



## Riding the Rumsey Roller Coaster

Editorial by Cheryl Bradley

**A** Calgary Herald editorial on March 27 stated that Rumsey Natural Area was established under [Alberta's] Special Places [Program] but was not protected by prohibition on new development. This comes as news to me even though since the mid 1970s I have been actively engaged in efforts to conserve Rumsey. However I am no longer surprised by unexpected turns of events. Conservation of Rumsey has been a roller coaster ride of raised hopes and broken promises.

The Rumsey block — an island of native habitat in a sea of cultivation - was put under a protective reservation by Alberta Parks in 1976 with the intent of designation as a provincial park. The first Prairie Conservation Action Plan, developed in the mid 1980s, recognized the Rumsey block as “the largest remaining representative site of aspen parkland left in the world” and recommended that it receive protective designation. This plan was endorsed by the provincial government.

In 1987, however, the Rumsey block was sliced in half by a gravel road to a single oil well and several side roads to low-production gas wells. Conservation interests who had worked with industry and government in the early 1980s to develop minimal impact guidelines for oil and gas activity felt betrayed. In 1989, the En-

ergy Resources Conservation Board established more formal guidelines “to minimize detrimental impact of

sensus was overridden by Alberta Energy behind closed doors. In the end, the plan confined industry to existing access routes except for rights sold prior to 1991 for which new ac-



Reclaimed well access road in Rumsey Photo: C. Bradley

oil and gas activity on the future provincial park”.

In 1991, the northern one-fifth of the block was designated as the Rumsey Ecological Reserve, but not without a major confrontation between conservationists and Parks Minister Steve West who at the last minute sought to scale down boundaries which had been agreed upon through public process. The majority of the block known as Rumsey South remained unprotected.

By the early 1990s about 55 wells had been drilled in the area and the majority had been abandoned. A mini-planning exercise for Rumsey South achieved general agreement from a wide variety of stakeholders, including industry, to phase out oil and gas activity. The developing con-

cess would be granted.

The Rumsey South plan (1993) committed government signatories from five different departments “to preserve and protect the Rumsey Aspen Parkland ecosystem while allowing for responsible use of its resources”. Recommendations to protect ecological integrity included conducting biophysical inventories, assessing reclamation activities, controlling invasive species and assessing cumulative effects of oil and gas developments. For the most part these recommendations have not been implemented. One study found failure to restore native vegetation to abandoned industrial sites and a major pipeline was routed around Rumsey; but the death of a thousand cuts from new well sites and access continued.

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In 1996 the Special Places Program designated Rumsey South as a Natural Area. A moratorium placed on new mineral commitments in candidate sites logically was expected to continue once the area was designated. In 1997, however, Energy Minister Steve West offered for sale 33 parcels of mineral rights in the Natural Area. When questioned about this in the legislature, Minister of Environmental Protection Ty Lund stated "...the drilling that will occur, if it does occur, will be on existing well sites...there will be no new roads, no new well sites... ."

This intent not to make new mineral commitments in areas designated under Special Places is confirmed in an agreement signed by deputy ministers of Sustainable Resource Development, Community Development and Energy in 2003. The agreement unequivocally refers to all areas, including natural areas, established under Alberta's Special Places Program, which ended in 2001. Information letter 2003-25 was directed to government staff who process applications and to applicants for mineral surface and subsurface dispositions. In 2006, however, new mineral commitments in Rumsey, surface and subsurface, are still being applied for and granted. Now the editor of the Calgary Herald informs us that Rumsey is an "excepted site" and open to development.

Meanwhile evidence has been mounting that Rumsey contains the biggest and best example of plains rough fescue grasslands remaining in the world and that we are unable to restore them once destroyed or fragmented. Other examples are very few and far between. Rough fescue was designated Alberta's provincial grass emblem in 2003 to much fanfare by the Legislature. Proposed coalbed methane development could lead to dozens of new well sites and new access and drive another nail into the coffin of plains rough fescue grasslands.

I want off this roller coaster, but as a professional botanist I cannot stand idly by while the last vestiges of a native ecosystem crash. I still hope that government and industry will redeem itself and Rumsey. One of Ralph Klein's last acts as Premier could be to finally implement the stated intent of three decades ago and designate the entire Rumsey block a protected area — perhaps a heritage rangeland free from new industrial activity. I wouldn't even mind if our Premier named it after himself. It would be an invaluable legacy for Albertans. ❀

## Alberta Energy Minister's Commitment to Rumsey is Empty

*Press release from Alberta Wilderness Association*

Alberta Energy Minister, Greg Melchin, spoke of his commitment to Rumsey in the legislature on Tuesday, but he should visit Rumsey before he insists that the current management plan for Rumsey is being followed, or read letters from Albertans who have been telling him the real story.

"The Minister says Rumsey is an area that has been valued, but Alberta Energy's actions show it has been valued for its oil and gas, not for the rich biodiversity of its rolling aspen parkland and fescue grassland, one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet," says Cliff Wallis, AWA Past-President. "Rumsey is simply the biggest and best example left, but Mr. Melchin and his department are treating it with utter contempt. What they haven't done speaks volumes about their commitment to protection."

Field investigations in the area have revealed abandoned, unreclaimed well sites, invasive non-native species along roadsides and on industrial sites, hillside erosion and a loss of biodiversity on reclaimed areas. AWA believes that if CBM goes ahead in the area, further erosion of the ecological integrity of the area will follow.

"Government has followed recommendations in the management plan governing continued use of mineral resources, but it has not followed through on key recommendations aimed at protecting the area's ecological integrity," says Cheryl Bradley, professional botanist and representative of the Alberta Native Plant Council. "Without studying and monitoring ecological integrity, we do not know if the management goal is being met."

Minister Melchin says the current plan, the 1993 Regionally Integrated Decision (RID), drafted well before natural area designation, has strict guidelines for oil and gas activity. In an April 2005 letter to AWA, he wrote, "Management direction provided by the RID ensures the protection of the environment and the complete reclamation of oil and gas disturbances." However, field investigations have proved otherwise.

Recommendations regarding ecological

integrity in the RID which are not being implemented include biophysical inventories, cumulative effects assessment, monitoring of vegetation changes, reclamation and recreation, and range and riparian health assessments. Annual and five year assessments have only been done once in the past thirteen years. There is no baseline data that will show whether impending CBM development will harm Rumsey's ecological integrity.

Neither the RID, nor an internal 2001 Plan Assessment by regional managers considered CBM activity; everyone believed that petroleum related activities were subsidizing. SRD is planning to implement one recommendation — a study of the success of past and current reclamation activities. However, SRD minister David Coumts has refused to say whether there will be any funding for the project.

"Perhaps the most important omission by the government is that there has been no 'ongoing and meaningful public involvement' as is specified in the RID," says Shirley Bray, AWA's representative for Rumsey. "Alberta Energy has hijacked the Rumsey agenda over and over again and shut out any opposition."

Alberta Energy Minister Greg Melchin's statement that drilling is not occurring in Rumsey (Calgary Herald, March 22) is a smokescreen to hide the truth. "By strong-arming the granting of surface access to coalbed methane rights, Alberta Energy has paved the way for drilling applications to EUB and sent a strong signal that government supports approval of drilling applications in the natural area," says Bray.

AWA is asking for EUB hearings on any new proposed industrial activity in protected areas until these issues are resolved, and a province wide review of protected areas, including protected areas policy and legislation, and what the public wants done with them.

For further information contact:

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Cliff Wallis, Alberta Wilderness Association, Calgary 403-271-1408 ❀

# Thank you, Ed Karpuk!

by Lorna Allen

**Deliberate:** *adj.* thought over in advance and done with a clear idea of what one is doing.

I believe that summarizes Ed's approach to many things, including his leap into high politics as President of the ANPC. From choosing to sit as Vice-President in 2001, serving the two-term and then proceeding to President for the following two-year term, he thought it through, made his decision and followed his plan. Or tried to follow the plan; more on that a bit later.

With impressive thoroughness, Ed carefully prepared for each meeting, making sure that all progress was documented and all contributors recognized and thanked. In any group, but probably more so in a volunteer one, it is very easy for threads to get lost or tangled. But this happened infrequently (if at all) during Ed's tenure, thanks largely to his strong organizational skills and attention to detail. Ed always had a detailed president report prepared for every meeting! As well as regularly providing carrot cake.

Looking back at the many many accomplishments during Ed's reign, the most recent, the highly successful 2006 workshop focusing on Adopt A Plant, showcased his hard work and dedication. Other projects that he has worked on include helping with the range assessment for Nisku Prairie, working with the other committee members on the wildflower seed issue and of course helping as needed with the myriad of other projects that ANPC is involved in.

The continuing strength and vibrancy of ANPC itself has to count as one of Ed's primary achievements. In 2005, at the end of his planned two-year term as President, no one stepped forward to take over the helm. Ed found himself in the position of Not-But-Sort-Of-President. This is where his planning began to unravel. But together with the Board, he found a way to make this unwieldy situation work, proving, if any proof was needed, his strong commitment to ANPC.

At the 2006 AGM Kelly Ostermann graciously agreed to take on the role as President. So on behalf of the Board and the ANPC membership, welcome Kelly, and thank you Ed for the years you have put in as Vice-President, President and Not-But-Sort-Of-President. Of course, with your

involvement in Adopt-a-Plant, Nisku Prairie and all those other projects, we know that we will be able to continue to count on your involvement in ANPC. Thanks very much for all your contributions! ❀

## Editorial Comment

by Laurie Hamilton

Ed has shown tireless effort and dedicated passion in his past years in a leadership role on the ANPC. The accomplishments of ANPC this past year speak to his success in that role.

In Ed Karpuk's report as Past President, he highlighted some of the accomplishments that ANPC achieved in the past year (the report can be found in the Minutes from the 2006 Annual General Meeting that are inserted with the newsletter).

In further detail, Ed's report lists such accomplishments as:

- Adopt-a-Plant Alberta
- 2005 Native Plant Seed Source List
- New webpage design
- Native Plant Collection Guidelines
- Policy on herbicide use
- Policy on honoraria
- Renewal of agreement between Nisku Prairie and the County of Leduc
- 2006 Botany Alberta Tour
- Wildflower Seed Mix project
- Continued effort as stakeholders in:
  - Rumsey Block
  - Suffield National Wildlife Area
  - Nature Canada's 'Canada Species Risk Survey'
  - Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC)
  - Alberta Invasive Plants Council (AIPC)

Ed's report finished with the following sentiment (which echoes my own upon reading this list of accomplishments):

*It has been a pleasure working on the Board. You are a terrific group! Keep up the good work!* ❀

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# Puzzling pairs: Those Confusing Upland Horsetails

by Lorna Allen

photographs by Lorna Allen

Horsetails (or scouring rushes, as some species are called) that belong to the *Equisetum* genus all have jointed stems, with an obvious sheath at each joint, and usually the sheath is crowned with a series of small teeth. Some species are unbranched, or sparsely branched, while others are regularly branched. Branches come off the central stem in whorls (three or more branches coming off the same stem joint). The stems are usually hollow, and the size of the central cavity is one of the characteristics to consider when deciding what species you are looking at. Nine species of *Equisetum* occur in Alberta.

If you are looking at a horsetail that is not (usually) in standing water and has regular, abundant branches, in Alberta, it is most likely one of three species. The three upland horsetails (*Equisetum* spp.) that can get confusing are:

- common horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*),
- meadow horsetail (*Equisetum pratense*) and
- woodland horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*).

Not exactly a puzzling pair you say? Well, one of the three can be easily separated, just by taking a quick look at the branches. Woodland horsetail is the only one of the three with branches that are themselves branched. But the other two generally require a closer look.

Common horsetail has two totally different looking types of stems. It produces spores on separate, fertile shoots that are



**Woodland horsetail, showing reproductive structure and branched branches.**

fleshy and pinkish or brown in color and appear early in the spring, then eventually wither away. The stems that are the typical “horsetail” are called the sterile shoots. In common horsetail, they are green, branched, appear later in the spring and never have a cone at the tip.

The cone-bearing stems of meadow horsetail also appear in the spring, but according to the *Flora of Alberta*, they are uncommon here. They are green, and start off unbranched, but develop branches later in the season, eventually looking similar to the sterile shoots.

The sterile shoots are the ones usually observed, and the ones that can get confusing. Common horsetail tends to be a coarser plant than meadow horsetail, with a thicker stem and branches. But one of the surest characters to separate the two is the length

of the first segment of the branch (the lowest internode), where it connects to the main stem. The branches come off the stem at the base of the stem sheath. In common horsetail, the lowest internode on the branch is relatively long; the same length or longer than the stem sheath it is connected to. In meadow horsetail, the lowest internode is shorter than the corresponding stem sheath. The teeth of the stem sheath are also quite different. They are dark on both species, but the ones on meadow horsetail are edged with white.

As outlined below, there are a number of



**Common horsetail reproductive shoot**

Character of sterile shoots	Common horsetail ( <i>Equisetum arvense</i> )	Meadow horsetail ( <i>Equisetum pratense</i> )
<b>Habit</b>	Stems are erect to decumbent	Stems are usually erect
<b>Height</b>	10 to 50 cm tall	20 to 50 cm tall
<b>Stem</b>	Green, prominently ribbed.	Whitish green, prominently ribbed.
<b>Stem thickness</b>	3–5 mm thick	1–2 mm thick
<b>Teeth of stem sheath</b>	10–16 pointed, brownish teeth	10–20 narrow, dark brown teeth with white margins.
<b>Central stem cavity</b>	Less than ½ the stem diameter	About ½ the stem diameter
<b>Branching pattern</b>	Numerous, regular whorls	Numerous, regular whorls
<b>Branches</b>	Ascending, 3 to 5 angled	Spreading, 3 angled
<b>Branch nodes</b>	Lowest node as long or longer than adjacent stem sheath	Lowest node shorter than adjacent stem sheath
<b>Rootstock</b>	Creeping, dark-felted and tuber-bearing.	Black, creeping.



**Common horsetail sterile shoot, showing stem sheath**



**Meadow horsetail, showing stem sheath**

differences that separate these two species. The information on the table is taken primarily from the Flora of Alberta, supplemented with information from the Illustrated Flora of British Columbia.

**References**

Douglas, G.W., D Meidinger, and J. Pojar.

2000. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia*, Vol 5. British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks and Ministry of Forests. Victoria, BC. 389 pp.

Moss, E.H. revised by J.G. Packer. 1992. *Flora of Alberta*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Ontario. ☼



**Meadow horsetail**



**Meadow horsetail, showing stem**

# Plant Happenings

compiled by Lorna Allen

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Pickin' Seeds for Nisku Prairie Restoration: We need Your Hands!

We're moving forward on our plan to restore a patch of the prairie grassland at Nisku Native Prairie Reserve. We need to collect ripe seed from the Nisku Prairie site (just south of Edmonton) during this summer, so that we can plant the seed this fall.

Please consider coming out to help — for an hour or two or three on the following dates (weather permitting, cancelled if rainy):

Thursday, July 13, 6:30 pm start (finishing around 8:30 or as fits your schedule)

Thursday, July 27, 6:30 pm start (finishing around 8:30 or as fits your schedule)

Thursday, Aug 10 (tentative)

Thursday, August 24 (tentative)

Meet at the east gate; park on side of the Vistas South main road.

Directions and more info: please contact Birgit Friedenstab: birgitf@telus.net or phone 780-440-0971.

Bring small paper bags or envelopes, and scissors help too — and don't forget the bug juice and sunscreen.

Target plant seeds will be described — so experience not a requirement!

### Field trips to Whitehorse Wildland Park

Please call Alison Dinwoodie (780-437-7183) ASAP if you are interested in either of the following trips:

**July 13-15.** Last chance to look at Prospect Ck. valley / ridges before CRO starts mining. Also the usual visit to the Cardinal Divide, east or west ridges.

Camping at Watson Ck. campground or Whitehorse Ck. campground (give a report on the haul road noise!) or the motel at Cadomin, phone 780-692-3663. Good hiking boots required!

**August 19-20** (probably Sunday 20th) Revegetation results at nearby Luscar mine. Mine personnel will give us a tour of some of their older reclaimed sites, which is of interest for the proposed revegetation of the Cheviot Mine, adjacent to WWP. Accommodation as above.

## WEBSITES

### Digital Nature Guides

rcampbell.bio.uci.edu/DigitalNatureGuide/Index.htm

### Conserving Plant Diversity: the 2010 Challenge for Canadian Botanical Gardens, David Galbraith, Canadian Botanical Conservation Network

On-line copy in PDF format:  
www.bgci.org/canada

### BEN: Botanical Electronic Newsletter

General information about the mailing list is at:  
victoria.tc.ca/mailman/listinfo/ben-l

### Botanical and environmental education events/conferences

www.bgci.org/canda/edu\_events

### Plant conservation events/conferences

www.rbg.ca/cbcn/en/news/coming

### Friends of Jasper offers wildflower courses

www.friendsofjasper.com/institute.htm

## CONFERENCES

### AUGUST

#### Great Plains Native Plant Society Annual Meeting

August 5, 2006  
Hot Springs, South Dakota  
www.gpnps.org

#### Annual Meeting and Conference: Canadian Land Reclamation Association (CLRA)

#### International Affiliation of Land Reclamationists (IALR)

August 20-23, 2006  
Crowne Plaza Hotel  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
Conference Activities: technical sessions (3 days), short courses, field trips, trade show and banquet.  
www.clra.ca

## SEPTEMBER

### BGCI's 6th International Congress on Education in Botanic Gardens

*The Nature of Success: Success for Nature*  
September 10-14, 2006  
hosted by the University of Oxford Botanic Gardens in association with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and BGEN, UK.  
www.bgci.org/educationcongress

### Alberta Invasive Plants Council presents the North American Weed Management Association's 14th Annual Conference & Trade Show

*Invasive Plants — Risk Assessment and Ecological Integrity*  
September 18-21, 2006  
Calgary, Alberta.  
www.invasiveplants.ab.ca.

### 2006 Natural Areas Conference

*Stewards of the Old and New West*  
Sept 20-23  
Flagstaff, Arizona  
www.naturalarea.org

### 15th Australian Weeds Conference

*Managing Weeds in a Changing Climate*  
September 24-28, 2006  
Adeleide, South Australia  
www.plevin.com.au/15AWC2006

## 2007

### 8th Prairie Conservation and Endangered species Conference and Workshop

March 1-3, 2007  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
www.pcsc.ca ☘



Harebell Photo: A. Falk



**Spreading Phlox (*Phlox diffusa*)** Photo: L. Hamilton



**Gaillardia (*Gaillardia aristata*)** Photo: A. Falk

## WELCOME!

ANPC would like to welcome the following new Board members:

**Kelly Ostermann**  
President

**Cheryl Bradley**  
Southern Director

**Birgit Friedenstab**  
FAN Director

## CONSERVATION COMMITTEE VOLUNTEER POSITION

ANPC is looking for a volunteer for the conservation committee to work to conserve native plant habitats.

For more information, please check out the ANPC website at [www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca) or contact Lorna Allen at [lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca)

## ANPC Objectives

The **Alberta Native Plant Council** strives to:

- Promote knowledge of Alberta's native plants.
- Conserve Alberta's native plant species and their habitats.
- Preserve plant species and habitat for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Council's specific objectives are:

- To educate individuals, industry, and government about native plants.
- To promote awareness of native plant issues through a newsletter, an annual workshop, and in the media.
- To co-ordinate information and activities concerning Alberta's native plants.
  - To develop briefs or position papers for special projects; for example, biodiversity, forest vegetation management, wetlands, rare species or phenology.
  - To organize field trips, plant studies and May Species Counts.
  - To update lists of current research and conservation projects.
- To preserve natural habitats and plant communities.
  - To support legislation that protects native plants.
  - To take action to establish, preserve and manage protected areas.
  - To undertake Alberta projects jointly with like-minded groups.
- To encourage appropriate use of Alberta's native plants.
  - To produce information on the use of native plants in land reclamation.
  - To develop and distribute collection, salvage and management guidelines.
  - To update a list of native seed sources and suppliers for horticulture and reclamation.



**One-flowered wintergreen (*Moneses uniflora*)** Photo: L. Hamilton

## Nisku Agreement Renewed

On February 13th, Leduc County renewed the stewardship agreement with the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) for another 5-year term.

That means that the ANPC and all of you volunteers and nature enthusiasts, in partnership with Leduc County, will continue to build on the last 11 years of stewardship and educational activities.

Watch out for more guided nature walks and volunteer opportunities in the near future!

Once again, on behalf of the ANPC, I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for your support and interest through the years. See you in 2006!

Birgit Friedenstab, ANPC FAN Director ❁