

Local stewards get their feet wet

Alberta Stewardship Network holds AGM
June 11 in Rich Valley

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T&C STAFF

It was the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who once said, "You can't step in the same river twice," and it's one statement that rings true with Dr. Michael Sullivan, fisheries biologist with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

During his keynote presentation June 11 at the annual general meeting of the Alberta Stewardship Network in Rich Valley, Dr. Sullivan discussed biodiversity, and looked specifically at the complexity of ecosystems and the difficulty in restoring them once they've been altered.

"We don't always see

the big picture," Sullivan told the crowd of about 75 people, most of whom were members of local stewardship groups.

"Once you change an ecosystem, people adapt and it becomes a lot more complex. It is very difficult for us to engineer something as complex as an ecosystem back to what we want it to be.

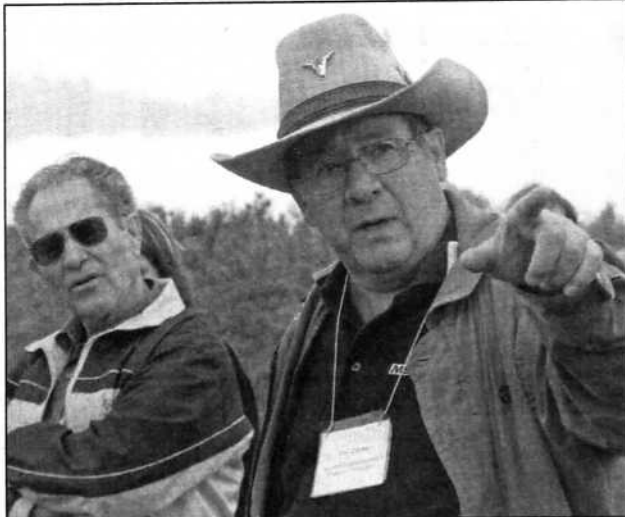
"It's not one species at risk, the whole system is in peril," he said before later stressing the importance of getting people to adopt a variety of improvement practices such as recognizing the danger of over fishing and carefully monitoring fish populations to prevent their depletion. "We have to

change our attitude toward nature. We can't engineer it, we have to work with it."

The conference, themed 'Communicating for Success,' also showcased several watersheds throughout the province and featured a teambuilding workshop and award ceremony as well.

"[It's] really to serve two purposes and that is to present information and knowledge to people involved in stewardship," said Margaret Glasford, Chair of the Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN). "Also to bring them together and give them a chance to chat and talk about some of their successes, some of the challenges that they've had and how they've overcome it and the various projects that have taken place."

One of the watersheds featured at Wednesday's meeting was Lac La Nonne, located roughly 15 km south of Barrhead, just south of the Pembina River.



Tim Clarke of the Lac La Nonne Enhancement and Protection Association points to one of several riparian improvement projects in the area.

The watershed is part of the Athabasca River Basin and encompasses the counties of Lac Ste. Anne and Barrhead and includes Lac La Nonne, Nakamun and Majeau Lakes.

According to the 2006 Lac La Nonne State of the Watershed Report, while the overall health of this watershed is good, streams in the area are inputting excess nutrients into all three lakes, something that will reduce water quality and could lead to increased algal blooms, increased aquatic plant growths, low oxygen levels and reduced fish populations.

Jeff McCammon, a member of the Lac La Nonne Watershed Stewardship Society, hopes the future will bring more community involvement.

"We are doing this work for the community and we need the community to come out and become involved and more aware of what it takes to actually make a difference in the health of all the lakes and the watershed as a whole," he said.

"The lakes are the end result of other things that are happening in the watershed and there just has to be some good work done."

The final part of the meeting included a tour of several sites, including a local farm that had been the subject of a riparian improvement project aimed at creating an alternative high-quality water supply to a nearby stream. An extremely important part of any watershed, riparian areas are the wet, green zones

found around lakes and wetlands.

Construction at this particular site included the installation of a shallow well and a solar powered pump and storage tank as well as fencing the new 'riparian' pasture.

Kerri O'Shaughnessy, a riparian specialist with Cows and Fish, explained that in 2004, when the project was initiated, a baseline health assessment found the pasture to be unhealthy because of the abundance of Canada thistle and also as the result of cattle having had access to the area during the wet time of the year.

"Before 2004 they were allowed in here from late May to early June when the soils were still quite wet, for 40-50 years," said O'Shaughnessy. "That created a lot of uneven ground and a lot of compaction and structural alteration."

Besides improving the health of the riparian area, other benefits of such a project include enhancing the runoff filtration, stream bank stabilization and improvement to the wildlife habitat. Cows and Fish routinely work with landowners, helping them to understand and appreciate the value of riparian areas.

"This particular area was to create a riparian pasture so that the cattle can be allowed in here at certain times of the year, generally later in the summer for a short period of time," said O'Shaughnessy, who added that leaving the cattle out of the riparian area during the early spring and summer allows the soil to harden before the cattle start grazing.

"This is the fourth year and I would hope that next year we can go in and see what's happening," she said.



Kerry O'Shaughnessy of Cows and Fish talks about healthy riparian areas on the shores of Lac La Nonne.

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JULY 5, 2008 3:00 P.M.

Entry Fee \$30.00

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Cow Riding

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Jr Steer (16-under)
Jr Barrels (11-16)
Peewee Barrels (10-under)
Call Riding (10-under)
Jr Steer Undecorating (11-16)
Ladies Steer Undecorating (17-over)
Jr Break Away Roping (16-under)
Miniature Wild Pony Race (10-14)
Mutton Bustin (6-under) free - pre entry only

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