

President's Report To The Grasslands Naturalist's Annual General Meeting Tuesday, June 28, 2022

For the second year in a row our society has operated in the dark shadow of the Covid-19 Pandemic. It has been a year of trying to adapt to the many restrictions. This past year, for the first time, we instituted indoor programs online. It would be good to receive some feedback from you, our members, on how successful and enjoyable these programs have been. Certainly, we have had some excellent guest speakers. How do you rate your experience attending programs online? One thing the GN board is considering is holding hybrid meetings in the future, once covid restrictions are fully relaxed. Doing this would give members the option of attending in person or online. Is this something that would interest you?

The past year started out with a great deal of effort and optimism put into the creation of a climate symposium. We had a strong committee and a great plan. The purpose of this symposium was to help residents of southeastern Alberta come to terms with the life-changing conditions that we will all have to deal with as the climate continues to change. It was also intended to attract a new generation of young people to our society. However, as the plans progressed, it became evident that it too ambitious given the current realities and attributes of our society. The plan called for a great volunteer undertaking as well as a financial one. Efforts to enlist the help and support of Medicine Hat College might have made the symposium feasible but so far those efforts have not materialized. The plan is paused for now.

In spite of the covid restrictions, we have been able to conduct outdoor programs with weekly neighborhood walks, the Christmas Bird Count and the May Bird Count and even a few other field trips albeit without carpooling. We are optimistic that this coming year will permit a full program of normal outdoor field trips.

One of our major society projects, Scenic Views, has been underway for almost two years and is nearing completion. Thanks to the hard work of Gerry Ehlert, John Slater and other members of this committee, 17 scenic vistas are being highlighted online and with signage. The accompanying text that accompanies these views, highlights the ecological value and importance of each one. This project has been undertaken with the City of Medicine Hat as a partner and with funding from Eco-Trust and other donors. In order to fully complete this project, we are still attempting to raise additional funding. By saying this I remind you that the Grasslands Naturalists is a registered charity worthy of your tax deductible donations.

Another project that has been undertaken this year, started out as a nomination of our society for the prestigious Emerald Award, but also turned into the creation of a beautiful brochure highlighting the role of our society over the years in southeastern Alberta. This is a valuable document that will be useful in future meetings with government, NGO's and corporate

entities, as well as new potential members. A big thank-you to David Gue for the development of this document. Take a look at a sample that will be on display at our Annual Meeting.

One of our more important society events of the year is related to fund-raising, namely our casino volunteer involvement. After a year without casino income because of covid, this year the opportunity returned and I am pleased to relate that our society received about \$13,000 just a month ago. A big thank-you to Bruce McLeod who chaired our casino committee and to all those volunteers who put in a late night to earn this much needed income for our society. As you can well imagine, the membership fees that we pay don't come close to covering our society's operating costs each financial year. Our insurance costs alone, which come to about \$3,000 annually, go far beyond what we gain from membership fees. Many more of our projects would go unfunded if it were not for casino income. A significant amount of this casino income goes to the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program as well as to our society operations.

On the environmental issues this past year, some of the biggest that we dealt with include advocating for a City of Medicine Hat master environmental plan which our new city council has agreed to implement; advocating for protection of native grasslands in the face of all the sustainable energy projects that are underway and planned in southern Alberta; advocating for further protections of native grasslands in the face of all the huge irrigation projects currently underway; and continuing to address the problem of invasive species throughout our city and beyond. Currently there are more environmental issues than we have the manpower to address and we need more volunteers on our issues committee, as well as someone willing to become chairperson. GN has a great legacy of responsibly addressing environmental issues and we need more help in this realm.

We have also launched a new initiative with the city of Medicine Hat. It is called the Bird Friendly City program under the auspices of our parent organization, Nature Canada. Medicine Hat has an abundance of prime bird habitat within city boundaries but too often city decisions ignore that fact. After initially approaching the city with this concept they have tentatively agreed to address the matter and explore just how bird friendly we really are, and what will be required in order to become a bird friendly city. We are working with the city's Director of Environment, and Government Relations, Kevin Redden in this regard.

This past year has also been a year of special recognitions for our society. We were nominated and short-listed for a prestigious Emerald Foundation Award and though we didn't win, it was a great honour to be recognized as among the top three in the province. Also, our society was prominent in the recent City of Medicine Hat Community Spirit Awards where Gerry Ehlert was recognized, along with Martha Munz-Gue and our own Medicine Hat Interpretive Program.

Speaking of the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program. This has been a major year of transition for this organization. We will speak more on this program's accomplishments and honours later but we are indebted to Corlaine Gardner and Marty Drut for their dedicated service in running a magnificent program. We are also pleased to welcome Alicia Lew as our new chief interpreter along with Ian Langill and other new interpreters. Alicia has accomplished a smooth transition

for the program and the Medicine Hat public can look forward to more years of great nature experiences at Police Point Park.

Looking ahead to the coming year for our society, I see our biggest challenge being the recruitment of more and younger members. At the recent Emerald Awards ceremonies in Calgary, I was struck by the fact that by far the majority of attendees were relatively young people...much younger than the demographic of Grasslands Naturalists. That is both encouraging and troubling to me. Encouraging to see that younger generations are getting involved in environmental advocacy but at the same time realizing that somehow it has not happened here in Medicine to the degree it needs to, in order to ensure the future of our society.

I am thankful this year, that Martha Gue has stepped up to be an interim Vice President which is a big help to us in the short term. However, we need a Vice-President who can take the helm of Grasslands Naturalists in the future. I am beginning my third consecutive year as President assuming, nobody steps forward today to lift the mantle off my shoulders...which I would willingly do. Our last President, Hugh Armstrong, ably held this position for five years but I have served notice that this coming year will be my last. I have several health issues that I'm grappling with and I have medical procedures that are pending. I'm not sure how long I can keep holding them off. I am also really happy to welcome Corlaine Gardner as a Director at Large on our Board so this bodes well for our future. We have had a vacancy at that position for the past 2 years. Other members of our board and executive are willing to continue in their important roles. I am working with a great team of people and there are few people in the world that are more gratifying to have as colleagues and friends than naturalists. It continues to be honor to serve as President but the times are changing and it is time for a younger more energetic generation to get involved. We have plans to try and recruit some college students from Medicine Hat College this fall. We have a great team of young people now employed at the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program. They and their generation are the environment's hope for the future. If you know of young people who care about nature and climate change, point them towards the Grasslands Naturalists. Organizations like ours are the hope for our planet's future.

Submitted by
Phil Horch,
President