



Will the Delta Marsh Field Station Survive?



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DELTA MARSH FIELD STATION

Beautiful Delta Marsh spans 18,500 hectares, and has been protected since 1982.

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By Jennifer Shay

MANY WERE SHOCKED TO LEARN that the University of Manitoba's Delta Marsh Field Station has closed for the winter, and its employees laid off. The university has stated it will re-open in the spring of 2010. A committee has been struck to resolve the station's reputed financial, infrastructure and operating problems, though its future seems uncertain.

It would be tragic to lose the field station. It has enriched our understanding of lake, marsh and forest ecosystems, trained hundreds of researchers and educated thousands, all in a field setting. Anyone who has taken a field course knows that nothing can replace firsthand experience of the natural world.

Founded in 1966, the station has gained an enviable national and international reputation, attracting high-quality students and faculty from Manitoba and universities such as Oxford, Toronto, Guelph, Queen's, Ottawa, Carleton, Lakehead, Regina and Calgary. By 2009, more than 120 theses and 340 scientific papers had been published based upon work done at the station. It has hosted thousands of students in its field programs. Many hundreds more have benefited from weekend courses.

The station's assets include its close proximity to Winnipeg and its natural setting. Delta Marsh is recognized as a "Manitoba Heritage Marsh" and nationally as an important bird area due to its significance for waterfowl and neotropical migrants.

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Executive Director's Letter

LATELY, I'VE BEEN CHALLENGED to think about the concept of "activism" and on January 9, the "Pages from the Past" feature in the *Winnipeg Free Press* reminded me of the activism of a volunteer environmental group that I was involved with in the '80s and early '90s. A large picture on the paper's Jan. 9, 1987 front cover featured a member of our group — Concerned Citizens of Manitoba — in characteristic "radiation protection suits" juggling a huge dice on the steps of the Legislature. The headline on the photo was "Nuclear Gamble."

Yes, the dice juggling was a stunt, one of our many street theatre gigs, but meanwhile, other members of the group were inside the building, meeting with the environment minister of the day.

Concerned Citizens of Manitoba started in Lac du Bonnet when local residents became alarmed over the research being carried out by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) into the disposal of radioactive nuclear waste in Canadian Shield rock. They were concerned that the presence of the underground research lab, in proximity to the Nuclear Research Establishment, then housed at Pinawa, would make an eventual waste dump in Manitoba likely.

Their concern spread, and a major campaign of research, public discussion, lobbying and activism ensued, supported by a startlingly wide swath of Manitoba society. It culminated in the passage of *The High-Level Radioactive Waste Act* (1987), effectively banning the burial of nuclear reactor waste in this province, and affirmed that Manitobans were not interested in hosting a nuclear dump in our backyards. I suspect we still aren't, but the Nuclear Gamble persists as we struggle to find ways to address climate change.

There are those (including, it seems, the editorial board at today's *Winnipeg Free Press*) that would have us believe that nuclear power is the answer to our energy needs in a carbon-constrained world, and AECL is pushing hard for a nuclear renaissance in Canada. Some proponents, including the Canadian Nuclear Society, go so far as to make the ridiculous assertion that nuclear power is "CO₂ free." I wish it were. The truth is that construction of new nuclear plants and the mining and processing of the uranium necessary to fuel them, are both highly fossil fuel intensive, meaning that nuclear's carbon footprint is a lot higher than it might appear.

Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization (mainly a consortium of waste owners) is once again seeking a "willing host" community for a nuclear dump. They are looking in the "nuclear provinces": New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan. Industry eyes are currently fixed on Ignace, Ontario, where town councillors have indicated their interest in exploring the possibility of being a host site, so this might not sound like a Manitoba issue. But it is.

Not only are Manitobans, like all Canadians, on the hook for federal nuclear subsidies, but what if a waste dump site is chosen in Saskatchewan? We would see daily truck and/or trainloads of highly radioactive materials moving through our communities, past and over our waterways and farmland. In the event of an accident on our highways, our communities and environments that will bear the brunt of any impacts.

Is nuclear power the answer to climate change? In my humble opinion, no. Even Ontario has backtracked on its plans for new-build nuclear, agreeing with Standard and Poor's that nuclear is "uneconomical" once its notorious cost overruns are internalized. It's likely in Ontario that new small-scale renewable energy options and conservation might well fit the bill for future energy demand and coal phase-out.

I'm glad to have been a part of an activist group that effectively brought the nuclear waste issue to the attention of Manitobans and our elected leaders. As I look around the Manitoba Eco-Network today, I see many hubs of activism on everything from protecting forests to promoting cycling to fostering local eating — all kinds of things that citizens can get involved in to address climate change. These steps start with the concern and activism of ordinary citizens. Together, we can keep activism alive and well in Manitoba. 🌱

—Anne Lindsey, *Executive Director, Manitoba Eco-Network*

FEBRUARY

9-10 Public Consultation on Draft Sewer Bylaw. Winnipeg's water and waste department has prepared a draft bylaw and are now seeking feedback. Feedback will be included in the report to City Council. Masonic Memorial Temple, 420 Corydon Ave. Feb. 9: 5:30-7:30 p.m. Feb 10: 9:00-11:00 a.m.

13 Seedy Saturday. Join the Friends of Assiniboine Park Conservatory and many others to celebrate prairie biodiversity with a full day of workshops, displays, vendors and visiting speakers. Bring your seeds and join in the fun of the seed swap. Location: FortWhyte Alive, admission free.

14 One Month Fair Trade Challenge. People all over Manitoba will commit to buying only fair trade brands of coffee, tea and chocolate for 30 days. Those who sign-up on the website (www.fairtrademanitoba.ca) will be entered to win prizes. For more info: pr@mcic.ca or 987-6420.

19-20 2010 Growing Local Food Security Conference (U of W). Workshops, discussions and displays featuring: rural success stories, hands-on preserving skills, indigenous food culture, urban agriculture, food policy, food justice, and more. Conference extras include: Youth Gathering, Culinary Tour Dinner, Film Premiere, Farm to Cafeteria Gathering. For more info: 943-0823 (Food Matters Manitoba).

25 Free Backyard Composting Workshop. Learn all the basics for successful backyard composting! 7:00-8:00 p.m. at the EcoCentre (3rd Floor, 303 Portage Ave). For more info: 925-3776 (Resource Conservation Manitoba).

25 Remediation and Prevention Conference. This Manitoba Environment Industries Association conference will offer insight into today's issues surrounding remediation, arming attendees with new problem solving perspectives as provided by peer case studies and examples. Location: Victoria Inn. For more info: <http://www.meia.mb.ca>.

25-27 Prairie Conservation & Endangered Species Conference. See the article on page 8 of this issue. Winnipeg will host one of the

most important gatherings devoted to landscape and wildlife conservation in Western Canada. The conference theme, Patterns of Change, reflects the goal of this event: to give divergent prairie interest groups the chance to explore ideas and approaches to sustain land owners and users as well as the rich natural heritage that is the endowment of all prairie landscape dwellers. Location: Winnipeg Convention Centre. For more info: <http://www.pcsc.ca>.

MARCH

10-11 Vibrant Communities Symposium. An opportunity to discuss the social, economic, environmental and cultural perspectives of a vibrant community and develop a Vibrant Communities Charter. Location: Hilton Suites Winnipeg. For more info: 949-2001 (Health In Common).

11 Bottled Water Free Day. The Polaris Institute, Canadian Federation of Students, and the Sierra Youth Coalition are thrilled to introduce Canada's first Bottled Water Free Day. On March 11, campuses and communities across Canada will be mobilizing to take action to ban the bottle and reclaim public water. We want you to be a part of it! Information and materials on the campaign are available at www.bottledwaterfreeday.ca.

12-13 Reel Green Film Festival. The Eco-Network is holding our first ever Environmental Film Festival. Friday evening will feature a Film Premiere and reception. Saturday will feature several films, a director's forum and eco-displays. Friday pass - \$10, Saturday pass - \$12 (or 2-day pass for \$20). Location: Red River College (Princess St Campus). For more info: 947-6511, or info@mbeconetwork.org.

18 Greenwashing. Do "green" products live up to their marketing claims? Consumers Association Canada – Manitoba free presentation at 7:00 p.m., Millennium Library. For more info: cacmb@mts.net or 452-2572.

27 Earth Hour 2010. Make a difference and unite with millions of people around the world by turning off your lights during Earth Hour (8:30 to 9:30 p.m., local time) to raise awareness and fight climate change. For more info: www.earthhour.org.

Please email your event notices to info@mbeconetwork.org.

OF SPECIAL NOTE

The Eco-Network appreciates and thanks the many individuals and groups that contribute to our efforts, and would like to recognize some very special donations...

At this past October's "Embraced in the Web of Water" event, songwriter and activist **Carolyn McDade** generously chose to donate the proceeds from the sales of her CDs to Manitoba Eco-Network. Her lovely music is based on the Earth Charter and is sung at regular singing circles in communities across North America. (See the Executive Director's Letter in the December 1 Eco-Journal). Read more about Carolyn McDade and her projects at www.carolynmcdademusic.com.



Carolyn McDade chats with MEN Executive Director Anne Lindsey at the Embracing the Web of Water event.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA MAUER

<< continued from page 1

Delta March cont'd...

It has a flourishing bird observatory where staff band thousands of birds each spring and fall, adding substantially to our knowledge of bird migration. The marsh is deemed to be of international importance under a convention of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Currently, the Delta Marsh Restoration Initiative is based at the field station with partners from the university, government and conservation groups.

The impetus behind the closure is apparently economic. It would be wrong to close the station permanently for purely financial reasons in light of its long history of attracting researchers, running field courses and contributing to public education. It is unthinkable for a university with the stature of the U of M not to have a field station at a time when environmental concerns are of such global significance. Schools, government and industry will need environmental scientists. Where will they be trained if facilities like the field station do not exist?

The Delta Marsh Field Station can have a bright future just as it has had an illustrious past. Before the station is supposed to reopen in the summer, a new steering committee will provide feedback on how to manage the facility. If you feel it should be kept open, please fax, email or write to:

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Jennifer Shay earned her master's and PhD in botany at the University of Manitoba, with a thesis on the effects of falling water levels on vegetation at Delta Marsh. She was instrumental in establishing the Delta Marsh Field Station, and served as director for 20 years. In 2001, having been a Member of the Order of Canada, she was promoted to the title of Officer.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DELTA MARSH FIELD STATION



About Delta Marsh

Delta Marsh is located on the south shore of Lake Manitoba. It is a 18,500-hectare freshwater coastal wetland. In the first half of the 20th century, the marsh was home to hunting lodges of the rich and famous (including the Prince of Wales and Clark Gable). The area was first protected in 1982, with the designation of "Wetland of International Significance" from the Ramsar Convention, and a "Manitoba Heritage Marsh" by the Manitoba government in 1988.

The treed beach ridge separating the wetland from the lake provides nesting habitat for the yellow warbler, the least flycatcher, the warbling vireo, and the midge. It is the preeminent site for bird migration study in the province.

Since Lake Manitoba water levels were artificially stabilized in 1961, Delta Marsh has experienced a proliferation of the hybrid cattail and associated loss of shallow peripheral ponds and other plant species, as well as erosion of shorelines.

—Tessa Vanderhart
(Primary source: *Encyclopedia of Manitoba*)



City Seeks Proposals for Garbage Gas Capture

Brady landfill methane conversion would reduce GHGs, provide energy

By Sarah Petz

AFTER SEVEN YEARS OF STUDY and consultation, the City of Winnipeg is moving ahead with a landfill gas abatement and resource recovery project that could turn tens of thousands of tonnes of harmful greenhouse gas emissions into a reliable, renewable energy resource.

The city is currently asking for bidders to design, build, finance and operate a project at the Brady Road landfill to extract and flare methane gas for a 20-year term. Pipes would capture the gas from decomposing organic garbage and flare it in order to convert it to carbon dioxide—still a contributor to global warming when emitted, but 95 percent less harmful than methane. The flaring alone would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 97,000 tonnes per year, according to the city's Environment Act Proposal.

Yet the city hopes to do one better in environmental terms. The resulting carbon dioxide can be used to generate electricity or heat buildings. Proposals from companies wanting to use the gas from the landfill are being accepted until Feb. 26, after which the city will have an evaluation period.

"There [are] a number of ideas out there. Really the whole idea of the proposal is that we want the market to tell us what they think is the best thing to do," explained Darryl Drohomerski, manager of the Solid Waste Services Division of the Water and Waste Department for the City of Winnipeg.

"We're not the experts in it at all, we're putting it out so that companies bidding on it would have the expertise to do that work."

The requirements of the proposal are flexible enough to allow bidders to use the gas as they wish, so long as their design creates an enclosed flare of 1,700 cubic metres per hour. The supply in the designated section of the landfill is expected to last approximately 20 years. A Feb. 2008 submission by engineering firm CH2M Hill estimated the design construction costs of the project at just over \$6 million.

"The landfill needs to be engineered with a series of gas wells extracting the biogas as it is produced," explained Jan Oleszkiewicz, professor of civil engineering at the University of Manitoba. "The gas may then be used to run generators directly or can be used as it is cleaned from contaminants."

"A company could build a generating station to produce electricity, or you could do things like convert it into a gas that you would use to run a fleet of buses or something like that," said Drohomerski.

Bidders also have the option of proposing a system of recovering and reusing other waste material, like compost, destined for landfill disposal. "There are a number of new firms out there that will do things like take all of your garbage and convert it into an energy source or a heat source that... may be beneficial to a city-at-large over what we're doing right now," said Drohomerski.

The University of Manitoba has previously expressed interest in partnering with the City of Winnipeg and Winnipeg Hydro on the project. Their proposal would see the gas piped from the Brady Road site to the Fort Garry campus, providing enough energy to cut the U of M heating bill by as much as half.

Mike Ferley, U of M energy advocate, in an interview with the *Manitoban* newspaper in October 2008, said that the project would drastically improve campus sustainability and save resources.

"We could offset almost half of the university's natural gas consumption. It's amazing. That project will pay for itself in less than five years. It's just an incredible opportunity for saving money," Ferley told the *Manitoban*.

However, no deal between the parties was reached, leading to the city's broad request for proposals.

Landfill gas capture projects have been completed in cities across Canada, such as Vancouver, Toronto, Edmonton and Calgary. The Environment Act Proposal cites more than 40 current landfill gas capture projects operations in Canada and more than 400 in the United States.

The Brady Landfill site was first identified for potential gas recovery in a 1999 report prepared for Environment Canada. Manitoba Hydro commissioned a similar report in 2001.

The city is hoping for construction to begin in late 2010. 

This article is adapted from "City seeks to turn garbage gas into renewable energy source," published by the Manitoban on Jan. 5, 2010.

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To mark the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010, the Canadian Environmental Network (CEN) launched a Best Practices/Case Studies Contest to gather innovative and effective examples of environmental non-governmental organizations' work related to the conservation, sustainable use, and awareness of biodiversity. Three Eco-Network member groups submitted essays, which are printed here.

The winning case studies are featured in a 20-page handbook available on the CEN website (www.cen-rce.org) and distributed to Environment Canada and the Secretariat of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The Mixedwood Forest Society case study (opposite page) was chosen to recognize the group's work in the Duck Mountain Provincial Park and Porcupine Hills protected areas.

A Rocha Pembina Valley

BioBlitz species identification project

By Larry Danielson, Chair, A Rocha Pembina Valley Education Team Board Member, A Rocha Canada

A ROCHA PEMBINA VALLEY is a conservation organization affiliated with A Rocha Canada and A Rocha International. Although A Rocha International has been active with conservation initiatives for nearly 30 years, A Rocha Pembina Valley is a much younger organization. One of our main conservation activities is the annual monitoring of the raptor migration through the Pembina Valley. We have collected five years of good data, anticipating the opportunity to champion the valley as an "Important Birding Area."

The BioBlitz project is an important step forward for our local organization as we partner with Manitoba scientists and local conservation agencies to promote biodiversity in our region.

A Rocha Pembina Valley conducted a 12-hour BioBlitz at the Livingston Nature Park in Morden

on May 30, 2009. Led by Paul Goossen, a volunteer from Canadian Wildlife Service, a team of Manitoba scientists and conservation experts identified the living species in the park, including 52 types of birds, 44 types of plants, 63 invertebrates, and three mammals.

The aim of this BioBlitz was to gather data to aid Morden's Parks and Recreation Committee as it works to conserve the riverfront of Dead Horse Creek and to manage and protect the biodiversity in this public park. In partnership with the Town of Morden, A Rocha Pembina Valley is also using the data to create a self-directed *Trail Guide for Livingston Nature Park*. Slated for publication in the spring of 2010, the trail guide will help park visitors to appreciate the biodiversity in this local setting and encourage their support for in riparian conservation.

Important in itself, the 2009 BioBlitz at Livingston Nature Park was also a pilot project in preparation for A Rocha's larger and longer initiative in 2010 — a 24-hour biodiversity study at Pembina Valley Provincial Park (400 acres) and the adjacent A Rocha Field Study Centre (100 acres).

Living Prairie Museum

Indigenous plants for city schoolyards

By Kyle Lucyk

LIVING PRAIRIE MUSEUM is a 13-hectare tall-grass prairie preserve and interpretive centre in Winnipeg. The tall-grass prairie is one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems, with less than one percent remaining. The preserve is one of the best examples of this ecosystem remaining in southern Manitoba, with over 150 plants species documented.

In the spring of 2009, Living Prairie Museum partnered with the St. James-Assiniboia School Division to increase the biodiversity at some their elementary schools. Together, we undertook a project which saw four butterfly gardens planted in schoolyards nearby to the museum. The gardens were planted with plants indigenous to the tall-grass prairie of southern Manitoba. Each garden contains 10 species of native plants and 200 plants total. Each species planted is either a nectaring plant for adult butterflies or the preferred food of caterpillars. The average size of the gardens was 175 sq. feet.

Previously, the gardens were planted with annual flowers or non-native perennials. Museum staff partnered with grade three classes to educate them on the benefits of using native tall-grass prairie plants to create habitat for butterflies. Children (and teachers) learned of the plight of the tall-grass prairie, how these gardens are an important way to conserve one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems and the importance of biodiversity in our urban community.

To ensure the success of this program, staff agreed to water and weed the gardens during the first summer. This added maintenance has ensured that this project is a positive experience for the schools and the neighbourhood. In the fall of 2009, interpretive panels were installed to thank the participants and explain the importance of these gardens to area wildlife.

Based on the success of this partnership in 2009, we hope to renew this relationship with the school division again in 2010.





Mixedwood Forest Society

Group's efforts in protected areas included among biodiversity best practices

By *Lindy Clubb, Assistant Executive Director, Mixedwood Forest Society*

OUR SMALL, volunteer, non-profit group formed more than 10 years ago to advocate for protected areas within Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd. (LP) management plans. LP is an international company producing products like oriented strand board from aspen trees. They own a plant near Swan River, in southwestern Manitoba's escarpment area. Setting a precedent, we campaigned successfully to have zoned backcountry areas (free from mining, logging and hydroelectric development) put in place in nearby Duck Mountain Provincial Park.

The park was slated to be 85 percent logged by LP. We published and distributed a colourful booklet of essays, promoting the value of the area's ecosystems and wildlife. We gathered a petition of 2,000 names and delivered it to the minister of conservation. Each person who signed the paper calling for less of the park to be logged understood more about the issue and learned (and began to care about) a place most of them had never heard of before. We contacted the media and had letters published.

The government adjusted the borders of the park, created large areas of protection where none existed before, and moved LP's fellers and bunchers into the provincial forest adjacent to the park. Thirty-five percent of the wetland-laden, waterfowl and wildlife-loaded park was spared. It's a big park. Backcountry zone protection totaled 44,000 hectares. The public benefited from the protected areas, but it didn't cost them a dime.

As you know, not many grants are earmarked for advocacy. It was the first time Manitoba had adjusted the borders of a park in order to accommodate protection from resource extraction, but it wasn't the last time. The message of current policy, which is to offer up an area to cut and then begin looking for areas to protect within it, is backwards. We proved that. Since then, in all but Duck Mountain park, logging is now forbidden, so 79 other provincial parks are spared.

Then our group canvassed the local population with informal surveys, presentations in the local high school, through workshops and a protected areas study, and we ascertained that the Porcupine Hills, the slopes north of the Duck Mountains on the other side of the Swan River valley, were also in need of protection. We mounted a successful public campaign, which concluded with the 11,000 hectare protected public forested area of the Bell River Canyon, the Steeprock River canyon, and the rare upland meadows of the Baden escarpment in the Porcupine Hills.

We were instrumental in establishing the only protected areas within LP's logging licenses, and we chose the Bell in part because it has the highest diversity of neo-tropical migrant bird species

of anywhere in Western Canada. So, we went from protecting moose and elk habitat in "The Ducks" to sparing wolf and warbler territory in "The Porks." With the public and local people behind us. Without income and relying on volunteer support.

We can't have biodiversity best practises, case studies, special areas etc. unless we have land and

“Thirty-five percent of the wetland-laden, waterfowl and wildlife-loaded park was spared.”

water protected from development and exploitive resource extraction. The protected areas we helped establish have served as templates for data collection by students, have caught the interest of the Canadian Wildlife Service for bird studies, have kept source water areas clean, have helped with issues such as climate change, have become an annual destination for large hiking groups, and serve as a model of what people can accomplish if they get their facts straight, go public, go to the right government body, and stick to the issue for as long as it takes to protect biodiversity. 🐦





Prairie Conservation Conference

Conference to focus on 'Patterns of Change', conservation

By Shoni Shukster Litinsky

THE TRIENNIAL Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference is coming back to Winnipeg for its ninth anniversary later this month. The national event has been circulating the prairie provinces since 1986, and is considered to be one of the most noteworthy events focusing on landscape and wildlife conservation in Western Canada.

The theme for this year's event, "Patterns of Change," will focus on sharing both valuable research and historical knowledge that will enable effective conservation and management of our natural prairie heritage for the future.

This event could not be timelier — a recent journal article published in *Biological Conservation* by University of Manitoba Natural Resources Institute Ecologist Nicola Koper and her team found that Manitoba has less than one percent of the tall-grass prairie that once occurred here (the rest has been converted for other land uses). If that's not shocking enough, the study also found that what is left is severely threatened and could be lost altogether without proper management.

Marilena Kowalchuk, conference committee member, and Riparian Program Coordinator for the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, says that, "we often must look to past strategies in order to evaluate what has worked and what hasn't to help us build effective solutions for the future."

The conference typically brings out a diverse crowd of roughly 300-400 participants, including government representatives, academics, First Nations, NGOs, landowners, community groups and students. This event is unique in that it makes a strong effort to bridge the gap between real world experiences and academic research. With two plenary sessions and several stimulating workshops over the two-day period there is sure to be something for everyone.

The plenary sessions seek to draw attention to how patterns in global change can affect the prairie environment and also

feature some interesting approaches to dealing with that change. For example, Don Ruzicka of Ruzicka Sunrise Farm in Alberta will speak about his holistic organic farming method, which involves adapting and learning to manage a changing ecosystem with both conservation and stewardship principles in mind and practice. Ruzicka has also managed to identify and sell to a niche market of socially conscious consumers who buy from him not just because of the quality produce he offers, but because of their growing concern and care for the natural environment.

Featured guest speaker Celes Davar owns and operates the education-based outdoor travel company Earth Rhythms Inc. with his wife Susan and focuses on inspiring travellers through education and a deeper understanding of the destinations they visit. Davar has identified a global hunger from travellers and citizens that want to take care of the planet and feels that all of the stakeholders involved (whether that be tourism

companies, researchers, conservation specialists, etc.) have a responsibility to these citizens to work together to come up with a way to share research and work in a meaningful and more readily understood way. By getting citizens more engaged in the process, the more informed and connected they will be to the destinations they visit. As a result they will be more inclined to share that knowledge and to take individual actions to make a difference.

The Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference will be held at the Winnipeg Convention Centre from February 25-27, 2010. Get more information and register online at www.pcsc.ca.



9th Prairie Conservation & Endangered Species Conference

Winnipeg, Manitoba • February 25-27, 2010

Patterns of Change: Learning from our past to manage our present and conserve our future

The six workshops are divided between both Friday and Saturday, and will feature presentations by Koper and many others. The workshops include:

Day 1

- Ecological Changes
- Changes in the Physical Environment
- Changing Socio-Economic Pressures

Day 2

- Changes in Prairie Health
- Changes in Prairie and Species Conservation
- Changing Relationships



(clockwise from top left)

The Hairy Prairie-clover (*Dalea villosa*), photographed near Lauder, MB, is listed as threatened under the Canadian Species at Risk Act.

Big bluestem grass near Lauder, MB.

Mixed-grass prairie grassland in a community pasture near Kirkella, MB.

Hope Sequestration

COP15 reflections after an anticlimactic ending at Copenhagen

By Dean Medeiros

PARTICIPATING IN THE United Nations Climate Negotiations in Copenhagen this past December was an incredible experience and privilege.

Cleanliness, sleep, and food were often sacrificed (sometimes voluntarily by some of my less-than-hygienic colleagues) as the Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD) worked in a feverish frenzy to follow the negotiations and parallel events, meet with policymakers, organize and participate in demonstrations, secure media spots, and connect with youth in Canada.

I feel very fortunate to have participated in the conference, despite the less-than-ideal outcome.

Firstly, some people assume that I was living a glamorous lifestyle by attending this event. The reality was that I lived in a humid, mildewy hostel with 30 youth with only two bathrooms and slept in a room with 11 others.

During the opening plenary, I was astounded to see all the global representatives in one venue. My initial astonishment quickly faded as the painstakingly slow reality of the talks began. Delegate after delegate repeated mind-numbing fluffy albeit feel-good rhetoric without substance as to how we will achieve ambitious goals.

I was expecting and hoping for a lot more. But reaching consensus with a group of people is difficult, and especially so when there are more than 192 different perspectives, interests, and cultural norms.

I began to understand a microcosm of this difficulty firsthand when working with the international youth forest policy group. We were a group of approximately 15 individuals primarily from developed countries. Our similar backgrounds seemed to be of no help, as one night we had a heated debate trying to determine whether financing for forest conservation projects should be market or fund-based.

Following the high-level policy also presented unique challenges in understanding the slight nuances in the policy lingo. For example, there is a really big difference between sustainable management of forests and sustainable forest management — the latter is essentially analogous to conventional logging. Whereas sustainable management of forests, as defined in the Bali Action Plan, is more holistic and recognizes that all forest values must be safeguarded including carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation and watershed protection. The CYD worked as a team to decipher and communicate policy developments to one another.

In addition to following the policy, the CYD also attempted to influence policy by meeting with policymakers, including daily meetings with Canada's key negotiator Michael Martin. The CYD posed a gauntlet of questions centred on the government's current pitiful target of a three percent reduction of emissions from 1990 levels. That's still three percent short of Canada's weak commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. Martin's eloquent yet meaningless responses were repeatedly a disappointing experience at COP15.

Considering the unsatisfactory position and actions of our current federal government, the CYD decided to focus on sub-regional governments. I met with Manitoba Minister of Conservation Bill Blaikie, who reassured me that Manitoba would achieve the Kyoto target of a six percent reduction in emission levels from 1990 by 2012. Manitoba certainly has a lot to gain selling relatively clean hydroelectricity within a global, carbon-constrained economy, and can show the federal government that urgent climate action is economically viable.

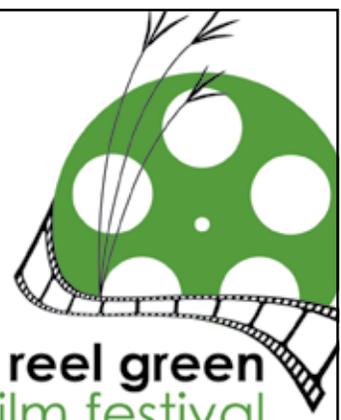
The CYD also attempted to influence policy by participating in diverse, non-violent demonstrations, and generated its own plethora of new media.

Connecting the youth in Canada to the negotiations in Copenhagen was to me the most important role of the CYD. Once more youth are aware of the policies (or the lack thereof), and the urgency of the issues, bold political action to stop climate change will become more feasible in the near future.

The solutions presented at COP15 were a welcome retreat from the disappointment of the negotiations. In one case, Google Earth is helping a remote indigenous tribe in Brazil, the Suruí, map and protect its rainforest. The Suruí territory is now clearly identified and transparent to all. With the aid of cell phone cameras, the Suruí can now take geographically referenced pictures and report illegal activities occurring within their territory. The Suruí are empowered guardians of the forest, effectively combating climate change.

Despite the less than ideal living conditions and extreme exhaustion, participating in COP15 was definitely a valuable, lifetime experience for me and the other CYD members. Our experience at COP15 has helped us further develop our understanding of climate change impacts and solutions which we will need as we become the bold and ambitious negotiators and world leaders of the future.

Any Manitoban youth interested in participating as part of the Canadian Youth Delegation at COP16 in Mexico should contact Erica Young, coordinator of the Manitoba Environmental Youth Network (erica@mbeconetwork.org). 🌱



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Flannery Calls for Sustainable, Responsible Approaches to Climate Crisis in New Book

By Steve Raub

Review

Now or Never: Why We Need to Act Now to Achieve A Sustainable Future

By Tim Flannery, with a forward by David Suzuki
HarperCollins, 2009

ON OCT. 1, 1964, the Berkeley Campus Police arrested Jack Weinberg, a Berkeley student who was hosting an information booth for the Congress on Racial Equality without institutional permission. Before the police could drive him away, a group of students surrounded their car to object, and spontaneously, thousands of students joined them. That event was the beginning of the free speech movement, which is viewed as the beginning of the student movement to oppose the war in Vietnam. At the time, the polls in America showed overwhelming support for the war. But the free speech movement and subsequent student activities were clear about their message: “Nnot now or ever” will we support or fight an unjust war. That spontaneous spark continued building, the polls changed and the policy on the war changed.

Now or Never is Tim Flannery’s book-length call to action on climate change. Flannery, the author of *The Weather Makers*, adapted his Australia-focused essay of the same name into a globally relevant treatise. Like the students who surrounded the police car, Flannery is calling for a shift in values and actions. Opinion polls on climate change swing back and forth, and the climate change movement is global but dispersed. However, the science of climate change leads to the certain conclusion that we need to act now or never. Scientists say the long-term consequences of not reversing CO2 pollution will be catastrophic.

Flannery quotes climatologist Jim Hansen: “If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that in which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, palaeoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO2 will need to be reduced from its current 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm.” In other words, we must not only stop polluting, but also capture almost one-tenth/10th of the pollution that is already in the atmosphere.

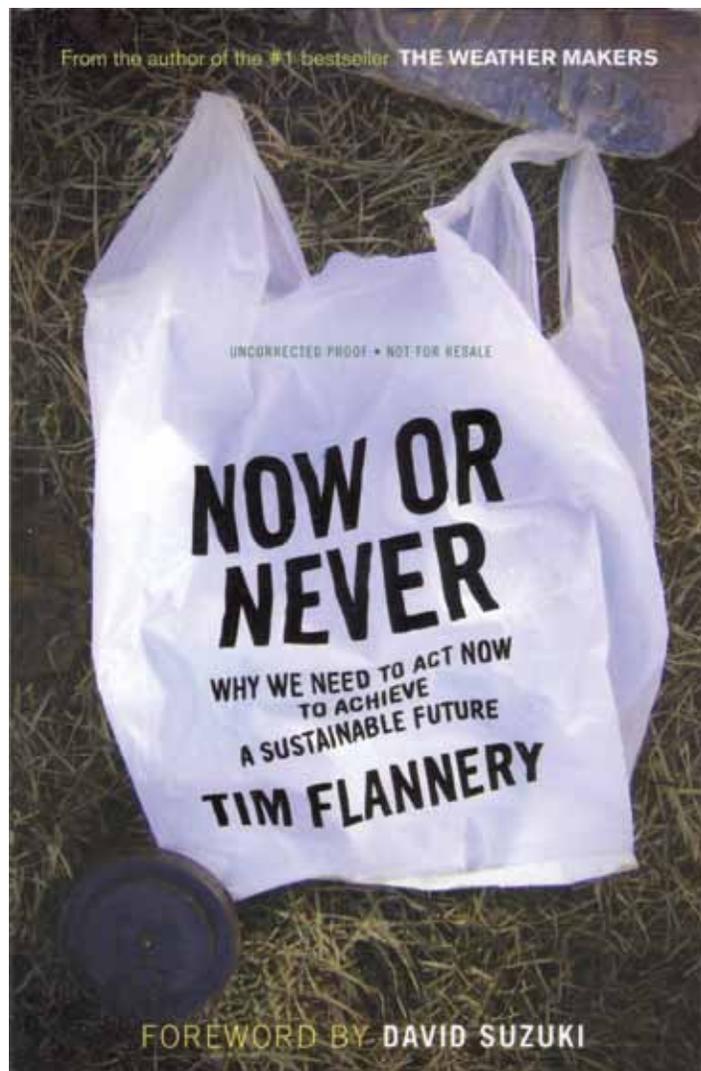
As the book opens, Flannery describes what scientists have found we are doing to the climate. He paints the picture with a discussion of Gaia (the

living earth concept) and what he calls the three great “organs” of the earth — the crust, the oceans and the atmosphere. He then describes our task as “beginning to live sustainably.”

Flannery reflects upon the meaning of sustainability in intriguing ways. He describes our species’ evolving relationship with the earth. At one time humanity was a relatively minor player in the earth’s life processes. But in the last 10,000 years, human beings have been playing an increasingly bigger role in influencing the Gaia. Today, our impact has been recognized as the single most critical, predictable and immediate influence on the global systems that support life. Unfortunately, that influence is undermining and destroying the amazing life support systems we rely on.

As Flannery writes: “Now our fate and that of our planet will be determined by the rate at which we, as a species, can mature and develop a new sense of responsibility. I fear that if we are to avoid catastrophic failure, we will need to learn very fast: learn, indeed, on the job. Our search for sustainability is thus an uncertain experiment, which must inevitably see setbacks and failures. Succeeding at it in the long run will be the greatest challenge our species has ever faced.”

Flannery devotes most of the rest of his treatise to describing ways to reduce atmospheric pollution. While he addresses many important questions, he fails to examine the political will to



change environmental policy. I assume that is because he knows the potential for the political will to change lies in the actions that you and I take. Somehow we need to convert anxiety, worry and confusion into action.

Some of that confusion stems from the lack of clear solutions to climate change and pollution. Flannery helps to assuage this by describing eloquently his ideas, developed from examples that have already provided positive results.

Finding clean and sustainable alternative energy sources will initially cost a lot of money, but it is my bet that it will pay off a great deal more than the current global annual military budget of more than a trillion dollars. And the miraculous thing about the human will is that sometimes it appears out of nowhere, when you least expect it. That is what happened that day the police tried to arrest Jack Weinberg — all of a sudden there was a collective voice for peace. Flannery believes that now is the time for such a voice to arise to protect the earth. 🌱



Featured Book Review

By Anne Lindsey

Denying the Source: The Crisis of First Nations Water Rights

Author: Merrell-Ann S. Phare
Rocky Mountain Books, 2009

HERE'S A QUESTION: "If you lived in a country where one out of every six people you met lived in a town that had drinking water too polluted for human consumption, what country would you be in?" Merrell-Ann Phare poses this question in her new book *Denying the Source*.

Her answer: "Indian country."

This is a book about the water crisis faced by Canada's aboriginal reserves, how it came about and why it is taking so long to fix the problems.

It is integral reading for anyone who uses water (and this would be all of us), especially those involved in making water policy, and those who care about social justice.

Water quality in First Nations communities is a subject that we covered in a recent edition of the *Eco-Journal*, with the positive efforts of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation in Saskatchewan. Their work with First Nations to improve the condition of drinking water on reserves is truly heartening and a beacon for the future.

Author Merrell-Ann Phare is the executive director of Winnipeg's Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, and legal advisor on water issues to the Assembly of First Nations, making her one of Canada's experts on indigenous water rights.

Phare has the sense to ask where the problem stems from in the first place, and how we have dealt with aboriginal peoples' right to water in our legal and constitutional framework.

Three facts came together to set the scene for the many injustices faced by First Nations regarding water. Firstly, there are important differences between the way indigenous and European traditions view questions of "ownership" and control of water. Second, the lack of a national water policy setting out enforceable standards for drinking water and minimum stream flows required for ecosystem needs. And lastly, in Canada's original constitution there was no mention of water ownership or provision, and only nominal mention of First Na-

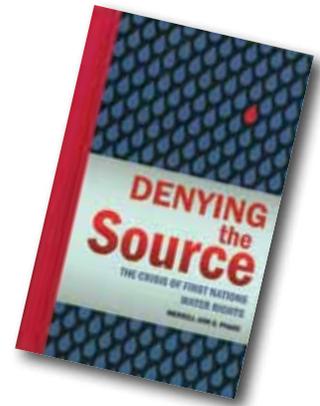
tions peoples as a federal responsibility.

However, in spite of the assertion by provinces that water rights were given up during the negotiation of land treaties, a growing body of jurisprudence indicates that indigenous peoples' inherent rights to water were not in fact, extinguished by treaties, and they still exist and cannot be taken away by the provinces and federal governments. While treaty rights were finally recognized in the 1982 repatriation of the constitution, much damage had already been done, and indigenous Canadians find themselves continuing to have to engage in legal battles to get their rights recognized.

Phare summarizes the outcomes of some important court cases and shares the Supreme Court justices' frustration that this fight continues to the present, creating a situation in which status Indians must essentially straddle two competing world views to fight for the enforcement of treaty rights.

Finally, Phare calls for moving forward on these important issues into a "relationship of renewal," utilizing the principles set out by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples some 10 years ago: mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility.

The first step, she suggests, is creating governance regimes to enable First Nations to manage water resources and solve water problems in their own territories. The next is creating a cross-cultural ethic about water — recognizing it as the sacred and life-providing element that it is for all Canadians, regardless of racial origin, and focusing on "prevention through source water protection, protection of watersheds and alternative models of economic development." Carried out in a truly co-operative framework, much could be accomplished to right the wrongs of the past, and create a more equitable future in the face of predicted climate-related water crises. 🌱



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Economic Benefits of Fisher Bay Park

CREATING A NEW PROVINCIAL PARK in Manitoba's magnificent Fisher Bay area could provide an annual net gain of \$38 million, says a new economic study released by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and Fisher River Cree Nation (FRCN). The Manitoba government has committed to establishing the park by October 2010, but its boundaries have not yet been determined.

The new independent study conducted by the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources says that the park, if it's designed as proposed by FRCN and CPAWS, could provide economic benefits 18 times greater than if the area were harvested by logging, mining, and non-Aboriginal hunting.

The new park would prohibit industrial activities while upholding and respecting all aboriginal and Treaty Rights. Just two hours north of Winnipeg, Fisher Bay has an ideal location and majestic landscape; creation of a park in this area offers numerous sustainable economic opportunities for local communities.

"Our community wants this park because it makes sense economically, ecologically, and culturally," says Fisher River's Chief David Crate. "By keeping the area natural we will maintain traditional subsistence activities and provide more than 100 jobs through avenues such as park management and eco- and cultural tourism ventures."

The area

Located on the west side of Lake Winnipeg is a truly spectacular boreal forest wilderness area called the Fisher Bay region. It consists of treed shorelines with long sandy beaches, large islands covered with old growth forests, wetlands, freshwater reefs, and a big section of Lake Winnipeg's water.

CPAWS, Fisher River Cree Nation support area eco-tourism opportunities

By Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Fisher River Cree Nation

This richly diverse wildlife sanctuary provides well for moose, elk, bears, eagles, many fish and waterfowl species, and songbirds. Its little-used beaches are suitable grounds for the Piping Plover, a highly endangered shorebird, to lay its eggs.

Canoeing, kayaking, sailing, hiking, bird watching, and fishing are just some of the popular recreational activities in the area that are ripe to be further developed with sustainable community initiatives.

Boundaries that make sense

The province has stated that beginning in late January it will consult with local communities, stakeholders, and the public to determine the park's boundaries. FRCN and CPAWS are proposing boundaries based on the results and analysis of independent ecological study performed in the region.

"We commend the Manitoba government for

moving forward on establishing the park," says CPAWS Manitoba Executive Director Ron Thieszen. "Now the challenge is to make sure it is designed according to the best ecological and cultural considerations, rather than political lines."

Your voice needed

The Manitoba government needs to know we care about protecting our precious lands and waters for future generations. FRCN and CPAWS are encouraging all citizens to send Premier Selinger a letter to voice their opinion about establishing appropriate boundaries for the upcoming Fisher Bay provincial park.

With only seven percent of Manitoba permanently protected from industrial developments, establishing the Fisher Bay provincial park would be a giant leap toward a healthy future for Manitobans, wildlife, and the Earth.



Photos Courtesy of Ron Thieszen

Support for Fisher Bay park

The quest for a new Fisher Bay park as proposed by FRCN and CPAWS is capturing the hearts and minds of many people and organizations. To date, we have received official support from:

- Jackhead First Nation
- RM of Coldwell
- RM of Fisher
- Arbong
- Riverton
- Over 11,500 support letters sent from Manitobans to the premier
- Honourable Bill Blaikie (Manitoba conservation minister)
- Honourable Jon Gerrard (Manitoba Liberal leader)
- Honourable James Bezan (local MP - Conservative)
- Manitoba Green Party
- Western Canada Wilderness Committee
- Nature Manitoba





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