

Society of Grasslands Naturalists  
(Draft) Minutes of General Meeting- November 24, 2015  
Police Point Park

1. Call to Order: 7:07 pm, Hugh Armstrong – Acting Chair, Betty Rainville – Secretary
2. Review and Adoption of Minutes of General Meeting October 27, 2015: Motion Carried
3. Exciting Sightings: Corlaine Gardner noticed purple crocus blooming two weeks ago near Empress, Alberta. Betty saw a Snowy Owl on a fence post near Rosemary in early November.
4. Treasurer's Report: Eileen away.
5. Correspondence: Eileen away.
6. Priority Business:
  - a. Bird Tales Update: Dee Armstrong said John Acorn gave his contact information as a possible speaker at the AGM in March 2016.  
Thank you to Lisa Bey for the great job at Masterpiece Retirement on November 12. The stuffed pine cones in the courtyard were a great success. The goal for 2016 is to have Masterpiece take over the programs without GN help. Sessions at Meadow Ridge start in February and March, 2016. December 10 is the last session at Masterpiece and involves hanging a bird collage. Thanks to Ian and Angela for volunteering.
  - b. MH Community Foundation Endowment Fund: The contract is signed and needs to be returned to GN. Trish from the Community Foundation will write an article for the next Chronicle.
7. Interpretive Program Report: Corlaine reported the IP is busy with school groups. The Strathcona Art Studio display opened November 8 with 80 people attending. It will remain up through December but will be taken down the first week in January, 2016.  
The Saturday morning Halloween Story Walk saw volunteers in costume along the walk. 140 people attended the event in 1 and 1/2 hours.  
Corlaine mentioned the Annual Christmas Hayride on December 6 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm sponsored by the Lions Club .Please consider putting your name on the volunteer list, since helpers for inside crafts will be needed if the weather is cold. In conclusion, Corlaine introduced the new MHIP bookkeeper. Welcome Louise Sjøvold!.
8. Committee Reports:
  - a. Issues Committee: 1. John reported that Cathy Linowski and Lisa James have commenced Baby's Breath Germination tests at the Medicine Hat College. Results will be known by early spring.  
2. GN members are encouraged to attend the Prairie Conservation & Endangered Species Conference in Saskatoon from February 16-18, 2016. The website is [www.pcesc.ca](http://www.pcesc.ca) For more information, talk to Rob Gardner, Marty Drut or Martha Munz Gue who has attended previously.  
3. "Change the Climate", by Alberta Ecotrust will be held February 25-27, in Calgary.
  - b. Indoor Program: The January speaker has not been confirmed yet, but "Insects in Amber" may be a possible topic. February and March topics may deal with the Swift Fox, or Alberta Parks Grazing Policy in the Spring Creek area. Or John Acorn, Nature Nut, may speak at the AGM in March.
  - c. Field Trips: Gary Martin and John Slater reported seeing many Canada geese on the river on the November 21 "Tracking Event" at Police Point Park. They were surprised to see possible moose tracks that morning. Gary is leading "A Walk in the Woods" on Saturday, December 19 to cut Christmas trees and limit some growth in the Upper Plateau at the same time. Meet at Elkwater Visitor Centre at 9 am. People may donate their trees to charity if they wish.

- d. Fund Raising Committee update: Hugh said that Co-op receipts are being accepted by Anne or may be left at the Nature Centre.  
Please note that volunteers are still needed for the Casino from February 18-19. There is a volunteer list at the Interpretive Centre. Again, helpers do not have to be GN members. There will be 4 shifts needed over the 2 days, with 5 people per shift. That makes a total of 20 volunteers needed.
- e. Medicine Hat Operations Committee: 1. As Corlaine mentioned previously, a new bookkeeper for MHIP has been hired.  
2. Note that a motion was approved at the last GN Board meeting that GN pay 100% of MHIP Employee OASSIS benefits effective January 2016 contingent on funds continuing from the City.
- f. Birding Trails project update: Milt Spitzer mentioned there was a meeting held at his house today. Colton Prins attended and presented some interesting ideas on handheld devices. Another new member, Mackenzie Fai, is planning to attend future meetings. Paul continues to work on the maps. The group is now on Draft 8. Trail 2 on Sauder Reservoir will be printed in the next Chronicle along with a write-up. Phil is keeping a record of volunteer hours for this project.

#### 9. New Business:

Corlaine read a letter from the City regarding taking out a weir by Marlborough Coulee. They asked if GN was possibly "maintaining" the small rock dam on the creek. No one at the meeting was aware of rocks being moved. John knows the area in question.

#### 10. Other Business:

- a. Pamphlets on Wildflowers and Butterflies: Dave is looking at a website on Butterflies. He may offer a talk on Butterflies in late winter or early spring.
- b. Donations: John noted that we need a policy written up by the Governance Committee, perhaps early in the new year, regarding the idea of a phone call and letter of appreciation to donors.
- c. Nomination of further Honorary Life-Time members: The Board recommended previously that the Governance Committee put together a policy on how a GN member can nominate someone; then bring their ideas to the Board. This will be brought up at another Governance Committee meeting since the committee hasn't met since June or July 2015.
- d. Next GN Board Meeting: Tuesday, December 1, 6:30 pm at Hugh's home.
- e. Annual Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count followed by a Potluck Dinner: Sunday, December 20. To register or for more information contact the Nature Centre (403 529-6225). Marty is in charge of Bird Count. The potluck dinner at 5:30pm is held in place of the December General meeting.
- f. Next GN General Meeting and presentation: January 26, 2016 at 7 pm at the Nature Centre.
- g. Adjournment: 7:40 pm with 17 people attending.
- h. Refreshment Break
- i. Program 8:00 pm. Joel Nicholson with an update on the Greater Sage Grouse. 18 people attended this presentation.

**Summary of Greater Sage Grouse Presentation made by Joel Nicholson**  
Summarized by B. Rainville

There has been a severe decline in Alberta, Saskatchewan and other parts of the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) range. They have been extirpated, or are locally extinct, in British Columbia. Numbers in North and South Dakota are on the decline too. The Greater Sage-Grouse area in Alberta has dropped from 40 thousand km<sup>2</sup> to only 4 thousand km<sup>2</sup> in the southeastern corner of the province, meaning 42 Townships of land equals the Greater Sage-Grouse area. In Alberta there is an approximate 98% decline in total numbers from historic populations of males at leks since their highest recorded population estimates in 1968. Numbers have gone from 600 to 650 in the 1960's down to a low of 13 male birds displaying on leks in the Spring of 2011 and 2012 in Alberta. (A lek is the flat area of ground where males dance, strut, and make sounds to impress females and challenge rival males during courtship). The Greater Sage-Grouse are sensitive to landscape change, roads, power lines and landscape development. There is habitat fragmentation and habitat loss here as well in the United States. West Nile virus has also caused a decline in numbers.

The Greater Sage-Grouse was taken off the Alberta hunting list in 1995. In 2002 the Greater Sage-Grouse recovery team was formally delegated the responsibility of drafting a provincial recovery plan for Alberta. In 2005, this team produced the Alberta Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Plan 2005-2010. Despite this plan the population continued to decline. A translocation program was initiated in 2011 using genetically similar birds from Montana to increase the Alberta breeding population. After approval was obtained an initial translocation of 9 hens from Montana to Alberta, in 2011, was conducted. The next year 29 hens and 3 males were translocated. The translocation agreement numbered approximately 150 birds from 2011-2015. A later plan, The Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan 2013-2018, outlines actions needed to prevent further declines in the Greater Sage-Grouse population, conserve its habitat, and ultimately to recover the population in Alberta.

In order to explain translocation, Joel described how a capture of the adult bird is carried out with one person holding a spotlight while a second helper dips a soft net over the bird's head. Each bird is then checked by a veterinarian and samples are taken in order to test for disease. ARGOS solar powered Global Positioning System (GPS) transmitters, which give Joel 4 data points per day, are then attached to the bird leaving the wings free and unencumbered for flying. The Sage-Grouse are not to be in transit for more than 36 hours. After the birds are moved to an active lek site the transmitters are activated just before sunrise. Helpers must watch for predators at the release site for obvious reasons. Just around sunrise the birds are released. Notes are taken to see the direction of each bird's flight, distance covered at flight, and behaviour and strength of the bird.

Monitoring confirmed that 2 out of 8 translocated hens initiated nesting in 2011, 11 out of 21 hens in 2012, 4 out of 8 in 2013, and 3 out of 3 hens in 2014. The majority of nests have occurred in proximity to the leks where the hens were released. Joel mentioned researchers had recorded and mapped the flight of a Greater Sage-Grouse hen that had travelled a surprising 1000 km. in 3 months and eventually returned to the lek where she had been released.

Joel listed some of the current happenings as we move forward:

1. Since Greater Sage-grouse are sensitive to landscape change, roads, chronic noise, power lines and landscape development, habitat restoration is an important factor to their success. Fortunately for these birds, around 2,400 acres of land has been secured by Alberta Conservation Association, Pheasants Forever, and some other non-profit conservation groups.
2. Joel noted that reclamation of old sites from the oil and gas industry. Strategic reclamation, is being encouraged. The City of Medicine Hat is co-operating with the rehabilitation of 52 sites.
3. Hopefully, increased partnerships with diverse groups with the common goal of exchanging information and coordinating research and management