Environmental Advisory Committee
Winter Newsletter 2021

TO PROMOTE EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS, AND PROVIDE ADVICE FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE VILLAGE OF SPRING LAKE

Your Environmental Advisory Committee has been active for the past sixteen years. Over those years, we have initiated, implemented and accomplished many things. We have developed partnerships with other organizations such as the Alberta Conservation Association, the members have taken educational workshops such as aquatic and land weed identification, have been members of other environmental organizations such as The Lakes of Parkland County, as well as offering workshops on topics such as composting, septic safety and healthy water wells. Even through the pandemic to date, we have managed to work behind the scenes and still complete some initiatives. To see a full list of the initiatives that have been done, visit the Village website, look for the EAC link and click onto Initiatives.

There were four nesting pairs of loons again this year and from them there were four chicks born; all four survived to the end of the season. Only one pair nested on the island this year, while the other two who usually nest there opted to nest on the mainland. This could probably be due to a lack of reeds this year which provided less camouflage. Only one of the pairs nesting on the mainland had chicks.

The pair in the southwest bay successfully nested on the platform again this year, producing the other two chicks. The platform which was put on the north side of the island was ignored by that pair; they were unsuccessful in hatching again this year.

At the Fall Festival this past September, the EAC passed out, on a first come first served basis, bird house kits, bird feeder kits and Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring guide books, along with activity booklets about bees. Hopefully spring 2022, many of our children will be ready and eager to put out their new bird houses and have their new feeders ready to go, along with being able to identify and follow the bluebirds when they come here to visit. Look for our table again next year to see what interesting bits we will have for you.

We like to promote and support tree planting in various ways each year within our community. In 2020, we passed out evergreen seedling kits to the kids, and in 2021, we made a donation to the Village for new trees, these to be planted in certain areas that needed to be naturalized. This is an ongoing project within the Village, tree planting, and we invite you to plant a tree whenever you get the opportunity to do so. This helps to keep our community looking green, the air clean and provides homes and food for our birds, insects and wildlife.

We developed an Environmental Action Plan in 2018 as one of our initiatives. Every meeting the EAC has, this Action Plan is reviewed to ensure the Village and our committee are on track to meeting our goals as outlined in the plan. Every fall, the plan is updated, revised as needed with new goals developed as current goals are met. It is then presented to council, usually in October, to be accepted as a working document whenever it is feasible to implement any of the goals. To review this document, have a look on the Village website under the EAC. If anyone has suggestions to bring forward that may be suitable for this living document, please email them to us at EAC@springlakealberta.com. Your suggestions and input are welcomed.

The beginning of our Terms of Reference starts with "To Promote Education". This is not just for the EAC to promote education within our community, but to promote education for the members of the committee as well. However, due to the pandemic these past one and a half years, it has been next to impossible to safely have guest speakers in, offer workshops, attend workshops or any type of educational programs other than virtually. Now with more people being vaccinated it was safer for all, so we were able to bring in the Executive Director from the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) of which Spring Lake is a member. Topics of discussion included a review of what the NSWA is about and how they are able to help us with grants and summer programs. The guest speaker likes the work we are doing and indicated we are ahead of many other larger communities with the initiatives we have completed (this list can be viewed on the Village web site under the EAC section) and how we are a proactive committee.

Our committee is monitoring the Covid situation, and has tentatively lined up some educational workshops for both the children and adults come spring and summer time. So here's keeping our fingers crossed that the pandemic will settle so we can all be safe and learn more about the birds, animals and insects that we share our community with.

Preserving our Dark Skies does not mean removing all lights in an area. This is not the only solution. If you are replacing security, accent, or general lighting, here are two easy ideas you can do to help reduce your impact and still enjoy the night:

When buying new lighting fixtures look at fully shielded lights which still provide useful light in the area needed but don't shine up into the environment, they shine down to the area you want lit.

Light color is also important, blue light emissions have been shown to confuse migratory birds, so try staying away from this type of lighting.

For more information, check out the International Dark-Sky Association's website at www.darksky.org

Everyone loves having a great yard in the summer. This usually means managing your lawn through various techniques. Soil compaction can be an issue if you see water pooling on your lawn in the spring (or else your septic system has failed). Aerating your soil helps take oxygen and nutrients down to the grass roots which helps the plant growth. The most common maintenance step of your lawn care is fertilizing. If you do want to fertilize here are a few key tips to remember to minimize your cost but also help protect our lake environment.

● Many organic materials serve as both fertilizers and soil conditioners, they feed both soils and plants. This is one of the most important differences between a chemical fertilizer versus an organic fertilizer. Soluble chemical fertilizers contain mineral salts that plant roots can absorb quickly. However, these salts do not provide a food source for soil microorganisms and earthworms, and will even repel earthworms because they acidify the soil. Over time, soils treated only with synthetic fertilizers lose organic matter and the all-important living organisms that help to build a quality soil. As soil structure declines and water-holding capacity diminishes, more and more of the chemical fertilizer applied will leach through the soil. In turn, it will take ever-increasing amounts of chemicals to stimulate plant growth. When you use organic fertilizers, you avoid throwing your soil into this kind of crisis condition.

● Ideally, use organic fertilizers (such as compost) which is a good source of nutrients but don't leach into the ground water as readily as synthetic fertilizers. Organic fertilizers help in water retention and beneficial bacteria growth.

● Synthetic fertilizers are quick and easy. While not as ideal as organic, remember to purchase phosphate free fertilizer and only apply it when the soil temperature is above 20° C otherwise the grass can't absorb the nutrients; plus if it rains, the majority of the fertilizer will run off with the precipitation (and into our

lake). If you use a synthetic product, then a slow release fertilizer is better as it doesn't burn your lawn.

● Regardless of what fertilizer you use, leave your lawn clippings on the ground. Most mowers now have mulching blades that reduce the grass blades to small pieces which is a great source of nitrogen. If you bag your grass clippings you are essentially bagging free fertilizer and throwing it away. Good luck next spring.

Interested in composting or learning how to start? Check out the Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development website at www.ESRD.Alberta.ca and look for Focus on Composting. The booklet details how to get started composting, what is good and bad compost and includes pictures and plans for a variety of composting bin designs.

As the Village looks at a honey bee bylaw, did you know you can help our native pollinators next year without needing to setup a honey bee colony and all that it entails?

So native bees or solitary bees what are they? Solitary bees, which means they don't make honey or live in a colony, live alone and like to keep to themselves. They do not want to sting you because they would rather find food, lay eggs, and pollinate plants, all at the same time. Alberta has over 300 species of native bees. They typically live alone but can be in groups, as they lay their eggs in similar locations. They also don't look like the classic honey bee. Many can be mistaken for looking more like large flies.

How to help? They love the flowers in your yard. If you have available space in your planters, add a few extra flowers. The other way to help is to give them nesting locations. These are typically called bee hotels or bee condos. The easiest hotel you can make is by drilling small holes in blocks of wood to give them tunnels. While this looks cool in your yard, you need to make sure the blocks are only used for a season or two seasons. This is due to if any mites or bacteria take hold in the holes, this can become a death trap for your guests. More complex bee condos can be purchased or made but most importantly, whenever you provide a home for the bees you need to keep it clean.

For more information on bees, contact the Edmonton and Area Land Trust at info@ealt.ca or www.ealt.ca. Here you can find information, plans and kids activities on bees, owls, moths, butterflies and bats.

While you are on their web site, also check out the 60 page booklet, Species at Risk In Alberta. It is an interesting identification and information guide in regards to birds, fish, plants, animals and insects in our province that are at risk of disappearing.

The guide is designed to help you identify Species at Risk and contribute to important conservation and recovery efforts. Visit www.ealt.ca/resources to view, download, or print an electronic version of this guide. It not only is very informative, it also has information you may find surprising. This organization has a wealth of information for people of all ages.

You may also want to check out Birdsafe.ca to get information and easy projects as to how to decorate your windows to keep birds safe from hitting them. This is important year round, not just in winter when the bird feeders are usually set out close to your windows for easy watching the fun little feathered friends.

From your EAC Committee, have a safe and fun winter