

Saskatchewan
ECO-NETWORK

NETWORKNEWS

203 - 115 2nd Avenue North, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 2B1 • Phone (306) 652-1275 Fax (306) 665-2128

“Forest Forays” Project Receives SEN Grassroots Activism Funding

Last fall, work began on an exciting project to gather and record statements, input and visions from different places and perspectives in developing a sustainable approach to forestry and forest stewardship. Project coordinators Joys Dancer and John Murray, of the Saskatchewan Treeplanters Association, have a vision of interviewing local people in four forest communities (Hudson Bay, Big River, Dore Lake and Prince Albert) to develop a discussion paper on alternative community development and eco-system based land use planning.

Their approach stems from the Community Economic Development (CED) movement and the Silva Forest Foundation, both of whom have assisted communities across Canada to develop new approaches to old problems. The CED Movement works with communities to develop “Action Plans” that include: bringing together local leaders, shaping community visions, doing research and networking with other communities, writing funding grants and lobbying and creating regional partnerships. The Silva Forest Foundation, founded by Herb and Susan Hammond in B.C., has assisted several communities in the creation of eco-system conservation plans. This process, which is carried out for a series of scales (regional, large landscape, small landscape, watershed, sites/stands), includes: assessment, design, integration and implementation. The process identifies factors that explore how natural systems function (ecosystems, cultures, communities, economies) and what the impact is on these natural systems from industrial developments.

The Forest Forays project has carried out its first community interviews in Big River. Key interested people (youth, elders, women and men) were invited to discuss a new approach to economic development and forestry in their community and area. The topics that each set of interviews intends to explore include values identification, visioning exercises, looking at the local assets (strengths and resources in the community), needs, obstacles and resources for realizing the identified vision.

The Forest Forays project was awarded the Saskatchewan Eco-Network’s Activism Funding for 2005/06.

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Exploring Saskatchewan's Nuclear Future

- by Ann Coxworth

Sponsored jointly by SARM, SUMA and the University of Regina, and billed as a public discussion forum, this 2-day event took place at the Regina Inn in mid-January. It attracted some 250 representatives of municipalities, senior governments, industry and a handful of other individuals. While the initial agenda suggested that it was going to be very much a promotional event for the nuclear industry, late additions (perhaps in response to objections from the Saskatchewan Eco-Network) provided a little more balance in the presentations.

From the industry perspective we heard about uranium mining and processing and about nuclear power plants. We learned how favorably Saskatchewan people seem to feel about uranium development and nuclear power, according to polling results, and how public acceptance of nuclear waste disposal has been managed in Sweden. SaskPower told us about the province's future electrical supply needs, mentioning that presently available nuclear plants are too large to fit into our grid system. A resident of Buffalo Narrows provided a northern perspective, suggesting that northerners are now better informed, more comfortable with the uranium industry, and less susceptible to "scare tactics" than they used to be. We heard about the energy needs of the Alberta Oil Sands industry, but were assured by the president of Cameco that the idea of building a nuclear plant in Saskatchewan to provide heat to the tar sands was not an economically feasible option.

The City of Saskatoon's Sheri Praski provided a refreshing overview of alternative approaches to meeting our energy needs. We listened to Patrick Moore (long disowned by Greenpeace) providing a confusing message which included both a claim that we need to build thousands of nuclear reactors in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as a suggestion that the science behind the belief that greenhouse gases cause climate change is shaky and that, anyway, a warmer climate would be pretty nice. "I don't see why people are so upset at the idea of sea-level rising," he proclaimed. "The fish wouldn't care!"

After a final panel on nuclear waste management, a short discussion of "where do we go from here?" took place. For many of the municipal representatives, the possibility of new, local, economic development opportunities was obviously much more important than strategizing about Saskatchewan's energy future. Some expressed disappointment that no momentum seemed to have developed towards a more robust, nuclear-based economy. Other people asked for a broader discussion of the potential shape of a sustainable energy vision for Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Environmental Society would encourage the latter approach.

Ann Coxworth is with the Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES). For more information about SES and the issues it works on, visit their website at www.environmentalsociety.ca.

Regina
EcoLiving's book

***EcoLiving:
Your Guide to
Sustainable Living***

is now available!

To purchase your copy:

in Saskatoon: U of S Bookstore, Turning the Tide, Escape
in Regina: Book & Brier Patch, Briarpatch Magazine, Buy
the Book, Eat Healthy Foods, Girl Guides Centre, Groovy
Mama, Habitat for Humanity ReStore, Nature's Best
Market, Royal Saskatchewan Museum, U of R Student's
Union office, and U of R Bookstore

in Craik: Craik EcoCentre

The book can also be ordered for \$7 plus shipping
by contacting Regina EcoLiving at

reginaecoliving@yahoo.ca

or call (306) 546-3676

Eco-Champions of Saskatchewan Website Is Growing!

- by Robert White

No environmental history of Saskatchewan has ever been written but the profiles of Saskatchewan Environmental Champions on the Saskatchewan Eco Network website does show the role of individuals and organizations in leading environmental protection and improvement in Saskatchewan.

Among the individuals and organizations profiled are **Lorne Scott** who, as a youth, began building and placing bluebird boxes and creating the Saskatchewan section of the *Prairie Bluebird Trail*. He has gone on to lead *Nature Saskatchewan* and the *Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation* in conservation initiatives and served as provincial Minister of Environment. **Stuart and Mary Houston** are known all over North America for their leadership in birdbanding, ornithological documentation and writings on natural history. The **Saskatchewan Environmental Society** is profiled for championing many significant causes in its 35-year history. There are also profiles on **Stan Rowe**, **Bison Conservation** and the **Royal Saskatchewan Museum**.



Stuart and Mary Houston, Saskatchewan's dynamic duo of ornithology- are long time collaborators in natural history and conservation activities. Their work in publishing, bird banding, and conservation is legendary.



Saskatchewan has also produced environmental leaders at the national and international level. **James MacNeill** grew up and studied in Saskatchewan but went on to be in the forefront in the development of federal environmental policy and programs in the late 1960's and

early 1970's. He led Canadian initiatives for the first United Nations Conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972 and was at the forefront of the subsequent evolution of the concept of sustainable development. MacNeill is a recipient of several honorary degrees, as well as the Order of Canada and the Lifetime Achievement Award of Environment Canada.

Similarly **Elizabeth Dowdeswell** went from being a schoolteacher in Swift Current to becoming leading international figure in environmental circles. In 1992 she became Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-the first woman to do so. As Assistant Deputy Minister of Environment Canada from 1989 to 1992 she played a leading role in global efforts to negotiate the treaty on climate change adopted at the 1992 Rio Conference. She is the recipient of nine honorary degrees recognizing her contributions.

Check out the website at www.econet.sk.ca (click on link in upper right corner) celebrating the environmental successes of Saskatchewan people and organizations. More additions will be forthcoming before project completion in March, 2006.

Growing Interest in Grass Biofuels *By Rupert Jannasch*

A market study Resource Efficient Agricultural Production (REAP)-Canada conducted on grass pellet fuels in Ontario, suggests that a promising opportunity for farmers may be on the horizon.

The sharp increases in oil, natural gas, propane, and some regional electricity prices during the last ten years have demonstrated consumer vulnerability to fluctuations in energy supply. Farmers are particularly vulnerable because as primary producers they are often expected to swallow higher energy costs. These high energy prices combined with low food commodity prices represent a double threat to the prosperity of Ontario farmers.

One solution to resolve both problems would be to commercialize renewable, biofuel crops. By doing this it would help diversify the farm economy, as well as allow farmers to increase their energy self-reliance and control their energy costs.

The need to find alternatives to fossil fuels and to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions has heightened interest in biofuels. Resource Efficient Agricultural Production (REAP), has pioneered the development of biofuel pellets made from switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), a perennial grass native to the Great Plains and eastern North America.

Switchgrass is a warm season grass adapted to marginal soils and arid climates with minimal fertility and management requirements. Switchgrass is best adapted to well drained soils and growing seasons with 2500 or more Corn Heat Units. Switchgrass has reasonably good frost tolerance and would be advantageous in areas that are risky for corn and soybeans.

Switchgrass pellets are used much like wood pellets. The goal has been to expand the pellet heating market from an estimated 10,000 wood pellet space heaters in Ontario by increasing the choice of fuels. The supply of surplus wood residues (sawdust, wood chips, etc.), for example, has declined by approximately 50% across Canada between 1990-1998. Over the past few years, many pellet processors across Eastern Canada have been unable to obtain enough sawdust to manufacture fuel, thus homeowners

have experienced difficulty obtaining pellets.

Until recently, combustion of moderately high ash pellets made from grasses or tree bark was limited by a tendency for clinker (fused residues) formation in pellet stoves. Dell-Point Technologies and Grove Wood Heat Inc., however, have now developed technology to efficiently burn these materials in pellet form.

REAP-Canada conducted the first stage of a switchgrass pellet market survey for Eastern Ontario in 2001. Farmer surveys and land-based assessments were used to identify opportunities and needs for the industries development.

Farmers responding to the survey ranged from hobby farmers to large cash crop (over 2000 acres) and hog farming operations. The greatest risks associated with developing a grass fuel pellet industry were perceived to be: slow consumer uptake of pellet stove heating, low demand for pellets (initially), bale storage fires, and high transport costs.

Interest in pellet production and heating systems among farmers stemmed from a desire to: develop energy self-reliance and certainty of supply, control on-farm energy costs, diversify on-farm income, utilize marginal lands, and adopt more environmentally sound heating systems. Hog farmers saw a double role for switchgrass both as a sink for manure and as an alternate fuel for heating hog barns.

One of switchgrass' many advantages as a cash crop is its large quantity of potential markets. Farmers expressed interest in using pelletized switchgrass for heating barns, shop, houses, greenhouses, as well as for off-farm pellet sales. Others proposed using switchgrass for livestock bedding, garden mulch, mushroom compost and buffer strips on organic farms. The diverse uses for switchgrass help build confidence that farmers will find a profitable market for it as the pellet market evolves.

Prospective growers wishing to export switchgrass or switchgrass pellets from their farms expect a return similar to, or better than, a hay crop.

REAP's website is www.reap-canada.com.

Ban Terminator Campaign Aims to Stop Introduction of Suicide Seeds

- By Terry Pugh, National Farmers Union

Canadians need to push for a nation-wide ban on Genetic Use Restriction Technology (GURTs), commonly known as “Terminator” technology, says Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Global Ban Terminator Campaign.

Speaking to the National Farmers Union (NFU) convention in Ottawa recently, Sharratt said ever since the first patent on Terminator came to light in 1998, there has been massive public opposition to its commercialization. It threatens the food supply of 1.4 billion people who depend on farm-saved seed for their survival.

“Terminator technology is a technique for genetically engineering seeds so the seeds themselves will not germinate,” stated Sharratt. “The first patent, granted by the US Patent Office in 1998, is owned jointly by the US Department of Agriculture and a company called Delta and Pine Land. The USDA spent \$200,000 of American taxpayers’ money to develop this technology which makes no claim for agronomic benefits. There are no benefits to the farmer – no increased yield, no increased nutritional value. The only claim that Terminator Technology makes is to create sterile seeds.”

“The obvious question is, why would the US public purse spend all that time, money and brain power to develop a technology whose only purpose is seed sterility?” she asked. “The answer is also obvious – to create new markets and protect corporate power and profits. The inventors of Terminator are very clear about this. One USDA spokesperson said the aim is to increase the value of proprietary seed owned by US seed corporations, and to open up new markets in the second and third world.”

She noted that Terminator is a “biological patent protection” mechanism because it prevents farmers from saving, re-using and breeding their own seed. “Delta and Pine Land officials refer to it as a technology protection system.”

Sharratt said while the patent is jointly owned by Delta and Pine Land and the USDA, the biggest potential customer for Terminator Technology is Monsanto. In 1999, Monsanto made a pledge not to commercialize Terminator. But five years later, Monsanto has become the largest seed company in the world and controls over 90 percent of the genetically-modified crops planted world-wide. With

access to Terminator technology, Monsanto “would capture the seed market like never before,” noted Sharratt.

A Canadian patent on Terminator technology was granted October 11, 2005, despite a *de facto* global moratorium endorsed by the United Nations in 1999. Sharratt pointed out the Canadian government appears intent on taking the lead in commercializing Terminator technology. In February 2005, the Canadian delegation at the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity meeting in Bangkok attempted to overturn the moratorium and allow field trials of Terminator to supposedly determine if it was environmentally safe. Public pressure forced the Canadian government to back off on its position.

In January, 2006, with the governments of Australia and New Zealand taking the lead at a similar meeting in Granada, Spain, officials from the Biodiversity Convention Office of Environment Canada once again attempted to undermine the *de facto* moratorium. A resolution was passed at that meeting which recommended abandoning the precautionary principle to allow testing of terminator plant varieties on a “case by case” basis under the guise of “risk management” and “capacity building”.

Terry Boehm, NFU Vice-President and Chair of the Canadian Ban Terminator Campaign, said the Canadian delegation appeared to be taking advantage of a change in government to push through an agenda that benefits large multinational seed and chemical companies – a move he termed irresponsible. “Why would Canada help to unleash something as dangerous as Terminator on the world?” he asked. He drew a parallel between GURTs and nuclear weapons, saying no amount of “testing” can alter the inherently dangerous character of the technology.

In March, 2006, the issue will once again be raised at the UN Conference on Biodiversity meeting in Brazil. Sharratt said there is a limited amount of time for Canadians to make their voices heard on this issue. A postcard campaign has been launched by the Canadian Ban Terminator campaign “We know from past experience that letters to government do make a difference,” she said. “We need to force the Canadian government to implement a ban on Terminator Technology now.”

Manufacturing Disease: Government Avian Flu Response Wrong-headed

Adapted from a longer article by Rob Wallbridge

Terrorist ducks and free-range sleeper cells? It's an odd idea to imagine, yet this appears to be the way some governments view wild birds and outdoor flocks of poultry in the wave of paranoia surrounding the H5N1 strain of avian influenza.

In early November, the government of Quebec imposed strict new regulations governing poultry farming in the province, including the requirement that all poultry be kept locked indoors, sealed away from any type of potential contact with wild birds. The intention is to protect the province's poultry industry and its export markets from the threat of avian flu. But is this response the right one?

This action not only affects small farmers who are accustomed to letting their poultry free range, it also threatens the ability of certified organic producers to continue to raise their flocks according to organic standards and according to their customer's expectations.

There are broader concerns about the real source of the current strain of H5N1 avian flu as well as the true effectiveness of this "exposure avoidance" approach to dealing with the threat, and its impact on the poultry industry, farmers, consumers, and human health worldwide. Consider that traditional Asian farms and markets being blamed for the current problem have existed for 7,000 years. Avian flu has been present for hundreds of years, and was first noticed to cause human disease over 100 years ago. Even the H5N1 strain has been present since at least 1959. The current strain of highly pathogenic H5N1 flu is believed to have started in southern China in early 2003. This area, like many parts of Southeast Asia is home to rapidly-expanding 'modern' intensive poultry production, as well as traditional farms and live-bird markets.

Our knowledge of viruses tells us that large, intensive livestock facilities are the perfect breeding ground for the emergence of highly-pathogenic, virulent strains: they house large numbers of bird in close quarters whose immune systems have been compromised by stress, poor living conditions, and feeds medicated with hormones and antibiotics. Current biosecurity protocols may even aid in their emergence by selecting against diseases that are easier to eliminate.


There is reason to suspect that the current strain of H5N1 emerged from an intensive operation and then spread in areas where large numbers of birds and large human populations are in close contact (a situation that doesn't exist in Canada). Previous experience tells us that this "exposure avoidance" approach to livestock disease control is bound to fail sooner or later. There is evidence to suggest that either the genetics or the environment (or both) of properly cared-for outdoor flocks confers some resistance to avian flu, as well as providing nutritional benefits to those who consume "pastured poultry" products.

These conclusions suggest that the recent measures taken by the Quebec government are unnecessary, ineffective at best, and likely highly counterproductive.

A more effective strategy would focus on avoiding the mutation of the virus to its lethal form, researching what factors make birds healthier and less susceptible to flu viruses, working with farmers to build the health and strengthen the immune system of their birds, and encouraging small, genetically-diverse flocks in order to reduce the risk of mutation and to preserve genetic material for future generations.

This alternative strategy will protect the health of our birds and our human population and also preserve and increase the quality and diversity of the poultry products available to consumers. This will benefit farmers and rural communities by reducing the concentration of market power that would otherwise accelerate.

Let's hope that the Quebec government reconsiders its position, and that all governments across Canada work with the entire farm community to create a balanced, rational approach to this and other livestock disease concerns.

Rob Wallbridge was born and raised on a family farm in Ontario and obtained a Bachelor of Arts & Science Degree from McMaster University in 1995. He currently works as an organic agricultural consultant and operates a diversified certified organic farm near Shawville, Quebec with his wife and child. 

2006 PIPING PLOVER CENSUS Call for Volunteers!

June 3-16, 2006 will mark the dates for the 4th International Piping Plover Census across North America. Nature Saskatchewan is coordinating the census in Saskatchewan. This year will be especially exciting because of the number of Piping Plovers that have been banded in the last few years.

The Saskatchewan census is critical to the international effort as Saskatchewan water bodies support 14-24 % of the total population of Piping Plovers across North America. The census results will provide information to help in the recovery of this endangered shorebird. They will allow Recovery Team members to monitor moderate-to-long-term population trends, as well as site and habitat use, and to assess the success of current recovery efforts and objectives as stated in the Recovery Team Plan.

Volunteers who have time to check beaches at one or more small lakes or basins in Saskatchewan are needed. As a surveyor, you will receive information on the Piping Plover, census instructions, a detailed map of your basin(s) and a census form(s) to fill out. Any expenses incurred for food, accommodation and/or gas will be reimbursed.

Your help is always greatly appreciated! Please consider being a part of this important project! For more information about this census, or if you would like to participate, contact:

Paule Hjertaas, Project Coordinator, Nature Saskatchewan
206 - 1860 Lorne Street, Regina, SK S4P 2L7, Toll free phone:
1-800-667-4668, E-mail: info@naturesask.ca



Thank you to Sharon Mascher, from Saskatchewan Environmental Society, who served on SEN's Steering Committee. Sharon recently moved to Australia, and we wish her luck in her endeavours there.

SEN Steering Committee 2005 / 2006

Alan Appleby - Chair
CPAWS-Sask.
3079 Athol Street
Regina, SK S4S 1Y6
Phone: (306) 586-3863
Fax: (306) 586-3863
Email: aappleby@accesscomm.ca

Sharon Cameron
SFL Environment Committee
Box 2174
Humboldt, SK S0K 2A0
Phone: (306) 682-5157
Fax: (306) 682-4046
Email: sharon.cameron@sasktel.net

Mike Finley
Nature Saskatchewan
410 26th St. W.
Saskatoon, SK S7L 0H9
Phone: (306) 665-6428
Email: mjfinley@shaw.ca

Randy Flemming
Interchurch Uranium Committee
Education Co-op
Box 1101, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3N2

Larry Hawrysh
Redberry Biosphere Reserve
Box 28
Hafford, SK S0J 1A0
Phone: (306) 549-4627
Email: dhawrysh@sk.sympatico.ca

Mary Beckie
14 Mitchell Street
Saskatoon, SK S7H 3G1
Phone: (306) 665-8103
E-mail: mbeckie@sasktel.net

Isabel Muzichuk
Concerned Citizens for a
Safe and Healthy Environment
Box 102
Buchanan, SK S0A 0J0
Phone: (306) 592-2122

Jim Elliott (CEN Council Rep.)
The Gaia Group
2108 Reynolds Street
Regina, SK S4N 3N1
Phone: (306) 352-4804
Email: caar@accesscomm.ca

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 16-18
**Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation
 77th Annual Convention**
 Heritage Inn, Moose Jaw
 For full convention details go to www.swf.sk.ca

Feb 15-16
**Organic Update Conference:
 Best Organic Management Practices**
 Paririe Ursuline Centre, Bruno, SK
 To pre-register call the Prairie Ursuline Centre at
 369-4186 or email pucentre@sasktel.net

March 11
Saskatoon Seedy Saturday Hosted by CHEP
 St. John's Church Hall (816 Spadina Cres. East)
 Displays, information, workshops and speakers,
 heritage seeds and plants for sale. Bring seeds to
 swap. Lunch and childcare provided. \$2 admission

March 23-24
**Sask. Waste Reduction Council's Spring '06
 Waste Minimization Forum**
 Travelodge South, Regina
 Tours, recycling markets, reuse options, municipal
 programs & business/institutional solutions
 For more info visit: www.saskwastereduction.ca

April 27-29
**Sustainability Network's
 Learning Network Workshop**
 For environmental leaders from Saskatchewan and
 Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.
 For more info contact Paul Bubelis, Coordinator at
paul@sustain.web.ca p 416-324-2792

June 4
Saskatchewan Eco-Network's Annual Meeting
 Craik Eco-Centre, Town of Craik
 More information will be forthcoming - mark your
 calendars!

June 19-23
U.N. Habitat-World Urban Forum
 Vancouver, B.C.
 For more info see www.unhabitat.org/wuf/2006

*LOST: Hard cover, signed book by Monte Hummel
 titled, "Endangered Species" - last seen at the
 Environmental Film Festival in November at the
 Broadway Theatre in Saskatoon on the CPAWS
 literature table. If found, please return to the
 CPAWS - Sask office (203-115 2nd Ave. North,
 Saskatoon). The owner will be happy!!*

Join the Network!

New members are welcome. Membership is open to non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations involved in environmental protection activities. Individuals who support the Network's objectives may also join as subscribers but may not vote or hold office.

Name/Contact Person

Organization

Title

Address

Postal Code

Phone Fax

Email

Membership fees:

Annual budget of less than \$5,000	\$30.00
Annual budget from \$5,000 to \$29,999	\$35.00
Annual budget from \$30,000 to \$99,999	\$45.00
Annual budget of \$100,000 or more	\$50.00
Organization fees include \$10.00 membership in the CEN	
Individual subscriber	\$10.00

Please send your cheque to Saskatchewan Eco-Network, #203-115 2nd Ave. N,
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