In 1998 Alberta began surveillance for CWD by using hunter-harvested big game. The program is focused on testing deer since they are the primary reservoir of infection in wild cervids, but other species can be included.

Hunting on CFB Suffield began in 2012 largely as a response to the expanding local population of elk on and around the base. There is no recreational hunting of deer so in order to look for CWD we test a subsample of the elk harvested on the base.

In 2012-2014, when harvest at Suffield was relatively low, it was mandatory to submit the head or appropriate samples of all elk harvested so they could be tested for CWD. As harvest goals were increased, it was not necessary to test all animals and in February 2015 we changed to voluntary submission of heads or samples.

Specific to the recent case:

- CWD was confirmed in a bull elk harvested at CFB Suffield in November 2016
- the risk of CWD occurring in wild elk is low, even when they share range with high numbers of infected deer
- CWD was identified in deer in the South Saskatchewan River valley near CFB Suffield as early as 2006
- CWD is known to occur in mule deer and some white-tails in areas all around CFB Suffield
- there is no current plan to remove additional elk from CFB Suffield other than through the annual hunter harvest



CWD and Hunters

- the risk that CWD occurs in free-ranging elk in Alberta is very low.
- risk of spillover of CWD from infected deer occurs only where elk share range with deer in the eastern border regions of the province.
- human health authorities have thoroughly reviewed CWD and conclude that there is no evidence of CWD in people, even in areas such as Colorado and Wyoming where

continued.....

the disease has existed in wildlife for many many decades.

- health authorities recommend that animals known to have any prion disease, which includes CWD, should not be eaten.

PRECAUTIONS

If you are concerned about CWD, wear waterproof gloves whenever you handle the internal tissues of your harvested animal.

Additional precautions are provided on various provincial or state wildlife agency web pages.

It is always good practice to cook game meat well, until the juices run clear.

If you want to avoid infected animals, learn about CWD and plan your hunts accordingly. For example, elk and moose in Alberta are the least likely to have CWD, mule deer bucks in eastern regions are the most likely. Check out our CWD web pages for more details.

If you harvest an emaciated animal anywhere in Alberta, contact any Fish and Wildlife office.

Summary

CWD is a rare occurrence in wild elk. However, spillover from infected deer populations can occur.

Additional Information

Government of Alberta, Chronic Wasting Disease aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-diseases/chronic-wasting-disease/

My Wild Alberta, CFB Suffield Elk Hunt www.mywildalberta.com/Hunting/GameSpecies/CFBSuffieldElkHunt.aspx



Mule deer bucks are the most likely to have CWD, particularly bachelor groups.

Both of these deer had CWD.



Ken
Crutchfield

Conservation Committee update

Committee members include: Mark Boyce, Ken Crutchfield (Chair), Kristie Derkson, Lorne Fitch, Matthew Pyper, Larry Roy

Committee attention has been focused on the following subjects.

Service to the Community

1. Alberta Game Policy Advisory Committee

–ACTWS reps: Larry Roy & Evie Merrill

ACTWS Exec agreed to send letter to Minister concerning AEP decision to disregard committee recommendations for proposed changes to hunting regulations. When composed the letter will be posted on ACTWS website

2. Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee

–ACTWS reps: Doug Collister & Kirby Smith

<http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/species-at-risk/default.aspx>

Still no change since report in last newsletter. The Committee last met in March 2015.

The previously mentioned Government wide review of Committees, Boards, Commissions as well as Delegated Administrative Organizations (Alberta Conservation Association) etc. remains an enigma.

3. Alberta Pacific Local Advisory Committee

– ACTWS rep -Kristie Derksen

–no report.

4. Alberta Fisheries Management Round Table

– ACTWS rep –Ken Crutchfield

(<http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/fisheries-management/alberta-fisheries-management-roundtable.aspx>)

Most of work relating to Round Table is being done away from any from the RT.

Participated in December 6th meeting with AEP ADMs responsible for Operations and Policy. Concerns focused on harvest regulations and accountability for open and transparent examination of scientific information used for decision making. Positive meeting, however there continue to be questions over accessibility, timeliness of info availability and response to calls for changes in harvest regulations.

5. North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (<https://www.nswa.ab.ca/>)

–ACTWS rep –Ken Crutchfield

–GOA AEP has made a 3 year commitment to stable funding of Watershed Public Advisory Committee however funding of specific committees will alter based on submission of annual work plans. Water Quality Forum scheduled for Sherwood Park April 6, Agora Center. Free admission open to public.

Still Stirring in the Background

SIMMERING - Suffield Elk Management

–ACTWS letter to Ministers of Defence (Canada) and Environment- Parks (Alberta) elicited responses from

federal and provincial ministers. Access the ACTWS website under Advocacy to view letters. Local advisory group engaged. Is there an ACTWS member in the Medicine Hat area who would be willing to resent ACTWS and report on work? Contact a member of Executive or me (kvcrutch@telus.net) if you are interested.

continued.....

COLD - Alberta Environment and Parks intention to update the 1982 Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta does not appear to be moving anywhere fast

–key contact: Sue Cotterill

- Nothing to report.

BACK BURNER - Alberta Grazing Leases no changes in status

(<http://www.oag.ab.ca/webfiles/reports/OAG%20March%202015%20Report.pdf>).

<http://www.albertalandinstitute.ca/research/research-projects/project/grazing-leases>

-ACTWS have been contacted by a representative of the Alberta Wilderness Association who are actively examining this matter. Nothing more to report.

PERCOLATING –POLICIES UNDER REVIEW- Canada Species at Risk Act

–Kirby Smith completed a review and the ACTWS Executive forwarded letter to review panel. A copy of the letter can be viewed on the ACTWS website. Policy review included:

1. Policy on Critical Habitat Protection on Non-federal Lands
2. Policy on Protecting Critical Habitat with Conservation Agreements under Section 11 of the Species at Risk Act
3. Policy on Survival and Recovery
4. Policy Regarding the Identification of Anthropogenic Structures as Critical Habitat under the Species at Risk Act
5. Approach to the Identification of Critical Habitat under the Species at Risk Act when Habitat Loss is Not Believed to be a Significant Threat to the Survival or Recovery of the Species
6. Species at Risk Act Permitting Policy
7. Listing policy for Terrestrial Species at Risk

Members are encouraged to take the initiative to consider submission of their personal

view points to the SAR Registry <http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/involved/consultation/>

The following policies were also recently released:

A. Range Plan Guidance for Woodland Caribou, Boreal Population (Final)

http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=2993

B. The Species at Risk Act Policy Principles (Final)

https://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=2990

C. Draft –Little Smoky and A La Peche Caribou Range Plan

- Kirby Smith completed a review which resulted in a letter being sent by ACTWS Executive to Alberta AEP- ADM Policy and Planning. A copy of letter can be viewed on ACTWS website.

Kudos to ACTWS member - Lorne Fitch

Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Recreational Fishing Award

–Cows and Fish Program 2016

Lorne Fitch and Barry Adams conceived and built a community based riparian habitat protection initiative that has finally garnered the national recognition that had until only recently been acknowledged internationally.

REMEMBER - Do not underestimate the value of your input into wildlife conservation matters. Take a stand and engage in public forums. Introduce yourself to your local elected officials and offer your insight. Professionalism is not confined to working hours.

Wildlife and Land Use in the Cooking Lake Moraine

Protected areas are used across Canada to conserve resources and protect biodiversity. However, many of these protected areas are near dense human habitation, which presents a conflict between human land use and wildlife conservation. How can we better share the land with wildlife?

Alberta's Cooking Lake Moraine (CLM) is a fantastic example of an area where humans and wildlife coexist. Come find out how remote cameras and genetics tell a story about how wildlife use the landscape and how this can help us learn to coexist with these species.

A presentation by Frances Stewart, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Victoria



Event information

What: a free public event, with free refreshments

When: Thursday, March 16, 2017; doors open at 7 PM, presentation at 7:30.

Where: Council Chambers at the Strathcona Community Centre (the same building that houses the Strathcona County Library). There will be signs in the building directing people to the event.

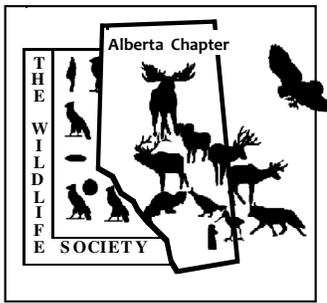
Who: Public event, all ages are welcome; mix and mingle following the presentation.

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Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society

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Don't forget we are also
on Facebook

Upcoming Events

The Wildlife Society:

The 24th Annual Conference will be held in Albuquerque, New Mexico on September 23-27, 2017.

The Society for Northwestern Vertebrate Biology

Arcata, California on Feb27-Mar 3, 2017

<http://thesnvb.org/annual-meeting/>

Do you know of an event that should be advertised here?

If so, contact one of the editors.

Footnotes from the Editor



It is going to be another great conference, I look forward to seeing you there!