

Society of Grasslands Naturalists  
**Issues Committee Annual Report 2020-2021**

The Issues Committee carried out their duties during the pandemic via email and physically-distanced outdoor walks. The members of the committee are John Slater, Martha Munz Gue, Gerry Ehlert, Paula Munro, Tina Regehr, Marty Drut, Mary Ann Ririe, and Phil Horch (ex officio).

The issues are too many for one volunteer committee to address. If a GN member identifies an issue that they would like to pursue, the GN Issues Committee will work with them on that issue. These are some of the issues we have tackled this year.

1. A big issue is a lack of **awareness and appreciation** of local ecosystems and species, and indeed even getting outside and connected to nature. This includes awareness of the alarming decline in populations of insects, birds, frogs, (etc. etc.) and whole ecosystems. The Weekly Nature Walks and the Adopt a Pond program provide REGULAR opportunities for participants to enjoy nature close to home. GN members who have adopted a pond include Ian Langille, Paula Munro, Ian & Angela Turner, Pat Ward, Kelly Blair, Gerry Ehlert, Margie Booyans, Holly Mackie, Nicole Nemo, and perhaps more. GN's wildflower brochure and website, the butterfly website, the Birding Trails booklet all help support the learning of curious participants. Ger Ehlert, GN representative on the Urban Environment and Recreation Advisory Board (UERAB) also brought awareness of the value of conserving grasslands to the City Parks & Recreation Department. However, in 2020 UERAB was dissolved. There currently is no mechanism for environmental advisement and no environmental master plan for the City. This points to an even greater need for increasing efforts for awareness and appreciation. Through the "Scenic Views" web-based project, Gerry Ehlert (with the help of John Slater, Paul Thibault, and Len Moser) is hoping to raise awareness of the enormous personal and planetary value of native grasslands including ecological goods and services, economic environmental and health and wellness value of our native grasslands and riparian areas. An EcoTrust grant has been approved for this project.

2. The **Climate and Biodiversity Emergencies** are two huge global emergencies that we tried (without much success) to address through engagement in the process of the development of the new Municipal Development Plan. In the fall of 2019, we participated in the Climate Conversations (Fridays at Four) at a cafe until the pandemic moved us to 'Kinette Korner' for the summer. The fall weather chased us home, so the Climate Conversations now continue on zoom every other week on Thursday evenings, supported by the use of Slack technology so that people interested in various threads of the conversation can continue the conversation or catch up. We are looking forward to supporting the development of the Symposium on Climate Change that GN president, Phil Horch is working on. Rob Gardner has established a local group under the "Transition" umbrella. Check out the website and volunteer to help with the Transition garden. A new program at the College will focus on Agro Ecology. GN enjoyed a presentation by the program director, Brent Smith, who also coordinates the MHC restoration program, now that Cathy Linowski has retired. Ian and Angela Turner and Martha have registered with "Future Ground" network, which is connecting and training local groups so that they become more effective and realize some of the synergy that can result when collaborating.

3. **Trash, Litter.** Ideally everyone would take care of their own waste. But unfortunately, every spring when the snow melts, the accumulation of careless tossing of waste over the winter is exposed. I talked with Natalie in Parks and Recreation about the possibility of users of City operated sports venues be asked to include, in their warm-up routines, a round of trash pick up around their venues. She was favourable to the idea; I don't know how her test run turned out. Happily, the Skateboarder Club has adopted the area near the creek between College Hill and the Highway. Also over 50 people are connected to the Adopt a Pond initiative through which 19 ponds and riparian areas are cleaned up every week or two. Groups that

have adopted ponds (or creek edges) include Skateboarders, Education Instructors at MHC, Unity Lutheran Youth, MH Council of Canadians, SEAWA. While it is not the main focus of our Wednesday Nature Walks, litter gets picked up by participants, as we enjoy nature throughout the city. The star picker upper is John Slater who must have picked up truckloads of trash by now, leading by example. Paula Munro is leading trash pick up in Redcliff.

**4. Invasive Species** Led by Gerry Ehlert, in collaboration with GN, IP, City Parks & Rec, SEAWA, MHC Restoration program, and AB Invasive Species Council

2019 Workshop @ Nature Center with broad range of presenters.

2020 Eurasian Buckthorn were flagged throughout the city (Ger and John); invasives are reported on EDDMaps (Alberta), over 600 Russian olive saplings by river in Harlow district and Connaught Pond were pulled (SEAWA & GN).

2021 Workshops are planned (Ger and Marty) for Invasive species ID and reporting for home owners and pond adopters. Pond adopters report invasive species at the 20 ponds that have been adopted. Russian olive saplings were cut at Leinweber Pond (SEAWA & GN).

**5. Environmental footprint of outdoor recreation.** Relationships are established with \_ cycling club (Ger and John) and with Skateboarders Association. Skateboarders have adopted the edge of the creek running through Kin Coulee Park. Paula has produced and posted signs to encourage appreciation of the natural spaces next to the trails.

**6. Water, Ponds, Riparian Health.** Led by Martha. GN/SEAWA collaborative projects: removal of Russian olive from river riparian area in Harlow district. Adopt a Pond Initiative launched at SEAWA's Earth Day "equinox" clean-up at Connaught Pond. First pond adopted March 8th; as of the mid May, 20 ponds and riparian areas were adopted involving over 50 individuals. Over 80 people participated in spring clean up of the ponds. Concern for downstream **water quality** if coal mining proceeds and expands in eastern slopes, resulted in letter to premier by GN president. Work on riparian restoration projects by SEAWA are supported by GN volunteers who help summer staff with watering new plantings.

**7. Air.** Monthly air quality reports can be accessed on the Palliser Airshed Society website. Air quality in SE Alberta tends to very good. GN nominee David Gue continues to serve on the Palliser Airshed Board filling the "public" chair.

**8. Governments. Change in Coal, Parks, Solar and Wind Farms, and Irrigation Expansion,** in some cases affect natural spaces beyond SE Alberta that nevertheless affect people living in SE Alberta. The Issues Committee and the GN Board have discussed these issues, followed the emails from CPAWS, AWA, NATURE Alberta, and others, and participated in local discussions with Council of Canadians, and Climate Conversations. President Phil Horch sent a letter to the premier and received a reply from Minister ... For coal, the concern is the effect on downstream water, as well as the destruction of ecosystems in the foothills. Here in the Hat, a lengthy process of consultation preceded the adoption of the new Municipal Development Plan. GN and SEAWA met together with the planning office early in the process and subsequently urged more attention to smart growth and protection of natural spaces. We were saddened to learn that the one advisory committee where environmental concerns could be brought up by citizens was folded. We recommend GN advocate for stronger emphasis on sustainability in all municipal departments and plans, since both reduction of carbon emissions and protection, conservation and restoration of ecosystems are of utmost importance for continued health of species and planet.

Respectfully Submitted May 2021 by

Co-chairs        John Slater  
                      Martha Munz Gue