

Innovations in:

Data and information sharing
Strategic coordination of planning
Partnership building

Beaver Hills Initiative

Working Together

For a sustainable region,
through shared initiatives
and coordinated action



A Bison Homecoming:

On January 24, 2012, Elk Island National Park transferred 70 plains bison to American Prairie Reserve in north eastern Montana. The 2012 historic partnering project between Parks Canada and American Prairie Foundation is a full-circle journey for North America's plains bison. It also represents a significant international conservation project that contributes to the continued survival and well-being of an animal that is the undisputed symbol of North America's vast prairie landscape.

In the early 1900s, a few private citizens in the United States and Canada made efforts to save the species following the near extinction of the species due to over-hunting and the advance of settlement on the prairies. In 1906, the last large herd of wild plains bison, the Pablo-Allard herd, was sold to the Government of Canada for \$245 per head. In 1907, 410 plains bison were shipped by train, in 17 freight cars, from Montana to Lamont, Alberta and then herded to their new home at the newly established Elk Park, which later became Elk Island National Park in 1913. This herd was eventually distributed throughout various national parks and as a result, most of today's surviving plains bison are their descendants.

The first transfer between Elk Island National Park and American Prairie Foundation occurred in 2009-2010 when 93 bison were moved to Montana.



The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Parks Canada are integral partners. CFIA certifies the animals as disease-free for conservation transfers and in co-operation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has developed a disease testing and treatment protocol for the animals and veterinary health certificates recognized by both countries. The bison are quarantined for 60 days in Canada and again for 30 days upon their arrival in Montana. In March 2012, the bison will be released at American Prairie Reserve.

While there is some risk in moving large animals over long distances, the transfer of bison for conservation initiatives is a risk worth taking. Safety of the plains bison is top priority for all stages of the transfer. Staff at Elk Island National Park have unique expertise and a long history in managing, caring for and handling bison and are assisted by a Parks Canada veterinarian. Animal scientist and author Temple Grandin consulted on the design of Elk Island National Park's state-of-the-art bison handling facility. American Prairie Foundation works with scientists from World Wildlife Fund to ensure the herd is healthy and well-managed in Montana.

The "bison homecoming" is a heart-warming chapter in the history of the near-extinction and slow comeback of plains bison in North America. American Prairie Foundation's work to set aside lands for prairie wildlife has united with Canada's work in conserving plains bison to strengthen a future for a magnificent animal that is part of the shared heritage of both nations.

For more information, please visit:
Elk Island National Park: www.parksCanada.gc.ca/elkIsland

Maureen Shenher
Elk Island National Park

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Greetings from the BHI's Executive Director

Happy New Year and welcome to 2012 and 15th edition of the BHI newsletter! BHI is approaching its ten year anniversary and looking forward to another busy year ahead.

First, and most importantly, thank you to the BHI partnership and everyone involved with the BHI. Your ongoing commitment to the BHI and hard work is appreciated and very essential to the outcomes for the BHI. You are truly part of making a difference in conserving and stewarding this unique landscape.

Last month, the BHI Board of Directors approved the 2012 – 2015 BHI Business Plan which is available on the website www.beaverhills.ab.ca Thank you to the Board and Working Groups for all the strategic planning efforts and review in 2011. An exciting time is ahead, implementing the business plan and numerous projects.

Continuing are the Biosphere Reserve Nomination, developing sustainable nature-based tourism opportunities, as well as the Transfer of Development Credit Pilot project. Recent release of the Canada West Foundation_ <http://www.cwf.ca> report entitled, "The Invisible Hand's Green Thumb Market Based Instruments for Environmental Protection in Alberta, the BHI is proud to be part of these initiatives. Future activities regarding connecting Canadians to stewardship and citizen science, updating the BHI Land Management Framework, evolving our GIS data management system, giving the BHI website a fresh new look and building new partnerships throughout 2012 and beyond are planned!

Please take a moment to read the updates from the Working Group Chairs who I thank for all their hard work.



BEAVER HILLS INITIATIVE
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Spring 2012 Newsletter

And please visit our website often!!! Throughout the website update we hope to keep things running smoothly. I would also like to welcome our newest working group, the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve, and all members of the Preserve to the BHI partnership. We look forward to learning more about our night sky and light efficient communities and the long weekend in September 2012 celebration to be held at Miquelon Lake Provincial Park.

And last but not least, please block the date for September 8-9, 2012 for the **BHI Ten Year Celebration** at Elk Island National Park! More details will be posted on our website and future BHI newsletters.

Thank you again; spring is just around the corner... a wonderful time to be out in the Beaver Hills.

Brenda Wispinski
Executive Director

Councillors' Working Group:

The Councillors' Working Group is currently planning the Beaver Hill Initiative's Ten Year Anniversary Celebration on September 8-9, 2012. Two days of community celebrations, music, information workshops and tours are being planned. Watch for more details on the website in the next few months.

Bonnie Riddell, Councillor
Strathcona County

What to do about Winter...

Did you know that winter is no time to lock yourself indoors and enter a state of torpor? It is in fact a great time to get outside and see the beauty that is Canada from December to March. It's easy to avoid the "Great Outdoors" during our winter months, but we should all break free of that mindset and find adventure close to home (especially when Mother Nature has blessed us with a mild winter).

The Beaver Hills is filled with sites to visit at this time of year... Elk Island National Park, Cooking-Lake Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area and Grazing Reserve, Ministik Bird Sanctuary...just to name a few. Wondering what you can do once you get there? Well, all of these places have winter trails to access either by your own personal power, four-legged horse power, or even in some cases mechanical horse power. Check the various websites to find maps and permitted uses on the different trails.

Winter activities you can do just about anywhere:

- Snowshoeing – rent them if you don't own a pair
- Geo-caching – for the tech savvy
- Bird watching – they don't ALL fly south
- Animal tracking – there's no better time to see tracks than when there's snow

Alissa Wilson

Nature Conservancy of Canada



Upcoming Events:

February 2012

- 10-11 - Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival
- 14 - Urban Agriculture Luncheon at Edmonton sponsored by Alberta Professional Planners' Institute [APPI]
- 20 - Family Day at Elk Island National Park
- 20 - Family Day at Strathcona Wilderness Centre
- 21 - Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper at Spilstead Hall
- 22-23 - Connecting Canadians through Stewardship Workshop
- 25 - Beaverhill Rural Crime Watch 16th Annual Supper at Ryley

March 2012

- 4-11 - Kalyna Festival at St. Michael
- 20 - Planning for Healthy Communities Luncheon at Edmonton sponsored by APPI
- 19-21 - AAMDC Spring Convention

April 2012

- 3-5 - Water: What is at Risk? Agriculture, Energy and Urban end use - sponsored by Alberta Institute of Agrologists at Banff
- 16-18 Community Planners Assoc of Alberta Annual Conference at Red Deer
- 25-26 - Advancing the Bio-economy: Biomass in a Canadian Energy Strategy at Edmonton
- 28 Bull-a-rama at Lamont

May 2012

- 4 Arbor Day

BHI Partners:

Local Governments

- Beaver County,
- Camrose County,
- Leduc County,
- Lamont County,
- Strathcona County

Government of Canada

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

Government of Alberta

- Agriculture and Rural Development
- Environment
- Municipal Affairs
- Sustainable Resource Development
- Tourism, Parks and Recreation

Academia

- University of Alberta
- Alberta Innovates Technology Futures

Industrial Partners

- Alberta Industrial Heartland Association
- Fort Air Partnership

Non-Government Organizations

- Alberta Invasive Plants Council
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Alberta Fish and Game Association
- Alberta Lake Management Society
- Alberta Land Trust Alliance
- Alberta Sports Recreation & 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

Collaborative Bioregional Planning:



A critical consideration in implementing the BHI has been the involvement of the five municipal governments, due to their statutory land-use planning responsibilities involving private land. Many of the initial BHI projects have provided science-based planning information and a comprehensive environmental database that has been available to all BHI partners. Of particular significance has been the development of a Land Management Framework based on an assessment of the natural capital of the Beaver Hills and Best Management Practices guidelines for both strategic and site-specific planning. Other significant projects include: woodlot management planning; transfer of development credits; food systems planning; Golden Ranches – Creating a Wildland Legacy; and a tourism development opportunity assessment study. In September 2006, designation of the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve recognized the importance of its nocturnal habitats and the values of the night sky as a cultural heritage for present and future generations.

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 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.

If successful, designation of the Beaver Hills as a Biosphere Reserve would provide international acknowledgement of the unique qualities of the Beaver Hills and what the BHI has achieved to-date in demonstrating biodiversity protection and sustainable development. More importantly, Biosphere Reserve designation would enable the Beaver Hills Initiative to become a more active contributor to finding solutions to global challenges such as the effects of climate change, the provision of ecosystem services, and the impact of urbanization on natural capital and ecosystems.

(This is an excerpt of an article published in the "Journal of the International Federation of Park and Recreation Administration", September 2011, pp. 18-20.)

Dr. Guy Swinnerton, Professor Emeritus
University of Alberta

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.