

**Society of Grassland Naturalists
Minutes of General Meeting – January 28, 2014
Police Point Park**

1. **Call to Order** at 7:07 pm. Anne Bernhardt – Chair; Barry Anderson – Secretary.
2. **Minutes:** There were no December minutes to review due to the Christmas Bird Count and Pot Luck Supper activities during that month.
3. **Exciting Sightings:** This month’s sightings include a merlin and a dark-phased gyrfalcon; the falcon was spotted by Milt Spitzer east of Medicine Hat on Highway 41A.
4. **Newspaper Clips:** A variety of newspaper clips were shared on recent topics involving problem cougars in Elkwater and the lawsuit between the federal government and the City of Medicine Hat regarding the endangered sage grouse.
5. **Treasurer’s Report:** – Eileen thanked those individuals who helped manage her treasurer’s duties during her recent vacation. She provided the current balances as of December 31, 2013, for each of the following accounts:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GN Servus Account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chequeing Savings ING Savings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$9979.07 \$4935.08 <u>\$6087.36</u> \$21,001.51
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IP Account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pipit grant City money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$21,550.00 <u>\$66,500.00</u> Current balance unavailable

An up-dated membership count was not ready at this time but should be available for the February issue of the Chronicle. Eileen distributed receipts to those individuals who have recently paid for their 2014 GN membership. Members are encouraged to receive the monthly Chronicle electronically since Canada post will soon increase postage fees.

6. **Priority Business:**
 - No report from the Governance Committee due to Paul’s absence.
 - From the Issues Committee, John provided a copy of the GN response to the Draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. Marty spoke briefly about the Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Strategies Plan. Individuals are asked to review and respond to this plan online before February 18: <http://esrd.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/species-at-risk/species-at-risk-publications-web-resources/birds/documents/SAR-SageGrouse-RecoveryActionSummary-Apr2013.pdf> The next Issues Committee meeting will be held on Monday, February 3 @ 9:30 am at Martha’s house.
 - The next Budget Committee meeting will be held on Monday, February 3 @ 1:00 pm hosted by Paul.
 - Corlaine reported from the Interpretive Program that the current high school art display “Young Artists Inspired by Nature” will be dismantled on January 27 to make room for the next display “Close to Home” by local artist Fran Lauzon which opens February 2 @ 2:00 pm at the Nature Centre. The “Winter Storywalk” which began January 19 has been very popular so far! Corlaine reminded everyone of the up-coming Family Day festivities at Police Point Park approaching soon. As well, the current display at the Esplanade entitled “Canada’s Waterscapes” will soon be replaced with “Ice Age Mammals”.
 - No recent Field Trips to report on from Gary; continue to check the Chronicle for up-coming events. A possible spring field trip to visit the city’s recent solar energy project is being considered. GN may hold a movie night in the near future at the Nature Centre to watch “The Big Year” – a 2011 comedy film about three men on a quest for a “big year” - a competition among

birders to see who can see and identify the greatest number of species of birds in North America in a calendar year.

- Martha reported for Nature Alberta that Petra Rowell, Executive Director, plans a spring visit to our city and a possible meeting with GN. Martha reiterated the need for GN to initiate a Young Naturalists Club – a nature focussed program with the goal of teaching children aged 5-13 and their families about nature.
- Martha also reported for SEAWA that its AGM will be held March 31, with its main focus to recruit an Executive Director.
- Rob provided a preview of the Indoor Program speakers for the next few months.

7. Other Business:

- The Fundraising Committee requires volunteers to assist with this committee. Contact Hugh Armstrong for more details.
- A reminder that the next casino workshop will be held March 11 at the Holiday Inn Express from 9:00 am -1:00 pm.
- The next GN Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 4 @ 7:00 pm hosted by Judy and Barry Anderson.

8. Attendance tonight – 25 for the business portion and 65 for the indoor program.

9. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm

10. Indoor Program:

**Cougar Management in Elkwater
“Reconciling Recreation and Wildlife”**

Peter Swain, District Park Manager for the Cypress Hills for the past five years, used his Masters of Science Degree and overall knowledge of cougar behaviour, to provide information to the public regarding the cougar problems incurred in recent months in Elkwater and area. Peter began his presentation by announcing that cougars have not been introduced in the Cypress Hills contrary to what many people believe or have learned through social media. Instead, cougars are a dispersing population and have consequently established a “temporary home range” within the park. Cougars thrive best in rough forest that is adjacent to prairie settings and have been known to travel hundreds of kilometres during their nocturnal sojourns. The park currently hosts a population of 15-20 adult cougars with confirmed successful breeding of cougars as early as 2006.

This past November and December 2 juvenile cougars were found preying on small dogs and barnyard cats in the park and surrounding area making it necessary to destroy them. A third cougar, a large male, was treed and killed when its scent inadvertently crossed the path of the much younger animals during the search. Peter made it clear that relocation of the problem animals was not an option and relocation is generally not supported by science research.

Peter outlined three solutions to help reconcile future problems with cougars in the park:

1. **Increase winter use of the park.** More people-activity generally decreases cougar-activity in the same area. Interestingly, it will take from 8-18 people usage per day to instigate any real change in cougar activity.
2. **Continue engaging cottage owners.** Cottage owners need to become “cougar smart” by enclosing the bottoms portions of their buildings, discontinuing the use of bird-feeders and removing bottom branches of trees on their property which can also act as a refuge for cougars.
3. **Educate the public.** Visitors, community residents and area ranchers all need to be aware of the current cougar presence in the park. Ultimately, people behaviours can be changed but animal behaviours are much more difficult to alter.