

# Iris

No. 57 • March 2008

The Alberta Native Plant Council Newsletter

## Storm Brewing on the Prairies — Public Lands Up for Grabs

*By Joyce Hildebrand, AWA Conservation Specialist*

The ancient Hebrew myth of Cain, the agrarian, killing his brother Abel, the herdsman, continues to inscribe itself on Alberta's prairie landscape. Public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, across Alberta's remaining native grasslands are being given away, sold, and converted to cropland at an alarming rate, with devastating consequences for endangered and at-risk prairie species.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) recently received word of a land swap that, if approved, could result in a large expanse of native grassland west of Medicine Hat – public land leased for grazing and home for numerous species at risk – being ploughed up and lost to future generations. Louis Ypma, owner of SLM Spud Farms Ltd., recently



approached the Hays Stock Grazing Association (HSGA) with an offer to buy their lease for 99 quarters of land in Cypress County near the confluence of the Bow and South Saskatchewan rivers. This is an expansive area of unbroken prairie that provides habitat for many prairie species. It is our understanding that Ypma wants to trade his own grazing leases in the MD of Taber with the HSGA grazing lease in Cypress. All of the land concerned is administered by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

(SRD). If he succeeds in acquiring the lease, Ypma will be able to submit an application to buy the land from SRD.

### The First Swap, 2003/04

If Ypma's past record is anything to go by, this bodes only doom for the prairie species on the land he is hoping to own. In 2004 Ypma acquired a similar piece of native prairie for potato production – this was also public land, in the same area as the land he is now looking to acquire. He took title of the land in January 2004, but ploughed the

*See Public Land, Page 2*

### In this Issue ...

Botany Alberta .....	4
Whitebark & Limber Pine Tour .....	5
Thanks to our Volunteers .....	6
Adopt-a-Plant Gears Up for 2008 .....	8
Alberta Plantwatch .....	10
Puzzling Pairs: Loosestrife .....	12
May Species Count .....	13
Call for Nominations .....	14
ANPC Workshop & AGM .....	15

**Public Land, from page 1**

land during peak nesting season in spring 2003 – while it still belonged to Albertans. In a May 2004 letter to then-SRD Minister Mike Cardinal, University of Alberta ecologist Dr. Mark Boyce wrote that with these actions, Ypma violated the *Public Lands Act*, the *Alberta Wildlife Act*, and the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. As far as we know, there have been no repercussions.

Documents acquired through the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPP) revealed several disturbing points about Ypma’s 2004 land exchange. It happened despite a wildlife survey that found evidence of four at-risk wildlife species on the land that Ypma acquired and cultivated. The report indicated that this land had significant wildlife values, including endangered species habitat, and that it was part of a large contiguous block of native prairie.

SRD claims that “public land required for recreation or conservation purposes, or bordering lakes and rivers, is not available for sale or cultivation” (SRD website). But extensive ecological surveys were not conducted on the property Ypma wanted to offload in the proposed exchange. How can we know whether public land is required for conservation purposes without a thorough environmental review? How could the Government of Alberta approve the cultivation of native prairie when this is the very ecosystem that is most threatened in Alberta, when three-quarters of Alberta’s at-risk species rely on native prairie, and when less than one percent of this natural region is protected?

## Tax Recovery Land Giveaway

Another issue related to the loss of public lands in Alberta, particularly in the settled White Area, is that of Tax Recovery Land transfer to

municipalities. Tax Recovery Land is public land that at one time was privately owned but was forfeited due to unpaid taxes between the 1920s and 1940s, when drought and other factors forced many off the land in southeastern Alberta. This occurred before the establishment of many municipal governments. In the Hanna-Oyen-Consort area, the default on taxes was so great that the provincial government stepped in and created special municipal management areas, now referred to as the Special Areas. But in addition to Special Areas, Tax Recovery Land is also widely distributed in other municipalities in southern Alberta.

Land to determine which lands were transferable to which municipality. Based on Environmentally Significant Area surveys, land that contained internationally and nationally significant areas (less than 10% of the total) was retained. In 2004 the Treasury Board questioned, on a fiscal basis, the transfer of Tax Recovery Land, and Cabinet once again affirmed the policy. It is important to note that although policy allows the government to transfer these lands, it has no legal obligation to do so.

And so the privatization of Tax Recovery Land is now happening with no public consultation and with no updated environmental assessments. This process includes no transparency,

Land Category	Percent of Alberta
Public land.....	60% (94% of B.C. is public land)
Private land .....	28.5% (virtually all in the White Area)
Green Area (unsettled).....	47% (contains 57.5% of Alberta’s public land)*
Public land in Green Area.....	47%
White Area (settled) .....	31% (contains 2.5% of Alberta’s public land)*
Public land in White Area .....	2.5%
Provincial protected areas .....	4.2%

*\*These figures exclude federal land (10% of Alberta), provincial protected areas (4.2% of Alberta), tax-recovery lands, and areas of the province covered by water (2.5% of Alberta).*

Since 1930, the government has treated Tax Recovery Land as public land, using provincial taxes to maintain and manage it. In 1996 Cabinet confirmed that Tax Recovery Land could be transferred back to the municipality within which it is located upon the municipality’s request, a practice that had been underway for some time. The land is transferred for \$1 per parcel, generally a quarter section. Municipalities will, of course, reap huge financial windfalls if they subsequently sell the land that they acquire – and being perennially short of cash, why wouldn’t they?

After this Cabinet decision, an extensive inventory and title search was done on remaining Tax Recovery

participation, or accountability measures, and past public land sales, trades, and transfers offer little hope that the ecological value of land is being considered in current transactions. When AWA contacted SRD’s Land Management branch to find out how much Tax Recovery Land exists and how much has been transferred in the last year, we were told that those numbers were unavailable because of current transfer negotiations now underway.

According to the MD of Taber’s newsletter (Winter 2007), the county contains approximately 569 quarter sections (368 km<sup>2</sup>) of Tax Recovery Land that are now leased by SRD to

local leaseholders. The newsletter states: “The process of transferring title to the Municipal District of Taber has already started and will continue until 2016.” Just nine years from now, all 569 quarters will have been transferred to Taber County if this process continues as planned. Similar transfers are happening in counties throughout southern Alberta.

The problem from an ecological point of view is that Tax Recovery Land is generally part of large contiguous blocks of prairie habitat, almost none of which is legally protected. Look at any map of a southern Alberta county, and you will see a sweep of green representing public land, including Tax Recovery Land, dotted with occasional islands of yellow deeded land.

## Burrowing Owls vs. French Fries



A great deal of pressure, including political pressure, has been applied in some areas of southern Alberta for the sale of public rangeland, including Tax Recovery Land, for conversion to irrigated farmland. The process of fragmentation is well underway, as native grassland is converted to irrigated cropland. “Breaking rangeland results in irreversible loss of habitat and fragments the remaining large blocks of prairie in Alberta,” says wildlife biologist Greg Wagner.

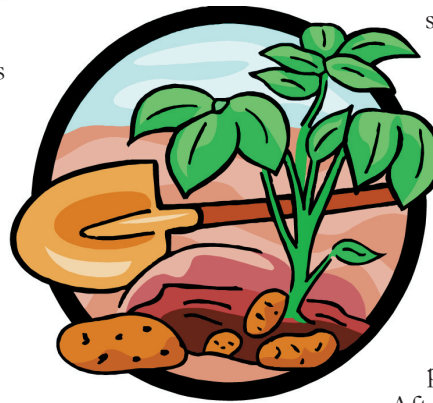
Wagner has spent much of the last fifteen years studying, surveying, or managing wildlife populations occupying southeastern Alberta. “Over this time,” he says, “I have watched the ongoing decline of native prairie habitats.” He and others are particularly concerned about the transfer of Tax Recovery Land to municipalities, which privatizes public land and leads to loss of government and public control over threatened grassland ecosystems.

What’s driving this exchange of valuable prairie habitat for cropland is the same thing that’s responsible for Alberta’s oil sands fever: money. There is currently a huge demand for new farmland, particularly that which could become irrigated because of its location near watercourses. This is especially true for potato production, which has proven to be very lucrative despite potatoes being one of the thirstiest of all irrigation crops grown in Alberta. The five major potato processing plants, including the huge McCain (Coaldale) and Lamb-

Weston (Taber) plants that came online in 1999 and 2000, have prompted a massive increase in irrigated potato acreage.

Whether Ypma plans

to grow potatoes on the Cypress County land is unknown. Other crops may be equally lucrative, especially given the provincial government’s promotion of biofuel development. On May 22, 2007, CR Fuels received a development permit from the MD of Taber for a \$325 million ethanol, biodiesel, and biogas digester complex on about 100 acres of land that is owned by Louis Ypma (*Lethbridge Herald*, June 8, 2007). If the necessary approvals are granted, construction could begin in summer or fall 2008. The biodiesel operation will produce about 113.6 million litres a year and use 250,000 tonnes of canola. The ethanol plant will produce 95 million litres a year and use 260,000 tonnes of wheat. As more hungry biofuel plants



are approved and built in the province, the pressure to break more native prairie for crop production is likely to increase tremendously, with devastating effects for endangered species. Furthermore, the fact that the Bow River is currently in a state of crisis because of overallocation provides strong evidence that converting more native prairie to cropland requiring heavy irrigation is unsustainable and unwise. Dr. David Schindler, one of Canada’s top water experts, warns that the Bow River may soon be depleted to the point where it will not recover as a fully functioning aquatic ecosystem.

## Public Land Policy Vacuum

In a 1998 paper entitled “In Search of Public Land Law in Alberta,” research associates Steven Kennett and Monique Ross of the Canadian Institute of Resources Law

state: “The importance of the province’s land and resource base to the well-being of Albertans and the increasing demands that are being placed upon it would lead one to expect a businesslike and well-conceived approach to public land management.”

After reviewing Alberta’s land and resource legislation, Kennett and Ross made the following conclusion: “Alberta’s statutes governing land and resource use lack an overarching framework of integrative principles, objectives and standards.... Alberta is also currently without a comprehensive planning process for public land and resources.”

If anything, government stewardship of public lands has worsened since Kennett and Ross’s analysis. In 2004 SRD stated that 9,000 to 10,000 acres of

See *Public Land*, Page 13



# Botany Alberta/Adopt-a-Plant Alberta/ Nature Conservancy of Canada 2008 Schedule



**Volunteer Day 2003 at Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary.**  
Photo NCC

Based on the success of last year's Botany Alberta event in the Milk River Ridge, the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) is again partnering with Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) Conservation Volunteers Program and Adopt-a-Plant Alberta (APA) to provide two opportunities for exploration, plant identification and conservation work in 2008.

Watch the ANPC website ([www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca)), NCC website ([www.conservationvolunteers.ca](http://www.conservationvolunteers.ca)) and APA website ([www.ab.adoptaplant.ca](http://www.ab.adoptaplant.ca)) for additional details on the following events. If you have any questions, contact Ed Karpuk (ANPC) at (403) 340-7114; Colleen Cole (NCC) toll free at 1-877-262-1253 or direct at (403) 444-3547; or Kelley Kissner (APA) at (403) 313-3138.

## Botany Alberta 2008

**Date:** Saturday and Sunday, June 7 – 8, 2008

**Closest Town:** Warburg

**Meeting Time:** Friday evening, June 6, 5-7 p.m. for campers  
Sat. and Sun., botany sessions begin at 8:00 a.m.

Botany Alberta, the annual botanical blitz of the ANPC, will be held at Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary on June 7 and 8, 2008.

Located 100 kilometres southwest of Edmonton, Coyote Lake is situated within one of the richest biological areas of Alberta. Nestled in a transition zone between the Dry Mixedwood Boreal Forest and the Central Parkland Natural Subregions, the Coyote Lake area supports over 22 mammal species, 154 bird species (nine of which are imperilled), 266 plant species including a number of rare and uncommon orchids, sedges and other species (most notably Columbian Watermeal – a species first recorded in Alberta at this site).



**Beaver dam at Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary.**  
Photo NCC

See *Coyote Lake*, Page 5



**Coyote Lake, from page 4**

When former Coyote Lake landowners Doris and Eric Hopkins learned of the NCC, which had purchased 320 acres (130 hectares) on the southeast corner of the lake in 1994, they decided to donate their land to the organization. Combined with donations from neighbouring landowners and land designated as Natural Areas by the province, the Hopkins' donation contributed to a total of 800 acres (324 hectares) of lands conserved by NCC.

Join us for rustic camping on the grounds of the sanctuary on the evening of Friday, June 6, after 5 p.m., to get set up for a full weekend of exploration and plant identification. There are options for less-rustic accommodations in Warburg and Winfield. Or, come early on Saturday to start your first day at 8:00 a.m.! Saturday and Sunday meals will be provided by NCC at the Coyote Lake Nature Sanctuary.

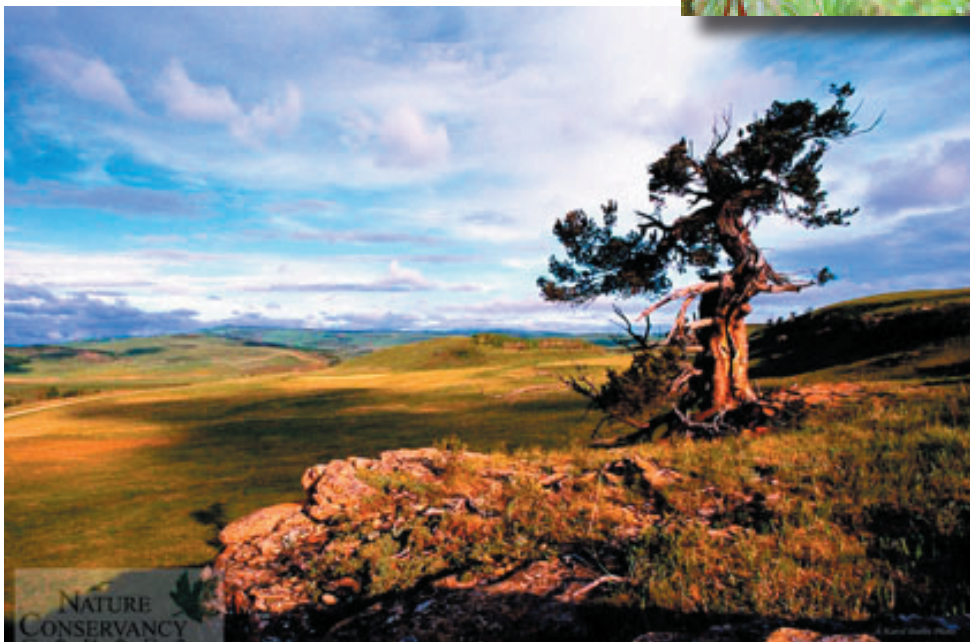
**Right: Pine blister rust.** Photo Parks Canada  
**Below: Limber pine on ridge.** Photo NCC

## Whitebark Pine – Limber Pine Tour 2008

**Date:** Saturday, July 19, 2008  
**Closest Town:** Burmis/Bellevue  
**Meeting Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Special Features:** Whitebark pine and limber pine identification and habitat assessment; blister rust identification and survey; information on dating limber and whitebark pines to reconstruct past climatic events on the prairies.

All of NCC's properties in the Crowsnest Pass are incredibly picturesque – several have the scenic Crowsnest River running through them and all have towering views of the Rockies. Some of these properties feature stands of rare whitebark pine and limber pine trees. Join us and Cyndi Smith, Conservation Biologist with Parks Canada, to learn how to identify these beautiful trees and the non-native fungus blister rust that has slowly eradicated so many of these pines since the early 1900s.



Help us conduct a survey so we can map blister rust and begin to manage the disease. Dr. Dave Sauchyn of the Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative in Regina, Saskatchewan will also join us to talk about his work dating limber and whitebark pines to reconstruct past climatic events on the prairies. After a day of data collection in the woods, spend the evening in town enjoying Crowsnest Pass' famous "Thunder in the Valley" pyrotechnic display.

# Thanks to ...

## Linda Kershaw

ANPC's first membership secretary 1987  
Northern Director 1990 – 1991  
Rare Plants 1995 – 1998  
Rare Plants 2001 – 2007

Linda has been more on than off the Board of ANPC since before ANPC was incorporated. She was the driving force behind the book *Rare Vascular Plants of Alberta*; coordinating many of the aspects of this complex project that involved numerous volunteers, many funding partners and for which she volunteered innumerable hours. Linda has often assisted with the organization of the ANPC workshops and has given talks at many of them. She continues to be there to help (for example, the brochure stuffing and wine drinking at the last ANPC workshop). And most recently, is working on a project to create “virtual” pages to the *Rare Vascular Plants of Alberta* for new species that have been found in the province since the book itself was completed. Thank you for your dedication to native plants of Alberta and sharing your knowledge with the rest of Alberta's plant lovers.

## Ken Sanderson

Conservation Action 1996 – 1999  
Webmaster 1999 – 2007

Ken has served on the ANPC for over 10 years, starting as the chair of the Conservation Action Committee in 1996, then switching over to Webmaster in 1999. Since the first ANPC website in 1999, Ken has overseen its steady development. He initiated a major redesign in 2005 that brings us to the clean crisp look and impressive content that we have today. In addition, he has quietly answered or fielded all questions that have come to the website. With



Linda Kershaw (far right) enjoys the antics of cake cutters at the Dandelion Festival.

photo Lorna Allen

his move to PEI, Ken decided that the distance might just be too long of a commute, but has continued to help from a technical standpoint, for which we are grateful.

## Eileen Ford

Central Director 2002 – 2007

Eileen joined the Board as Central Director in 2002, bringing with her an infectious enthusiasm for plants. She provided a strong link between ANPC and the “plant people” of central Alberta. She has a strong concern for the impacts of invasive species on our native plants, and was instrumental in getting trials started on the seeds that come in “wildflower” seed mixes. The project resulted in the development of the *Guidelines for the Purchase and Use of Wildflower Seed Mixes* that can be

requested from ANPC or is available on-line at [www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca).

Eileen, (along with Ed Karpuk) started the welcome tradition of providing lunch whenever Board meetings were held in Red Deer. So delicious were the provisions that we now hold all the meetings in Red Deer! In 2007, as Eileen and her husband were planning some travels, she decided to step down from the Board. Thanks for all your hard work Eileen, happy travels – you will be missed.





## June Flanagan

Reclamation and Horticulture  
2002 – 2007

ANPC was fortunate to have the invaluable expertise that June could bring to the position as head of the Reclamation and Horticulture Committee. As the author of *Native Plants for Prairie Gardens* and co-author of *The Prairie Gardener's Source Book* she is well qualified to answer the varied and diverse questions that come to ANPC regarding use of native plants. And she bravely tackled (twice) the update to the Native Plant Source List – a popular and invaluable tool for people looking for businesses that sell native plants, but a big and difficult job! Although she stepped down in 2007, the Board still contacts her now and then to help with a particularly thorny issue. Don't worry June – we'll try not to do that too often!

## Birgit Friedenstab

*Nisku Native Prairie Park Reserve*  
Steward 1993 – 2007  
FAN Director 2006 – 2007

Birgit has been an exceptionally dedicated and active volunteer – taking on the stewardship of *Nisku Native Prairie Park Reserve* from the beginning – maybe more correctly, she began the *Nisku Native Prairie Park Reserve*. Birgit recognized that this Municipal Reserve was a rare example of a remnant fescue native prairie, successfully negotiating with the neighbors and municipality to get agreement to have the site designated in 1993 as the *Nisku Native Prairie Park Reserve*. She then worked with the County of Leduc to develop a joint ANPC - Conservation Land Management agreement, signed in 2001 and renewed in 2006.

Not only did she pay attention to get the legalities sorted out, she spent innumerable hours organizing events and stewardship activities. The spring crocus walk is always a popular one, and proves the value of the site as an

outdoor classroom. She also fearlessly tackled issues from brome control to fencing, always with the main objective in mind: maintain the health and vigour of the prairie. Other activities she has coordinated for Nisku Prairie include garbage pick-up, weed pulls, collecting and growing out seeds for their eventual use in restoring disturbed areas, and many more.

With a new 5-year management agreement in place, the focus can once again be on more hands-on stewardship activities and so she felt now was the time to step aside, in hopes that a new steward will step forward and bring new ideas and new energy. Again showing her dedication, Birgit indicates she will commit to helping orient the new volunteer steward, and to pass on what she can of what she has learned.

Birgit also stepped down from the executive after serving one term as the ANPC representative to FAN. She felt she would not have time to devote to this position, with her up-coming wedding. Congratulations Birgit, and thank you.



**Birgit Friedenstab at a Nisku work bee.**

Photo Lorna Allen

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# Adopt-a-Plant Alberta Gearing Up for 2008!

by Kelley Kissner

In April 2008 the Adopt-a-Plant Alberta program will launch its third field season to collect distribution and population data on rare plants, mosses and lichens across the province.

The past two field seasons have been exciting and the program has had the support of a large number of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers!

In 2006, 33 volunteers took part in the program and collected data on 19 rare species. In 2007, 41 volunteers collected data on 20 rare species. Data collected by volunteers are provided to the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre (ANHIC), which tracks information on Alberta's plant and animal biodiversity. At ANHIC, the information is available to be used in detailed status assessments and is also available to industry and other land users to 'flag'

occurrences of rare species to help mitigate effects of development and other land uses on these species.

The program has evolved since its inception in 2005. In addition to the program's main focus on inventory and data collection for species potentially at risk of decline or loss in Alberta, it now also integrates with ongoing provincial and federal recovery efforts for formally designated at-risk species. Adopt-a-Plant Alberta contributes to species-at-risk recovery through education and awareness, providing surveying and monitoring support, promoting stewardship and contributing

directly to stewardship and management activities. In addition, the program has developed a relationship with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). Adopt-a-Plant Alberta volunteers assist NCC by conducting surveys and providing data for rare plants on NCC properties, which helps this

Adopt-a-Plant Alberta welcomes new and returning volunteers in 2008! The program offers an exceptional opportunity to learn about rare plants, and at the same time contribute to an understanding of their ecology and distribution in the province. Membership in Adopt-a-Plant Alberta is



**Dana Bush (2nd from right) trains volunteers at APA technical workshop in April 2007.**

Photo Kelley Kissner

organization steward its land. NCC also provides opportunities for volunteers to take part in habitat stewardship initiatives. The program continues to evolve in 2008 with plans to begin rare plant surveys on provincial Crown lands, as well as continue work within protected areas and on NCC-owned properties. The program's website will also be enhanced to include a "chat forum" where volunteers can discuss rare plants, botany, and communicate to arrange to work together in the field. In 2008, the program hopes to subsidize volunteers' travel expenses – the exact amount will depend on the success of applications to a variety of organizations for financial support.

free and the program is open to anyone with an interest in rare native plants who can donate some time between April and October. No specialized skills are required – the program provides training to its participants at technical workshops hosted in two different locations in Alberta. At the workshops, professional botanists, academics and resource management professionals train volunteers on rare plant identification and survey methods, use of GPS units and topographical maps and field safety. In 2008, technical workshops are planned for Lethbridge (May 4) and Edmonton (May 10-11). A workshop registration form is included



in this issue. Please note that the training workshop in Lethbridge will occur the day after (Sunday) the ANPC's Workshop and Annual General Meeting, which are both scheduled for Saturday, May 3 at the University of Lethbridge. If you are in Lethbridge for the ANPC workshop and meeting, please consider staying an extra day to take part in the Adopt-a-Plant Alberta training workshop!

There are a number of ways to participate in the program. Many volunteers 'adopt' one or more rare plants from a prioritized list of species that lack sufficient data on their populations and distributions, to enable a clear understanding of how well they are doing in the province. Adoption involves volunteers searching for new locations of their species or monitoring their species at locations where it has been previously identified. Volunteers may also (or exclusively) take part in one or more group field events to assist in a conservation or habitat stewardship initiative. Adopt-a-Plant Alberta will be co-hosting or hosting a number of exciting events in 2008 including Botany Alberta, a workshop on limber pine and whitebark pine, a survey of rare plants in the Lac La Biche area, an invasive species pull to help protect populations of western spiderwort, surveys of western blue flag, tiny cryptanthus and sand verbena, and possibly an event to help protect a population of soapweed.



## Adopt-a-Plant Alberta

### Program/Training Workshop Registration - 2008

Name

Address

City

Postal Code

Phone (day)

Phone (eve)

Email

I will be attending the (check one):

- Lethbridge training workshop on Sun. May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008.
- Edmonton training workshop on Sat. and Sun. May 10-11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.
- Not sure yet, but add me to the mailing list to receive more information.

**Note:** the workshop in Lethbridge will occur over 1 day rather than 2 days due to it taking place the day after the ANPC Workshop and Annual General Meeting that are scheduled for Saturday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 in Lethbridge.

**Please mail completed form to:**

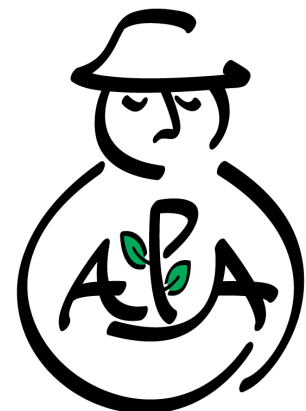
Kelley Kissner, Program Coordinator, Adopt-a-Plant Alberta,  
59 Hidden Green NW, Calgary, AB T3A 5K6

**Or, e-mail your information to:** [kkissner@afhe.ualberta.ca](mailto:kkissner@afhe.ualberta.ca)  
Call Kelley at 403-313-3138, if you have any questions.

**Adopt-a-Plant Alberta website:**  
[www.ab.adoptaplant.ca](http://www.ab.adoptaplant.ca)

There is **no fee** to register for Adopt-a-Plant Alberta or to attend the training workshops.

To join Adopt-a-Plant Alberta, learn more about the program or to be put on a mailing list for updates on when and where technical workshops will be held, complete and submit the registration form or contact: Kelley Kissner, Program Coordinator, at [kkissner@afhe.ualberta.ca](mailto:kkissner@afhe.ualberta.ca) or at 403-313-3138. Also see the program website at [www.ab.adoptaplant.ca](http://www.ab.adoptaplant.ca). Hope to see you in 2008!





*By Elisabeth Beaubien*

Are you interested in wildflowers? Since 1987, up to 200 Alberta naturalists, gardeners, and other plant lovers have observed flowering times and reported their findings to the Plantwatch program. From a list of 21 possible plants, observers select one or more species which occur near their home, school, or work. Then they watch carefully and write down the calendar date when the plants' first flowers open, and then when the plants reach mid-bloom.

Why track flowering dates?

Spring flowers bloom in response to temperature, and changes in bloom times can provide an easy way to track how climate change affects the land around us. Plantwatch observers act as 'eyes of science', and keep their fingers on nature's pulse. When they observe, record and send in their bloom dates, they are contributing precious information on environmental change.

As coordinator of Plantwatch, I am delighted to be working on a PhD thesis analyzing 20 years of spring seasonality data (over 47,000 records) gathered through this program. These valuable data can help us understand how the timing of spring may be changing over time. After warm winters, the first flowers (prairie crocus, pollen shedding on poplars) appear earlier than usual. A cold winter and spring results in later than usual blooms. Because both plant

and insect development are cued by temperature, we can use the appearance of flowers to predict when certain insects will appear. A preliminary analysis of the data for Alberta shows a high degree of consistency in flowering pattern. In central Alberta, Plantwatch shrubs bloom in the following order

each year: first saskatoon, then chokecherry, and then wolf willow. The analysis of flowering times could also help predict the best times for activities in forestry, organic farming, and health care (allergy season).

## Fun for Observers

Plantwatch observers receive regular newsletters summarizing interesting comments from fellow watchers, such as the ones following. Was it an early or late year in your region? Which blooms and fruits were abundant? Did you notice any effects of weather and insects on local plants? Plantwatch observers have so much interesting information to share and compare. Join us! But be forewarned: as your knowledge of the natural sequence of blooms (and bugs, and birds) increases with each year of watching, tracking the arrival of spring can become an addiction. One observer wrote "I've lived on this ranch for 30 years, and I have just discovered early blue violets!" It's a great reason to get out and enjoy a closer look at your neighbourhood.

PLEASE join the Plantwatch team! Observers of all ages are needed to track spring flowers. Full information on the program is available from the Alberta coordinator (see information below) or from these websites: [www.plantwatch.ca](http://www.plantwatch.ca) and <http://plantwatch.sunsite.ualberta.ca>. The second site is being updated and will soon be moved

to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists website at [www.Plantwatch.fanweb.ca](http://www.Plantwatch.fanweb.ca).

Elisabeth Beaubien  
Alberta Plantwatch Coordinator  
Department of Renewable Resources  
751 General Services  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB, Canada T6G 2H1

(780) 492- 2540 (SIS lab) (daytime)  
[e.beaubien@ualberta.ca](mailto:e.beaubien@ualberta.ca)



Linda Kershaw

Wolf willow (*Elaeagnus commutata*).

## Alberta Plantwatch Wall Charts

These charts, which feature 21 beautiful Alberta plants, are now available. The charts measure 60 cm (2 feet) by 90 cm (3 feet), and they are ideal for brightening the walls of nature centres, schools, park offices, community parks, or your home!

**TO ORDER LARGE WALL CHARTS:** they are available for the cost of mailing:

- 1 - 2 copies: folded \$2
- 1 - 2 copies: rolled in a tube \$12
- 3 - 5 copies (rolled) \$16
- 6 - 10 copies (rolled) \$18



Please send a cheque to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (11759 Groat Rd., Edmonton, AB, T5M 3K6), and be sure to include your name and mailing address.

## Alberta Plantwatch 2007 Observer Notes

### Northern Alberta

Fort McMurray tower watcher K. Fraser reported that while winter snows were deeper than usual in 2006-2007, May and June were shockingly dry. Tent caterpillars were common and wild fruits (bunchberries, blueberries, raspberries, pincherries) were few. H. Hrychiw of Wembley reported that saskatoons were uneven in fruit timing; some ripened two weeks later than others. G. Griffiths of Athabasca noted that late May frosts slowed the season down, compared to 2006.

### Eastern Alberta

C. Lumley, just west of Lloydminster, found the “spring cold and late, July too hot, August cool and damp”. There were no saskatoons, pincherries, or blueberries, but a modest crop of chokecherries and lingonberries. C.



Cliff Wallis Fidler

**Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*) just past mid-bloom.**

Snyder, east of Wainwright, noted abundant prairie crocus and golden bean. The full bloom of saskatoons on May 18 was followed by frosts and then no berries. “A spring and summer of extremes!” In Edmonton, D. Clandfield

noted “many aspens have a large number of rolled up leaves, hosting larvae. The season was remarkable for prolific growth of leaves and flowers (at least in wet periods).”

M. Lambert, southeast of Camrose wrote “the most crocus I have ever seen: they are everywhere!”

### Central Alberta

Various observers noted that early blue violets, dandelions, and golden bean were very profuse in 2007. Other creatures seen in abundance were tree swallows, butterflies, ants, blue asters and spreading dogbane. In central Alberta mosquitoes started in mid-May, and dragonflies were very plentiful in August.

Farther south, at Ponoka, M. A. Predy noted “a very rainy spring. Weather seemed to vary between cold/wet and very hot. Crops were seeded late and are at least 3 weeks behind.” From Alix, S. Bargholz reported no saskatoons but great chokecherries. “July was HOT! and wet. The whole summer growing season was wet, and I’ve never seen shrubs and trees grow as fast and tall as this year and I’m 80 years old!” Others also reported huge growth on trees and other vegetation.



**Early blue violet (*Viola adunca*).** Photo Lorna Allen

### Southern Alberta

In Calgary, D. Choy reported for several areas and said: “plants bloomed much later this year compared with the past few years”. J. Froese noted that a second crop of prairie crocus appeared May 5 after 50 mm of rain. From Finnegan, east of Drumheller, E. Gillespie wrote “we had a wonderful year for flowers, trees and our native grasses. Wildflowers covered the prairies and hillsides, and we noticed a few more song birds than last year nesting.”

### Western Alberta

In Kananaskis, J. Buchanan-Mappin reported that “May had average temps and precipitation but June had above normal precipitation (170 mm), and July was dry and hot. The early flowering dates seemed to be later than normal, but there were incredible numbers of most flowers, particularly violets and twinflowers. There were very few buffaloberry berries so the grizzly and black bears had to find alternate food sources.”

In eastern Jasper National Park, E. Slatter noted “excellent growing conditions. Native plants lush, generally blossoms and fruit abundant. saskatoons produced bumper crop of large luscious berries – consumed rapidly by myriad wildlife species

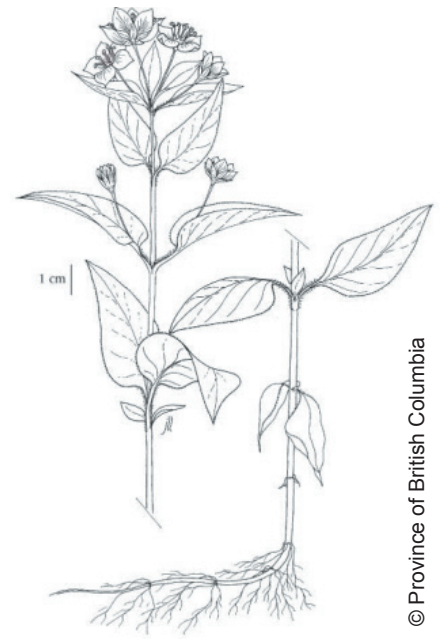
**See *Plantwatch*, Page 12**

# Puzzling Pairs: Loosestrife, Fringed or Not?

by Dana Bush

I know it's loosestrife, but is it fringed or not? This is an important question, as fringed loosestrife is common, but lance-leaved loosestrife is rare in Alberta with fewer than 20 occurrences (S2). They both occur in similar habitats (marshes and wet woods), however fringed loosestrife is common in both the Parkland and Grassland Natural Regions, while lance-leaved loosestrife is restricted to the parkland and moister northern grasslands.

Once you've seen both plants, the differences are distinct; well sort-of, as they may hybridize. Fringed loosestrife has conspicuously hairy petioles, with larger ovate to heart-shaped leaves. Lance-leaved loosestrife is sparsely ciliate at the base of the petioles and almost hairless at the base of the leaves. The leaves are narrower and lanceolate, with a base that narrows to the petiole. This key is more accurate than the one in the *Flora of Alberta*, and there are good illustrations in *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest*, although the petioles on *L. hybrida* appear a bit short.



*Lysimachia ciliata*

© Province of British Columbia

Characteristic	Fringed loosestrife ( <i>Lysimachia ciliata</i> )	Lance-leaved loosestrife ( <i>Lysimachia hybrida</i> )
Synonyms	• <i>Steironema ciliata</i>	<i>Lysimachia lanceolata</i> var. <i>hybrida</i> , <i>Steironema lanceolatum</i> var. <i>hybridum</i> , <i>Steironema hybridum</i>
Rhizomes	• Creeping rhizome	• Rhizomes less extensive than <i>S. ciliata</i>
Petiole length	• 5-20 mm long	• 1-3 cm long
Petiole pubescence	• Conspicuously long-ciliate from node to base of leaf blade	• Sparsely ciliate along basal half, essentially glabrous near blade
Medial cauline leaf	• 4-14 (17) cm long • 1.5-6.5 cm wide • Ovate to ovate-lanceolate • Base rounded to cordate • Margins finely ciliate-serrulate	• 2-8 (10.5 cm) long • 1-3 cm wide • Linear to lanceolate • Base rounded to cuneate • Margins rarely ciliate
Basal leaves	• Similar to cauline leaves	• Ovate to lanceolate • Petioles longer than blade
Corolla	5-13 mm long 3-9 mm wide	5-10.5 mm long 4-10 mm wide

## References

- Coffey, Vincent J. and Samuel B. Jones, Jr. Biosystematics of *Lysimachia* Section *Seleucia* (Primulaceae). *Brittonia*, Vol. 32 (3):309-322.
- Douglas, G.W., G.B. Straley, D. Meidinger, and J. Pojar. 1998. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia vol. 1. Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons (Aceraceae through Asteraceae)*. B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, and Ministry of Forests, Victoria, British Columbia.
- Hitchcock, C. L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, and J.W. Thompson. 1955. *Vascular plants of the Pacific Northwest*. Parts 1-5. 5 vols. Univ. Washington Press, Seattle, WA.
- Moss, E.H. revised by J.G. Packer. 1992. *Flora of Alberta*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Ontario.

## Edmonton Plant Study Group, Spring 2008 Schedule

### Get a Jump on Spring

Date: April 19, 2008

Time: 10 am – 4 pm

Place: Devonian Botanic Garden

### 2008 Planet Party

Date: April 27, 2008

Time: 1 pm – 4 pm

Place: John Janzen Nature Centre

### Edmonton Horticultural Society Perennial Exchange

Date: May 24, 2008

Time: 10 am – 2 pm

Place: 10746 - 178 Street

Edmonton Naturalization Group  
will be selling plants.

### Plantwatch, from page 11

(furred and feathered!). No insect pests or major infestations were apparent. But mosquito populations in July were right up there with Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, or of Equatorial Africa... VORACIOUS AND BITING!!! Even the ducks were scratching their heads then diving to escape!"



## May Species Count for Plants in Flower

May 24, 25: Count Weekend  
May 24-31: Count Week

Initiated in 1976 by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the May Species Count for Plants in Flower is an annual, province-wide event conducted by volunteers during the last week of May. In general, participants select their favourite natural area(s), record the number of different species that are flowering, and submit their observations to the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Box 1472, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N5 or the provincial compiler. The results are scientifically valuable since they can provide insight into the patterns of change in plant response to alterations in climate and habitat. If you are interested in participating, please contact the provincial compilers at:

Suzanne Visser  
Dept. of Biological Sciences  
University of Calgary  
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4  
e-mail: [svisser@ucalgary.ca](mailto:svisser@ucalgary.ca)

### OR

Elaine Gordon  
15216 - 74 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5C 0Y7  
e-mail: [ecgordon@telusplanet.net](mailto:ecgordon@telusplanet.net)

## Fall Count of Plants in Flower

October 4, 5: Count Weekend

The fall count is a new initiative to evaluate the number of species that continue to bloom into the fall.

Contact Suzanne Visser at the above address for further details.

## Public Land, from page 3

public land are sold every year. According to the MD of Cypress, the land that Ypma is trying to acquire in that county is entirely public land and therefore subject to sale. Any Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada who is over 18 can apply to buy public land in Alberta. Land managers determine if the land is suitable for the intended use, and if they approve the use, the land is sold to the highest bidder. If Ypma acquires the grazing leases of the Hays Stock Grazing Association, therefore, he can buy the land through this process. According to SRD's website, this should not happen if the land is environmentally sensitive, but recent history shows that this may be no more than lip-service.

What is needed immediately is a full public disclosure and public review of the sale of all Alberta government-administered lands, including Tax Recovery Land and lands administered by Special Areas. Furthermore, all public lands must undergo a thorough environmental review within a broader ecological framework that examines the need for prairie conservation and the protection of endangered species. Ecologically significant lands must be identified and a plan put in place to protect them in perpetuity. Policy must be changed so that any transfer or sale of public land, including Tax Recovery Land, involves public participation. We need a clear, defined policy for the release of public lands, a policy that includes an open process whereby all Albertans, not only those with local interests, are given the opportunity to be involved.

Current SRD initiatives that are meant to address the environmental impacts of human activity on Alberta's landscape must address the issues outlined here. Whether or not the government is serious about three recent initiatives – the Land-Use Framework, the proposed cumulative effects regulatory framework (the draft policy document "Towards Environmental Sustainability"), and the Integrated Land Management program – can be determined in part by how SRD deals with Ypma's proposed land swap and with the issue of Tax Recovery Land privatization. The Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan 2006-2010 – created by the

Prairie Conservation Forum, of which the provincial government is a member – specifies three goals, one of which is stewardship: "Conserve Alberta's native prairie and parkland landscapes." Alberta's current management of public lands, including Tax Recovery Land, is in direct contradiction to this goal.

When Premier Stelmach was the Minister of Agriculture in 1998, the *Calgary Herald* cited him as saying that "good black soil" is what drives farming and ranching." We hope that in the past decade, he has realized that ranching is in fact driven by "good native grassland," and that turning up that black soil destroys not only the home of many of Alberta's endangered species but also the potential for sustainable grazing.

The silent characters in the drama of Cain the farmer and Abel the herdsman – the ones with no voice since the arrival of Europeans with their shiny metal implements – are the land itself and the many species that depend on it. It's time to learn to listen to the grassland, to expand our tunnel vision, and to realize that humans are also dependent on its continued existence. Candace Savage, in her eloquent conclusion to her magnificent tribute to the prairies, *Prairie: A Natural History*, says it well: "The survival of the wild prairie and its creatures will depend, in no small part, on our ability to ensure their well-being right now. By protecting and restoring wild prairie and managing the working landscape for wildness, we can strengthen and enhance the ecosystem, in all its diversity and abundance, both for our own sake and for the future."

*For an overview of public lands in Alberta, particularly the issue of public access to those lands, see the October 2007 issue of the Wild Lands Advocate. See also AWA's website: AlbertaWilderness.ca.*

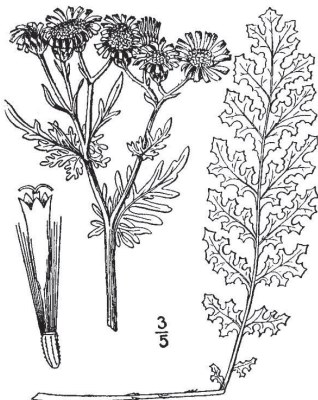
*"Storm Brewing on the Prairies" is an abridged version of an article published in the December 2007 issue of the Alberta Wilderness Association news journal, the Wild Lands Advocate.*



**Cut-leaved ragwort (*Senecio eremophilus*).** Photo Lorna Allen

## CORRECTION

In the IRIS Issue No. 53, December 2006, the article Tansy Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea* L.) a new invasive species for Alberta (by Lorna Allen) documented a finding of *Senecio jacobaea* L. in Edmonton, along the North Saskatchewan River Valley. Upon receiving e-mail responses suggesting a second look at the specimen, the original identification was reassessed by the author. The good news is that instead of an invasive alien species, the plant identified as *Senecio jacobaea* was actually the native species *Senecio eremophilus* (Richards). Thanks to those alert readers who helped catch and correct this error and to the author for following up on these suggestions.



**Tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)**  
Britton and Brown.

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

## Call for Nominations

ANPC has both elected and volunteer (non-elected) positions on the board. The elected positions are for a two-year term. Nominations are now being requested for the following positions, which are up for election this year.

### Positions up for Election and Incumbents

President .....	Kelly Ostermann
Treasurer .....	Mryka Hall-Beyer
Northern Director .....	Pat McIsaac
Central Director .....	Tony Blake
Southern Director .....	Cheryl Bradley
FAN Director .....	Vacant
FAN Director (alternate) ....	Elaine Gordon

ANPC members may offer to stand for election for a selected position, or nominate others (with agreement from the nominee).

Nominations may be mailed to:  
 Alberta Native Plant Council  
 Box 52099  
 Garneau PO  
 Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2T5

Or can be emailed to [lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca).

Elections will be held at the Annual General Meeting, to be held in conjunction with the May 3, 2008 Workshop in Lethbridge, Alberta (see registration form in this issue).

### Vacant non-elected positions

In addition, ANPC is looking for volunteers for the following non-elected positions:

- Horticulture and Reclamation Representative
- Volunteer Coordinator

**For any member who wishes to bring up any items for discussion at the AGM, please e-mail ANPC via [lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lorna.allen@gov.ab.ca) prior to April 20, 2008.**

**Past issues of IRIS are now available on-line at [www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca)**



## Iris

is published three times a year by ANPC. The Council aims to increase knowledge of Alberta's wild flora and to preserve this diverse resource for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

If you have an announcement, article or other item, you are invited to submit it to the editor for publication. Items concerning native plants will be given highest priority.

The editors reserve the right to edit submissions, but will review changes with the authors whenever possible. Disputes will be resolved in favour of the Audience.

Copyright remains with the authors except where noted. Permission to reprint is generally granted, but please contact the editors for details.

Submission deadlines for upcoming issues:

**October 15, 2008**  
 November 30, 2008  
 February 1, 2009

A subscription to *Iris* is included with membership in the ANPC. To join, contact the Secretary, or check our website, [www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca).



**Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC)**  
21st Workshop and Annual General Meeting

**Fragments of the  
Grasslands**

**Saturday, May 3, 2008**

University of Lethbridge

Room E690, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta

**Adopt-a-Plant Alberta's Southern Workshop to be held at  
the University of Lethbridge on Sunday, May 4, 2008**  
(under separate registration [see following page])



What's the current state of Alberta's Grasslands? Please join us in Lethbridge to explore this amazing and botanically diverse portion of the Alberta landscape. Potential topics include:

- landscape overview
- changes over time
- new plant discoveries
- present and future effects of climate change
- cumulative effects
- conservation and preservation



After the workshop, the ANPC will hold its Annual General Meeting. Everyone is invited to attend. Learn about ANPC activities, consider a position on the Executive and/or volunteer for committee work.



The day will conclude with an evening banquet and a presentation by **Lorne Fitch**, entitled "Rocks and Trees and Grass and Critters: Alberta's Other Treasures."

The daytime workshop and annual general meeting will take place at the University of Lethbridge.

7:30 am - Check-in start and registration

8:30 am – Workshop presentations begin

4:30 pm – Annual General Meeting

The banquet will be held at the Sandman Lethbridge, with a cash bar opening at 6:30 pm.

Workshop registration includes the one-day workshop (note that the Adopt-a-Plant workshop requires different registration [see next page]), a continental breakfast, buffet lunch and coffee breaks. The banquet is optional. Free outdoor parking is available.

**Free space for display tables is available (limited amounts) on a first-come, first-served basis.**

For information on display tables and registration please contact:

**Laurie Hamilton**

**Phone: (403) 543-4455**

**E-mail: [laurie\\_hamilton@irisenvironmental.ca](mailto:laurie_hamilton@irisenvironmental.ca)**

**Registration:**

Fill out the following registration form and mail it to:

**2008 ANPC Conference**

**c/o Laurie Hamilton**

**635 36<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE**

**Calgary, Alberta**

**T2E 2L8**

Include a cheque or money order payable to:

**Alberta Native Plant Council**

We cannot accept other forms of payment.

The development of the program is underway. Please see [www.anpc.ab.ca](http://www.anpc.ab.ca) for regular updates.

**Deadline:**

Early registration is up to and including **April 11, 2008**. After that a late registration fee will be charged. Deadline for banquet tickets is **April 25th, 2008**. Cancellations will be refunded in full, if notification is sent to contact indicated above (Laurie) by **April 18th, 2007**.

**Registration Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Early Registration (tick one as applicable, enter amount on line below)

- Member (new or current) ..... \$50.00  
 (if you are already a member, or if a membership payment is enclosed)
- Non-Member ..... \$60.00
- Student ..... \$30.00

**Late Registration after April 11th**

- Member (new or current) ..... \$60.00
- Non-Member ..... \$70.00
- Student ..... \$40.00

Workshop Registration Total ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Banquet Ticket ..... @ \$30.00 ea ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Banquet Guest(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**My diet is restricted** (please describe, so we may meet your needs during the workshop and banquet):  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**New Membership or Membership Renewal enclosed:**

- Individual.... \$15.00       Family..... \$25.00
- Senior ..... \$10.00       Student..... \$10.00
- Corporate.... \$50.00       Life..... \$500.00

Tax deductible donation.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_

- where needed    conservation action    educational programs

**Total Enclosed** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

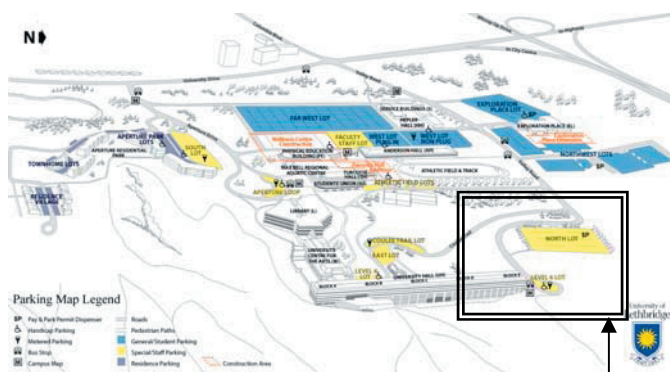
**Accommodations:**

The Sandman is 4.7 km drive from the University of Lethbridge and offers a variety of non-smoking rooms (singles and doubles), which have been blocked for registrants for the nights of May 2 and 3. Please book by **April 11th** to take advantage of the special rates and mention **Alberta Native Plant Council**. Call direct at (403) 328 1111 or toll free at 1-800-SANDMAN for Hotel Reservations.

**Sandman Hotel Lethbridge**  
 421 Mayor Magrath Dr. S.  
 Lethbridge AB



**University of Lethbridge**  
 Room E690, 4401 University Drive  
 Lethbridge, Alberta



Room E690 (Block E) and North Lot  
 Parking

**Adopt-a-Plant Alberta** Southern Workshop is conveniently being held at the University of Lethbridge on Sunday, May 4, 2008.

For more information and to access the registration form, please contact:  
 Kelley Kissner at 403-313-3138 or  
 kkissner@afhe.ualberta.ca

Or visit the website: [www.ab.adoptaplant.ca](http://www.ab.adoptaplant.ca)