

Innovations in:

Data and information sharing
Strategic coordination of planning
Partnership building

Research & Monitoring Working Group:

The Research & Monitoring WG is tasked with completing a 'State of the Beaver Hills' report. First step will be to compile information on existing and past research projects in the BHI since its inception in 2000. Second step is to review and select indicators for Reviewing results achieved and lessons learned from past projects and efforts will establish future research and monitoring priorities by identifying information needs &/or data gaps. To date, several studies have contributed useful data and findings have had practical applications in the region. For example, the BHI's fire history study and woodlot management project provided key information to fire chiefs and local officials when considering fire risk. The BHI AgCapture project provided foundational data for the Wetland Research project and the Tourism Development Opportunity Assessment.

Dr. Brian Eaton
AITF

Jocelyn Thrasher-Haug
Strathcona County



Beaver Hills Initiative

Ecological Health Inventory and Assessment in the BHI:

A gap analysis of existing ecological data for the BHI in recent years pointed out to a lack of baseline information and monitoring abilities for most of the upland and wetland ecosystems in natural areas outside the Elk Island National Park. Sustainability of healthy, functioning, uplands and wetlands within the remaining natural areas and ecological processes that regulate them is of the utmost importance for the Beaver Hills Initiative.

To address the above mentioned gaps, in 2008, 35 randomly selected permanent sampling plots were established across the uplands of the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreational Area [CLBPRA] to collect baseline site, soil, vegetation, productivity and rangeland health data. A riparian health inventory was then conducted in 2009 for 10 randomly selected riparian areas in CLBPRA and in one riparian site at Golden Ranches using the Cows and Fish (Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society) methodology to establish the baseline and set a stage for long term monitoring.

We are pleased to report that all upland sites and most of the riparian sites showed to be "healthy", with few sites having some minor to moderate issues related to increased ungulate browse or invasion by non-native, invasive plants. All healthy sites can serve as a benchmark for land stewards in the Beaver Hills to identify and address specific land use and land management issues through adoption and monitoring of beneficial management practices.

Ksenija Vujnovic
Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation

For more information please contact:
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Working Together

Greetings from the BHI's Executive Director

I am pleased to present the fall 2012 issue of "Working Together", the quarterly newsletter of the Beaver Hills Initiative.

I encourage everyone to participate in upcoming events this fall such as the 6th annual Beaver Hills Dark Sky celebration called "Moon over Miquelon" on Sunday, September 2nd; for details check out: <http://edmontonrasc.com/public/bhdsp.html> or <http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/news-events/news/moonwalking-at-miquelon.aspx>.

In celebration of the BHI's 10th Year as a voluntary, collaboration of over 30 agencies and local jurisdictions, I would like to acknowledge how much we appreciate all the public support received by our member municipalities and partner agencies, which strongly reinforces their long term commitment to achieving a sustainable region for us all.

Special welcome to our OECD visitor this month, Mr. Tetsuya Uetake, with whom we look forward to sharing information on the BHI. I thank everyone for their hard work and I hope you enjoy learning about the many activities and projects involving the BHI. Thank you again for a wonderful ten years and have a safe and bountiful harvest season.

Brenda Wispinski
Executive Director



BEAVER HILLS INITIATIVE
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For a sustainable region,
through shared initiatives
and coordinated action



Fall 2012 Newsletter

OECD Policy Research Case Study of the BHI:

The BHI has attracted international attention from the Organization for Economic Cooperative Development or OECD. Researchers at the OECD are interested in examining policy and practices of 'collective action'. The BHI is one of two case studies the OECD is studying in Canada. OECD uses its wealth of information on a broad range of topics to help governments foster prosperity and fight poverty through economic growth and financial stability. The OECD helps ensure the environmental implications of economic and social development are taken into account or the principles of collaboration that the BHI has embraced for the past ten years.

Two key strengths of the BHI recognized by the OECD are the 1) ability to share information including both scientific data among members to develop consistent planning and practices; as well as the way the BHI applies local knowledge and learnings from local landowners to develop practical policies across the region; and 2) the ability of the BHI to effectively leverage resources (e.g. funding and technical expertise) and make it collectively possible to undertake projects with larger pool of resources which otherwise could not be supported or afforded at the individual municipality level.

Candace Vanin, P.Ag.
Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada

Fragmentation Impacts on Biodiversity & Ecosystems:

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published in 2002, called "Environmentalists Hail the Ranchers":

Ever since the great cattle drives of the Old West, ranching has been suspected of chewing up Western ecosystems. For decades, environmentalists have tried to limit grazing from public lands, where ranchers lease pastures from the government. But some scientists and conservationists are now saying that cattle ranches may be the last best hope for preserving habitat for many native species.

Scientists are concluding that large, intact working cattle ranches are crucial puzzle pieces holding together an increasingly fragmented landscape. When ranches and farms are subdivided into "ranchettes" or acreage estates of 40 acres or less, invasive species move in along with people and their pets, and fewer native species can live on the land. And it becomes much harder, if not impossible, to let fires burn across the land periodically, a process that is now thought to be essential in many ecosystems.

Scientists who studied ranch lands and ranchettes around Yellowstone National Park, found that some songbirds from higher elevation public lands used the private ranch lands as breeding grounds. But in the ranchettes, songbird death rates started to exceed birth rates, because houses draw magpies and other birds that prey on the songbirds. Scientists speculated that the songbirds were getting squeezed between increasing development at lower elevations and protected but unproductive breeding grounds at higher elevations.

"There is this lore throughout the conservation community that ranching is bad, period," said Dr. James H. Brown, a professor of biology at the University of New Mexico and an expert on the ecology of the Southwest. "I think that is demonstrably wrong." He found that the ranches had at least as many species of birds, carnivores and plants as similar areas that are protected as wildlife refuges. Ranches also had fewer invasive weeds. More important, the ranches provided a better habitat for wildlife than the ranchettes, which had fewer native species and more invasive species than ranches and refuges. Like many ecologists, they had assumed that grazing hurt wildlife. "It finally dawned on me," he said. "We made a mistake."

Full article is available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/10/science/earth/10RANC.html>

Upcoming Events:

September 2012

- 1-2 – Beaumont Blues Festival
- 2 - Moon over Miquelon-Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve 6th Anniversary at Miquelon Provincial Park
- 9 – Harvest of the Past & Taste of Heritage Food Fest at Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village
- 11-16 - Northern Prairie Star Party at Black Nugget Lake Campground, Beaver County
- 14 - Beaver County Open House
- 16 - Neighbour Day at Strathcona Community Centre
- 26-28 - AUMA Fall Convention at Edmonton
- 30 – Strathcona Wilderness Centre Fall Open House & Trail Run

October 2012

- 9-12 - Canadian Institute of Planners Annual Conference at Banff
- 13 - Andrew Garlic Festival
- 16-17 - Livestock Gentec Conference 2012 at Edmonton
- 17 - Historic Sites Survey Open House at Brookville Hall, Ardrossan
- 17-19 - Prairie-fed Water Systems: Challenges and Opportunities Conference at Camrose sponsored by Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin and Battle River Watershed Alliance
- 18-20 – Alberta Recreation & Parks Assoc Conference at Jasper
- 20 - International Astronomy Day

November 2012

- 4-7 - Growing the Sector: Hemp 2012 at Edmonton
- 13-15 - AAMDC Fall Convention at Edmonton
- 15-16 - Green Industry Show 2012 at Northlands Expo Centre
- 24 - Christmas in the Heartland at Josephburg

December 2012

- 3-4 - Evaluating the Opportunity of Farm Fresh & Local Foods Workshop at Leduc

BHI Partners:

Local Governments

- Beaver County
- Leduc County
- Lamont County
- Strathcona County

Government of Alberta

- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Environment & Sustainable Resource Development
- Municipal Affairs
- Tourism, Parks and Recreation
- Alberta Innovates Technology Futures

Government of Canada

- Elk Island National Park, Parks Canada
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Academia

- University of Alberta

Industrial Partners

- Alberta Industrial Heartland Association
- Fort Air Partnership
- Northeast Capital Industrial Association
- Strathcona Industrial Association

Non-Government Organizations

- Alberta Invasive Plants Council
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Alberta Fish and Game Association
- Alberta Lake Management Society
- Alberta Land Trust Alliance
- Alberta Recreation and Sport Development
- Alberta Sports Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation
- Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve
- Cosmic Journey
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Edmonton and Area Land Trust
- Land Stewardship Centre of Canada
- Miistakis Institute
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
- Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
- Worley Parsons

Protected Areas Working Group:



In January 2009 the BHI's Board of Directors gave approval for the BHI's Protected Areas Working Group to commence the preparation of the nomination document for seeking Biosphere Reserve designation for the Beaver Hills. The nomination document is now complete and provides the detailed evidence required to assure UNESCO that the proposed area and the organizational framework is in place meet the requirements of the Biosphere Reserve international program. Submission will take place in September 2012. It is anticipated that early in 2013, word will be received whether the BHI is Canada's 17th biosphere reserve and more importantly on a provincial level, Alberta's second.

Dr. Guy Swinnerton, Professor Emeritus
University of Alberta

Did You Know?



Did you know that Alberta will soon be the only province in Canada with a provincial mushroom emblem, the red cap mushroom (*Leccinum boreale*)?

Markus N. Thomann
Worley Parsons

Vision: The Beaver Hills Initiative values the region for its natural beauty, quality of life and supports cooperative efforts to sustain the quality of water, land, air, natural resources, and community development.