

Big Lake Environment Support Society President's Report for 2006

Presented at the BLESS Annual General Meeting on January 30th, 2007

2006 BLESS Directors

The 2006 Big Lake Environment Support Society (BLESS) Board of Directors included Nicholas Batchelor (Secretary), Dave Burkhart (President), Bruce Cameron (Treasurer), Stuart Loomis (Vice-President), Miles Constable, Lilo Engler, Bob Russell, John Samson and Jack Wiercinski. The Board of Directors met 13 times in 2006 to discuss BLESS affairs. In total, members of the BLESS Board put in well over 900 hours on BLESS related activities in 2006. Secretary Nicholas Batchelor produced accurate, detailed minutes for each meeting which are available to members for review and will be held in BLESS archives as a permanent record of 2006 board discussions and decisions.

Participation in the Sturgeon Watershed Initiative Group

Three BLESS Directors participated in the fledgling Sturgeon Watershed Initiative Group in 2006: Dave on behalf of the society, Stuart who represented the Sandy Lake Restoration Society and Lilo as a resident living within the watershed. The group includes a wide variety of stakeholders with an interest in the Sturgeon River watershed including municipal and provincial government administrators, First Nations representatives, residents, non-profit and environmental groups and industry representatives. The intent in forming the group is to develop a sustainable management strategy and plan for the Sturgeon River watershed under the province's Water for Life program. So far the group has met nine times and is currently working on developing a set of bylaws that will enable it to become a society under the Alberta Societies Act.

Park Presentation at NAIT

Early in the year, NAIT instructor Laurie Hunt approached BLESS with a request to speak about Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park (LHCPP) to her class of Biological Sciences students enrolled at NAIT in a Parks Management course. John Samson gave a presentation to the students on March 6th that described features of the new provincial park and some issues facing it. Jack Wiercinski attended the presentation at NAIT and followed up with a letter describing the event that was published in the Gazette. Students used the information John provided in developing a park planning assignment required for their studies.

Concrete Pipe Removal

In early March last year, we contacted the Alberta Capital Region Wastewater Commission (ACRWC) to inquire about the old concrete pipes that have been cluttering up the natural area for years near the 231 Street subdivision. ACRWC investigated and determined the pipes were remnants from when the wastewater line was constructed back in the 1980s. ACRWC has assumed responsibility for removing the pipes and, after consulting with staff from Alberta Community Development and Alberta Environment, has agreed to remove them this winter.

On December 4th, Jerry Yang from ACRWC said the the pipes were on their schedule and would be removed from the provincial park no later than next February. He will advise BLESS, in advance, of the date the pipes are to be removed.

RAMSAR Application

On April 21, the BLESS Board sent a letter to former Minister of Sustainable Resource Development David Coumts requesting permission from the provincial government to apply for RAMSAR Wetlands of International Importance status for LHCPP and the Big Lake wetlands. The response from the minister dated July 19th expressed strong provincial support for the

application. Minister Coumts indicated he had consulted with Community Development Minister Denis Ducharme who also supported the initiative. In his letter, Minister Coumts remarked that RAMSAR status for the new park would support the province's Water for Life Strategy and other wetland conservation values including the Alberta-Canada habitat partnership, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy.

The RAMSAR application requires that an information sheet describing the park and associated wetlands be created. The information required spans diverse subjects including biogeography, physical features, hydrological values, wetland types, flora, fauna, social and cultural values and land uses and ownership. Research and writing tasks are ongoing. Information about some subjects has been produced but considerable work remains to be done.

River Edge Enhancement Project

Dan Stoker took the River Edge Enhancement Project under his wing again in 2006 and began the year by organizing a willow cutting gathering in January. The willow cuttings were sent away to be grown into viable rooted stock, a \$600 expense that BLESS funded. Throughout the year, Dan worked diligently with the city and the REEP committee to produce a very successful public event on Father's Day (June 18) that saw residents plant the 600 willows and many more seedlings along the river in Berrymore Flats. Later in the summer Dan built and installed a large bird feeder to mark the site of the planting, an initiative that enjoyed front-page coverage in the Gazette. The current Board of Directors has agreed to support REEP initiatives again this year.

Chapter on Big Lake Published

BLESS member and former president Louise Horstman wrote a full chapter about the Big Lake Natural Area that was published last year in Professor Ross Wein's new book "Coyotes Still Sing in My Valley, Conserving Biodiversity in a Northern City." Must reading for all with an interest in the Big Lake natural area.

St. Albert and Area Multi-stakeholder Project

Lilo Engler very capably represented BLESS on the St. Albert and Area Multi-stakeholder Project (STAMP) in 2006. STAMP is a group of stakeholders concerned with oil and gas issues as they relate to the St. Albert field. A significant amount of oil and gas activity occurs within or adjacent to the provincial park. The STAMP group met quarterly last year and held two open houses. Lilo set up and staffed tables with BLESS literature and promotional material at both events.

Springing to Life

Dan Stoker organized and conducted the well-attended annual two-day Springing to Life event once again in 2006 on April 15th and 22nd. A late spring saw the lake still covered with ice on both days which likely contributed to the decrease from the previous year in the total number of birds counted at the BLESS platform. Still, there was an increase in the number of different species noted in 2006 that included tundra swans, Canada geese and various species of ducks. BLESS members Miles Constable, Lilo Engler and Dave Burkhart participated in the event.

Earthday

The BLESS presence at Hawrelak Park for Earthday on April 23 was another resounding success, once again thanks to Dan Stoker's dedication and knowledge in setting up and running the ever popular aquatic displays. Mary Stoker, Bruce Cameron and Dave Burkhart helped out at the displays during the day-long event. The Edmonton Journal published a great article that featured the aquatic displays.

Spruce Up the Sturgeon

Stuart and Rosalind Loomis and Dan Stoker worked with the city again in 2006 to organize and look after the details necessary to run the very successful 2006 Spruce Up the Sturgeon event on

May 7th. Some 70 residents chipped in on that sunny Sunday to pick up 600 kilograms of trash. Dan set up his aquatic displays and conducted a test willow planting near the river. A good number of BLESS members and directors turned out to help with the cleanup; some even had the opportunity to work alongside Mayor Chalifoux in cleaning up the banks of our river.

Roy Financial Mayor's Walk for Charity

Stuart and Rosalind Loomis and Rita Jensen represented BLESS on the committee that organized the 2006 Roy Financial Mayor's Walk for Charity on June 17th. BLESS members Rita Jensen, Stuart and Rosalind Loomis, Nicholas Batchelor, Miles Constable and Dave Burkhart collected donations from sponsors and then turned out early that misty morning to help with setup chores before walking the course. Following the event Stuart Loomis sent out charitable receipts for all BLESS donations. Donations to BLESS from the 2006 Mayor's Walk totaled \$425.

BLESS Summer Nature Centre

The BLESS Summer Nature program was another success for 2006. There was good response to the advertisement we placed in the St. Albert Gazette for a program coordinator. Dan Stoker was involved in interviewing the first candidate who applied; Nicholas Batchelor and Dave Burkhart interviewed six more. Jessica Cobb, the person hired to run the 2006 program, is an education student at the University of Alberta.

Jessica started on June 14th and spent the first two weeks developing her program for the summer that included more stringent criteria than in previous years for successfully completing the Young Naturalist Program. Jessica looked after press coverage for the program and was successful in having three feature articles covering the Nature Centre in the Gazette and Saint City News as well as coverage in every issue in the Gazette's "What's On" column over the summer.

We were very fortunate to have three members of Jessica Cobb's youth group and Ben and Jaques Bellamy, two members of Jessica's family, volunteer regularly at the Nature Centre last year. Special thanks in a letter from BLESS went out to Kelsey Ermantrout for volunteering five and a half hours every Thursday throughout the length of the program. Kelsey found out about the volunteer opportunity through her attendance at the REEP planting in June.

Overall, there were 1,823 visitors to the BLESS Summer Nature Centre in 2006, which included 1,117 children who participated in a variety of programs that changed every week. There were 49 graduates from the Young Naturalist Program in 2006.

Jessica's wages were covered by an Environment Canada EcoAction grant and funding through the Alberta Government's STEP Program. Each grant paid half the cost. TD Friends of the Environment contributed \$500 towards the cost of supplies for the 2006 program. Last year's Summer Nature Program came close to experiencing a cash flow problem because funds from the EcoAction grant were not received until well into the program and STEP grant funds were not paid until after the program had been completed. Alternative funding opportunities will need to be identified before this year's BLESS Summer Nature program proceeds to avoid potential cash flow problems in 2007.

Edmonton City Plan

In August, the City of Edmonton asked BLESS to participate in its "Focus Edmonton City Plan" initiative, a three-year project that will develop a new land use development plan for Edmonton that will be in force for the next 30 years. Edmonton has an ambitious and progressive process in place to involve the public and we are pleased the city has invited BLESS to participate. The impact of future land developments in Edmonton could have a profound effect on the Big Lake Natural Area and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park.

BLESS members Warren Minchau and Stuart Loomis attended initial meetings in late 2006 that gathered public input with respect to the principles Edmonton's new City Plan should follow. There will be more opportunities for public input in 2007 that will explore growth scenarios for the city and define goals, policies and success indicators for City Plan. We are looking forward to providing continued effective input into this important City of Edmonton planning initiative.

Newsletters and External Communications

Early last year, Miles Constable volunteered to be the BLESS Newsletter Editor and committed to publishing four newsletters in 2006, a goal he was successful in meeting. Because of Miles' commitment, 2006 was the first year in many that BLESS has published a newsletter every quarter. The newsletter went through a couple of format changes over the year with the latest being an email-distributed web-based format that appears to hold promise for future editions.

Lilo Engler also volunteered to help with communications and developed an amazing distribution list for BLESS newsletters and announcements of over 400 people, many of them school teachers from throughout the area. Lilo also assumed responsibility for distributing BLESS announcements throughout the year, including notice to members and the general public of this AGM.

There were many communications last year between BLESS and the various levels of government at both the administrative and political levels. On January 27th 2006 we wrote to then Community Development Minister Gary Mar regarding motorized vehicles in LHCPP and asked for more prominent park signs and more enforcement. Mr. Mar replied on February 15 thanking us for information we provided with a promise that he would provide larger park entrance signs and look at reallocating Parks and Protected Areas staff to have more of a presence in the new park.

On April 11th, a letter went out to Rob Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs expressing BLESS concerns that the City of St. Albert was disregarding its Stormwater Management Master Plan in permitting floodplain infilling for the Timberlea Area Structure Plan. Minister Renner responded on June 7th advising us to continue to bring our concerns before city council. He also forwarded the letter to Environment Minister Guy Boutilier who responded May 29th saying if wetlands are negatively impacted by development, Alberta Environment will ensure full reclamation is carried out by the company that caused the damage. When the matter of Genstar's application for a development permit to infill in the floodplains in Timberlea came before St. Albert Council on June 19th, we made a presentation to council opposing the application. Nevertheless, a motion by Councillor Korotash authorizing the infill passed unanimously.

A letter went out to newly-appointed Community Development Minister Denis Ducharme on April 21 that followed up on non-member Elke Blodgett's tireless efforts to relocate the high tension power lines that lead along the Riel Lagoon dike at the entrance to LHCPP in St. Albert. We also took the opportunity to reiterate the need for larger signs and more enforcement for the park and spoke to the need for restrictions to motorized watercraft on Big Lake. In his response of May 19th 2006, Minister Ducharme advised that the City of St. Albert and Altalink were working with the province to move the power lines. Mr. Ducharme promised more land for the new park and expressed his desire for a future increase in the Parks and Protected Areas budget to hire a conservation officer for the park. On the first anniversary of the new park the province announced the acquisition of approximately 50 acres of prime natural area and habitat for LHCPP at the corner of 137 Avenue and 199 Street.

At the request of Barb Collier in support of the Friends of Lily Lake we sent a letter to Environment Minister Guy Boutilier on May 3rd asking that Ministerial Order 39/2000, an order prohibiting the building of Highway 651 through the middle of Lily Lake be upheld. Sturgeon County Council had hired a consultant to prepare a report identifying how to have the ministerial order rescinded. Construction of a road through the Lily Lake wetlands had been a priority for

Sturgeon County in the past. The reply we received in June advised that Minister Boutilier was upholding ministerial order 39/2000 that prohibited the building of the highway.

In an attempt to ensure adequate future access to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, Bob Russell drafted a letter that went to Mayor Chalifoux on September 26th with the offer that BLESS participate in planning initiatives for the South Riel Lands. In his reply dated October 2nd Mayor Chalifoux said he had forwarded the BLESS offer to the city manager "for a reply in due course and as appropriate."

South Riel Urban Planning

Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart met with Beaverbrook Developments representative George Cantalini in June, for a briefing in advance of the Beaverbrook open house for its South Riel development proposal. Beaverbrook planned to build in the section of South Riel located east of the West Regional Road (WRR). As part of the development, the company proposed to move a significant part of the requisite environmental reserve from the east side of the road to the west side when it was developed, a move that could maximize park lands and green area adjoining LHCPP. The City of St. Albert has stated it will not make any decisions on South Riel development until its annexation bid is decided.

Signs for LHCPP from Alberta Parks and Protected Areas

On Friday June 16th, BLESS directors Stuart Loomis, Miles Constable, Lilo Engler, John Samson and Dave Burkhart met at the BLESS shelter with Rob Spelliscy and Kyle Clifford from the Alberta Parks and Protected Areas office in Spruce Grove to determine where larger park signs might be placed for the new provincial park. The group toured potential locations on the east and south shores to identify potential locations. Staff from Parks and Protected Areas had the signs made up, including a billboard type kiosk for near the BLESS platform, and installed them on August 20th. The installation crew wasn't able to get Alberta One Call out in time for the August installation to mark potential hazards in the vicinity of the 231 Street location, so a sign still remains to be installed there.

BLESS Stewardship Reports, Park Monitoring

On July 8, directors Jack Wiercinski, Miles Constable, Stuart Loomis, John Samson and Dave Burkhart went on a monitoring tour of South Riel to look at potential impacts of the WRR on the wetlands adjoining the park. The group also toured the new area added to the park last year at 137 Avenue and 199 Street to assess the condition of the natural area.

BLESS submitted two stewardship reports to Parks and Protected Areas under the provincial government volunteer steward mandate in 2006, one in March that reported the excessive snowmobile traffic on the lake that had destroyed vegetation in riparian areas, and the other in June that reported on the extensive algae bloom on the east bay of Big Lake and ATV traffic in the park.

Water Quality Sampling Programs

Water quality sampling activities on Big Lake began on June 24 last year when Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart canoed out on the lake to test water quality parameters for the province's Alberta Water Quality Awareness Day (AWQA) program. This was the second year that BLESS participated in the program. Data obtained from the tests was entered into the province's online database.

Development of BLESS capacity for water quality testing was a new initiative for 2006. Early in the year we applied for and received a grant from Alberta Ecotrust to purchase equipment that would allow water samples to be tested in the field. Miles Constable, our resident biologist and water quality expert on the board, met with suppliers to define equipment requirements and developed a sampling plan for Big Lake and the tributaries flowing in and out of the lake.

Primarily as a result of contact made by Stuart Loomis in late 2005, the Alberta Lake Management Society (ALMS) also decided to carry out water quality analyses of Big Lake last year. The 2006 ALMS program, based upon laboratory analyses of water samples taken in conjunction with BLESS sampling throughout the summer, will fit well with the new BLESS water quality testing program as, once ALMS data becomes available, we will be able to correlate the results from laboratory analyses with our field test data to determine the accuracy of our test results.

Stuart, Dave and Amanda Krowski, the person ALMS hired to gather samples for its program, conducted five day-long sampling trips to obtain water samples from each bay of the lake in June, July, August and twice in September. Stuart also conducted ALMS sampling tours with Amanda on Sandy Lake in those months on behalf of the Sandy Lake Restoration Society. Using the equipment obtained for the BLESS program, physical water quality parameters (temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, salinity, total dissolved solids and conductivity) were recorded on the sampling tours of Big Lake.

Each sampling tour with ALMS on Big Lake was followed by a road trip to obtain water samples at Carrot Creek and the Sturgeon River where they cross Meadowview Drive and at Atim Creek where it crosses Highway 44 to enter the Big Lake marshland. Miles Constable, Dave Burkhart and Warren Minchau participated in sampling trips and conducted chemical analyses of the samples at the BLESS log cabin after each trip using a colorimeter and reagents purchased with the Alberta Ecotrust grant money. Water samples from the river and creeks, along with the samples taken from Big Lake, were tested to determine the amount of nitrate, nitrite, phosphate, alkalinity, iron, silica, sulphate and potassium in each sample. Results of the testing to date have been recorded for analysis and inclusion in the final report of the BLESS 2006 Water Quality Testing Program due out by the end of May. We hope to also conduct sampling through the ice this winter and in early spring to obtain more data for the report.

West Regional Road Stakeholder Meetings

Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart participated on behalf of BLESS in WRR stakeholder meetings with the City of St. Albert in May, July, August, September and October last year. There were problems with what was said in the meetings not being recorded accurately in minutes the city produced. Following months of repeated confirmation from city staff in the meetings that a year-round pedestrian crossing would be installed before the West Regional Road opened, and without any advance notice, city engineers, in late September, recommended to Council that a pedestrian crossing NOT be installed before the road opened to traffic, a recommendation that council approved. Subsequently, the City unilaterally cancelled WRR environmental stakeholder meetings. There have been no environmental stakeholder meetings for the WRR since and it remains unknown if there will be any in 2007.

Pedestrian Crossing of the West Regional Road

On September 5th we addressed St. Albert Council with BLESS objections to the City's decision not to provide a year-round pedestrian crossing of the WRR when the road opens to traffic in 2007. The location at Levasseur Road where a pedestrian crossing is needed has been used by residents for decades to gain access to the viewing platform at LHCPP. After consulting with staff at Alberta Transportation and Infrastructure, we wrote a letter to Minister Ty Lund in an attempt to obtain clarification of any provincial government concern with pedestrian access across the West Regional road at Levasseur as reported to council by city engineers. The response from the minister dated September 26 stated the province had no commitments with respect to the road and the city had sole authority over all traffic operation decisions. On September 29th, BLESS directors Stuart Loomis, Bob Russell and Dave Burkhart met with local MLA Doug Horner to discuss what he might do to ensure adequate year-round pedestrian access to the park across the West Regional Road. We reiterated our concerns to the minister in a letter dated October 5th in response to which Mr. Horner suggested we contact Community Development Minister

Ducharme with our concerns. On October 10th, BLESS Directors John Samson and Dave Burkhart met with Mayor Chalifoux, the city manager and city engineering staff to ask that the city reconsider its decision. To date the City of St. Albert remains steadfast in its refusal to provide a pedestrian crosswalk that will enable year-round access to LHCPP when the new road opens to traffic this year.

BLESS Planning Session

Following a general cleanup of the log cabin on September 15th, BLESS directors met for a dinner party hosted by Stuart and Rosalind Loomis, the purpose of which was to discuss where BLESS might go with future endeavors. Nicholas Batchelor recorded and categorized the ideas brought forward that evening. The Board of Directors has since been addressing the ideas brought forward that evening at its regular board meetings to find ways to act upon some of the ideas.

Park Cleanup

On October 7th, John and Mike Samson, Jack Wiercinski, Nicholas Batchelor, Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart spent a few hours cleaning up trash in the new park area at 137 Avenue and 199 Street and at the same time installed park boundary signs and signs prohibiting unauthorized park activities. It was an enjoyable fall outing that saw a significant amount of garbage removed from the new park land. Still remaining in the area are the remnants of an old car that will need to be removed in future.

Riel Recreational Park Stakeholder Meetings

Late in the year the city initiated stakeholder meetings for development of Riel Recreational Park on the site of St. Albert's former dump. On behalf of BLESS, Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart attended three planning meetings with other stakeholder groups that were facilitated by city consultant Gibbs and Brown. The Riel Recreational Park development proposes to add much new pavement to the site with exhibition grounds, parking lots and roads. The city plans to route stormwater from approximately a third of the site directly into the river. City engineers have indicated runoff rates will most likely exceed those recommended in the City's Stormwater Management Master Plan for new developments as well as the rate recommended by the Big Lake Basin Study task force. Our position was that stormwater from the entire site should be treated and runoff rates should be controlled to at least pre-development levels before stormwater is released into the watershed. We expressed our concerns during the stakeholder meetings and in a presentation to council on December 18th when we asked that the city revisit its plans to provide environmentally responsible stormwater management for the site. Council did not address our request.

The City has applied for a \$6 million grant through the Canada-Alberta Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (CAMRIF) to carry out the project. The federal component of the funding mandates compliance with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act which could require an Environmental Impact Assessment and screening by federal regulatory agencies prior to grants being dispersed. In late December we registered BLESS concerns with the project in writing to the CAMRIF director. The 2007 BLESS board should continue to monitor this project as it develops and act as appropriate to try to minimize adverse impacts from the development on the Sturgeon River.

Beaver Management Guidelines – City of St. Albert

BLESS directors Stuart Loomis and Dave Burkhart attended a City of St. Albert workshop on September 21st to provide input into development of the city's beaver management guidelines. Following the workshop, written submissions were provided with suggestions on how to improve the guidelines, some of which the city incorporated into its final document. The city's new Riel stormwater facility has been built without any beaver exclusion structures and we expect

problems will arise in that location in future that may not be able to be appropriately resolved within the current guidelines. The city has promised a review of the guidelines after one year to determine if the document requires revision.

Park Planning - Interpretive Centre Meeting

On November 15th BLESS held a meeting at Sir George Simpson school to gather public opinion about future developments for LHCPP, particularly with respect to an interpretive centre. This initiative was prompted by a Ducks Unlimited proposal underway to develop an interpretive centre for the park. DUC has met with local and provincial politicians at a senior level and has plans for more meetings early this year to develop its proposal. The BLESS board thought the general public should have an advance opportunity to provide input into future park development plans. Those who attended the BLESS meeting provided excellent ideas for future development. One of the suggestions made was to install web cameras that would allow a wider audience to experience LHCPP over the internet, a suggestion the BLESS board is currently acting upon. Generally speaking the consensus at the meeting was that any development be low-impact with the primary objective of conserving the natural area. Comments and suggestions provided by the public at the meeting have been summarized in a report that was distributed in the fourth quarter BLESS newsletter and sent to senior planners at Community Development for consideration. It would be beneficial to hold more public meetings in 2007 to ensure the public has every opportunity to have input into how park development should proceed.

Web Cameras for LHCPP

Shortly after the November park planning meeting, BLESS Director Jack Wiercinski entered a competition at NAIT to identify a project for NAIT's Prototype Development Program in the Office of Industrial Research and Innovation. The proposal Jack put forward -- web cameras for LHCPP -- won the competition! NAIT is providing \$5,000 towards a study that will identify an optimum web camera system and equipment for LHCPP and has assigned a person internally to carry out the study. A BLESS committee has been struck, with Jack Wiercinski as chair, to work with NAIT on the project. The study is expected to be complete by the end of February after which BLESS will apply for funding to install a prototype system at the mouth of the Sturgeon River where it enters Big Lake. The committee has set a goal to have a web camera system up and running by this fall, 2007.

Christmas Bird Count

The 16th annual Christmas Bird Count was held on December 26th in 2006. Many former and current BLESS members participate in the annual event. In 2006 there were 112 participants who identified 34 different species including two species new to St. Albert -- a Mourning Dove and 11 House Finches. Over the past 16 years 73 different species in total have been recorded locally during the event. Once again in 2006, BLESS sponsored the Christmas Bird Count by paying the Bird Studies Canada entry fees for participants. The 2006 entry fees amounted to \$245.

Ahead for 2007

Many annual BLESS programs have proven their value over the years. These include Earthday which provides great exposure for BLESS to a large audience of potential members, Spruce Up the Sturgeon which has become a fixture in St. Albert and REEP, a relatively new initiative that has the potential to involve many more residents of St. Albert as stewards of our watershed. Community-wide events such as the Roy Financial Walk for Charity help to cement BLESS stature in the community. The Summer Nature Program is our hope for the future, our link with the next generation of conservationists who we have an obligation to mentor. All of these programs are important for the society to maintain and should continue to be a part of BLESS efforts in 2007. Some programs and events require funding; all require volunteers to make them happen. The amount of resources available determines what can or cannot be accomplished. Thanks to the foresite of Bob Russell who applied three years ago, BLESS is finally positioned for an Alberta Lotteries Casino this fall that will strengthen the society's financial position and secure

the future of important programs like the Summer Nature Centre. A significant number of volunteer hours will, however, need to go into running a successful casino.

There are other new and ongoing initiatives that must also be pursued in 2007. Initiation last year of the RAMSAR nomination for Wetlands of International Importance status for LHCPP is critical and should be completed in 2007. More meetings should take place to gather additional public input into a conceptual plan for the future of Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. The water quality testing program that began with a grant from Alberta Ecotrust in 2006 must be completed and the project report must be submitted to the granting organization by May 30th.

Early in 2007, the City of Edmonton Planning Department received a proposed amendment to its 1991 Big Lake Area Structure Plan (ASP), as well as a Neighbourhood Structure Plan (NSP) for the first development within the ASP area. Developers are planning to build a subdivision between 199 Street and 215 Street that will extend from just north of Horseshoe Lake near the Glendale Golf Course to the banks of Big Lake. This, the first of what will be six proposed neighbourhoods within the ASP area, will introduce 2072 dwelling units that will house 5,136 people. When fully built out, the Big Lake Area Structure Plan will include 8,855 dwelling units accommodating 27,768 people.

The impact of such massive developments on Big Lake and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park will be immense. Stormwater runoff, light pollution, noise and just the mere presence of a small city clustered on the banks of the lake have the potential to put tremendous pressure on park natural areas and wildlife. As stewards of the park, BLESS must use every means at our disposal to ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices are used for these urban developments that ensure the least possible impact on habitat, natural areas and wildlife within the park – whatever the financial cost. We have only one Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park and it must be conserved in its natural state for future generations of Albertans.

Provincial Park status for the Big Lake Natural Area has broadened BLESS horizons; work should be undertaken to increase membership numbers in adjacent communities, particularly Edmonton and Parkland. The recent web camera initiative will focus the attention of an even wider audience on Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. There will be a need for ongoing research, education and communication efforts for the natural area and its wildlife. Much work remains to be done. There is little doubt BLESS must grow in number of both its members and committed volunteers to successfully take on and accomplish the many challenges and opportunities before the society.

Dave Burkhart
BLESS President, 2007