

December 2007

Headwaters Edition — It all begins in the Canadian Rockies

Off-Highway Vehicles *Submitted by: Rita Stagman, Sustainable Resource Development*

Alberta's strong economy and rapidly rising population have put many pressures on Alberta's public lands. Recreational use of public land has dramatically risen over the past few decades and motorized recreation is the fastest growing recreation sector in Alberta. All-terrain vehicle sales in Alberta have increased 225 per cent since 2000. The Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council predicts an additional 30,000 will be sold this year. Many of these off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are getting faster, louder, larger and more powerful than other modes of recreational travel. Indiscriminate use on public land, particularly in the backcountry, can damage the land, vegetation and waterways and lead to conflict with other users. However, you can make a difference—you can take the lead and reduce YOUR impact. Start by planning ahead. By knowing your route and the trail conditions, you can prevent many personal safety and environmental concerns. Take time to become familiar with the OHV regulations, possible fire bans, and wildlife concerns in the area.

When planning an outing, riparian areas require special consideration. Riparian areas are those strips of green vegetation alongside streams,

creeks, rivers, lakes, sloughs and any other small or large body of water. A healthy riparian area filters sediments and pollutants and this results in clean water for humans and quality habitat for fish and wildlife. Because they are close to water bodies, riparian areas are highly susceptible to rutting, erosion, and damage to fish habitat. Accessing and crossing them responsibly can prove to be a challenge.

How should I cross a wetland, creek or river? First, ask yourself if it is really necessary to cross. "Just getting to the other side" or "seeing what the machine will do" are not legitimate reasons for damaging streambanks or wetlands. If crossing is necessary, seek out established bridges or high-ground detours.

Planning ahead ensures that you will minimize your impact. Other responsible actions include:

- travelling only on designated routes
- not washing OHVs in water bodies
- respecting the rights of all users

Stewardship does not end there. Sustainable Resource Development has developed the "Respect the Land" environmental stewardship education and awareness program, which has been a successful means of encouraging user groups and individuals to use public land responsibly and to be accountable for their actions. You too can get involved with the many volunteer organizations that take time to maintain, repair and develop sustainable trails. Or, grab a garbage bag and pick litter. For more information on stewardship activities visit <http://www.srd.alberta.ca/lands> or call your local Sustainable Resource Development office – toll free by calling 310-0000.

By remaining informed and taking responsible actions, we can collectively maintain our recreation opportunities and preserve the area for future generations.



Appropriate riparian area bridge crossing
Photo by Roger Marvin

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Grants available for Watershed Stewardship Groups in Alberta

ANNOUNCEMENT:

The Alberta Stewardship Network has announced their Watershed Stewardship Grant Program—Spring 2008. The ASN is now inviting Watershed Stewardship Groups working in Alberta to submit applications for grants up to a maximum of \$7500 for the Watershed Stewardship Grant Program. Applications and qualification information are available at www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca. Deadline for applications is February 14, 2008 at 4:30.



Water and Carrots

What do water and carrots have in common? A carrot can inspire a horse to travel. Likewise, water can move livestock where you want them to go. Rather than cows mucking along the water's edge for a drink it's much better to set up the water where you want the cows to go. Better cow and calf health with less foot problems is one benefit. Greater weight gains have been documented from having clean water. I'd bet using less energy walking on dryer ground equals less weight loss and/or feed use than from slogging through the pugs and hummocks (think of the energy you use pulling your foot in a rubber boot out of the muck).

The Rocky Riparian Group (RRG), Clearwater County's watershed stewardship initiative, has a new solar system, from the Kelln product line and supplied by Marvin Jackson of Sundog Solar out of Sundre, as a demonstration unit. The cost of the system was co-funded through a grant from the Alberta Stewardship Network and EPCOR Water Services. The system allows a farmer to draw water from a variety of sources. It can be used for winter watering from a drilled or wet well and as an all season application from either a wet or drilled well or a dugout. The potential exists to tie in a summer pasture pipeline for the ultimate in manure distribution. The unit has the added advantage of being mobile with the tank and system components mounted on a single axle trailer. There is even the possibility of adding wind power to the system.

Because it is a demonstration system applicable for several different applications it is "pricier" than the average farm needs. The idea is to continue promoting the best and latest technology. With the unseasonable warm weather in late October through early November, the RRG has experimented with ice and frost management without the double-bowl, insulated stock tank insert. The use of a bottomless five gallon pail and some mineral oil along with a plywood cover with a baffle has kept the float frost free. However, the real advantage is the ability to water livestock in minus double digits with the insulated tank.



Photo by Gary Lewis

Submitted by: Gary Lewis, Rocky Riparian Group

It certainly is a win-win for everyone. The Alberta Stewardship Network is all about promoting environmental stewardship activities. EPCOR Water Services Inc. is interested in source water protection for its 1.3 million drinking water customers. The RRG is committed to helping farmers discover year round watering options and ties in perfectly with their mandate to "promote healthy watersheds". The more farmers can show their peers the benefits of off-source livestock watering the greater the potential for technology transfer and uptake. When Fred sees his neighbor having success he's more likely to invest in it himself.



Photo by Gary Lewis

Upcoming Events

Kneehill Watershed Advisory Council General Meeting

January 9, 7:30 pm, Kneehill County Office

Topic: Carbon offset protocol. Open to the public

Red Bow Regional Watershed Alliance

Ranching Opportunities

February 7, Olds College Alumni Centre

To register contact Lesley Lovell, 403-335-3311

Rocky Riparian Group

Water Well Management Workshop

January 29, 10am to 3pm.

To register call Clearwater County, 403-845-4444

Kneehill Watershed Advisory Council and RDRWA

Water Well Management Workshop

First week of March—date to be finalized, Three Hills, AB.

Visit www.rdrwa.ca for scheduling.

Visit www.albertaefp.com to find an Environmental Farm Plan workshop in your area

Bearberry Creek Restoration Project

Submitted by: Marco Fontana, ACA

Bearberry Creek originates approximately 69 km North West of Sundre and flows into the Red Deer River within the Town limits. The drainage area of approximately 260 km² includes three named tributaries, Kelly, Barry, and Smith creeks. Historical information indicates that Bearberry Creek once supported a variety of sport fish and was a popular destination for anglers. Sport fish populations have since declined drastically, which may represent a change in habitat within the drainage and perhaps the largest factor is the degradation of fish habitat and riparian areas from land use practices. Stream banks were once reported to be densely covered by willows but are now more sparsely vegetated, dominated by tame grasses or completely bare. Declines in sport fish numbers may also be attributed to the construction of a weir in the Town of Sundre and the subsequent loss spawning migrations from the Red Deer River. With the recent construction of a fish bypass channel around the weir, Bearberry Creek and the Red Deer River have been re-connected. However, the re-establishment of sport fish populations may be limited by the current degraded state of riparian and aquatic habitat.

To improve overall watershed health and to assist the re-establishment of a recreational fishery in Bearberry Creek the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), a non-profit conservation organization, launched the Bearberry Creek Restoration Project, a multi-stakeholder, riparian habitat protection and enhancement initiative. To better understand conditions in the watershed the ACA first collected baseline fisheries and stream habitat data and conducted an aerial videography assessment of the riparian conditions throughout the drainage.

In 2007 ACA, Mountain View County, and Cows and Fish staff began working with local landowners to implement riparian protection and enhancement projects, including the construction of a bio-engineering bank stabilization demonstration site on Bearberry Creek. The ACA plans to continue this work and hopes to work with many more of the Bearberry Creek landowners in the future.

For more information on the Alberta Conservation Association visit our web site <http://www.ab-conservation.com/>. For more information regarding the Bearberry Creek Restoration Project contact Marco Fontana, ACA's East Slopes Land Management Programs Coordinator at marco.fontana@ab-conservation.com.



View from the Board ...

Submitted by: Earl Graham Chair—RDRWA Board of Directors

It is that time of year again when all the hustle and bustle begins. Well a lot of hustle and bustle has been happening all year with the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance. Over the last year we have completed our Communication Strategy, our Watershed Atlas and our Watershed Stewardship Kit. We have a new brochure and have been distributing it at many tradeshows and various presentations. In doing so, we have increased our membership by 56% and it is still rising. We have held 2 information meetings, the most recent one being in Olds on Agriculture and Watershed Management. During the summer we hired a watershed stewardship coordinator on a pilot program to assist watershed stewardship groups develop plans

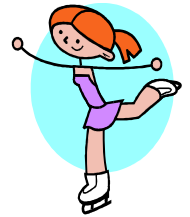
and implement some of their programs. It was very successful. To help our Manager, Beverly Anderson deliver our programs, we hired a Program Coordinator, Donna Trotter and an Office Administrator, Andrea Simpson. They are all particularly busy with new State of the Watershed project coming on board. A Steering Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee is being formed as part of this initiative. At a provincial scale, the Manager and Directors have been busy participating in the review of the Land Use Framework, Cumulative Effects Workshops and the Alberta Water Council's review of the Water For Life Renewal, Governance and Watershed Planning Framework.

The RDRWA thanks our members and partners for their support in the past year, and sincerely appreciates the financial support from Alberta Environment and the municipalities within the watershed.

We wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year! We hope everyone "gets their feet wet" in 2008 by participating in the development of our State of the Watershed report.



Favorite winter **water** sports in the Red Deer River watershed



Holiday Greetings!

Thank you for supporting the
Red Deer River
Watershed Alliance.

We wish you a happy holiday
season and all the best in 2008!

Manager, Staff and Board of Directors

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance



Clean Water
A priceless
gift for all