

## BLESS December 2022 Newsletter

This is the quarterly newsletter informing the BLESS membership about ongoing environmental issues, events and achievements around Big Lake. We hope the membership finds this newsletter useful and interesting. Comments, questions and suggestions from anyone reading this newsletter would be much appreciated. Please submit your feedback to the BLESS board of directors at [info@bless.ab.ca](mailto:info@bless.ab.ca).



### Current Board Members

President – Al Henry  
Vice Presidents – Pat Collins, Tony Druett  
Treasurer – Miles Constable  
Secretary – Dave Burkhart  
Directors at Large – Kevin Aschim, Lyn Druett, Linda Brain, Jillian Dyck, Teresa Marshall, Meagan Dyck, Nick Parayko, Megan Hobbins

### Regular Board Meetings

These are usually held at 7:00pm on the first Wednesday of every month. During the Covid 19 situation the board meetings have been conducted using ZOOM. In addition to the board, all members of BLESS are welcome to “attend” the meetings. Anyone wanting to be added to the list of ZOOM invitees should submit their request to [info@bless.ab.ca](mailto:info@bless.ab.ca).

### Financial Report

Financially BLESS is in good shape. We used a lot of our casino money on the Summer Nature Interpretation program this year, necessitating a grant application to the St Albert Community Foundation for funding in 2023. That grant was approved in early December so we can plan for another successful summer program next year.

We received \$2250 from the City of St Albert Environmental Initiatives Grant to print a recently developed Animal Guide to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. We have also received monthly ongoing donations from several generous supporters via CanadaHelps.org. Another supporter from Calgary very generously sent us funds for equipment for next year’s Summer Interpretation program.

Al Henry and Miles Constable attended a cheque presentation from the St Albert Community Foundation in December. The money was granted for the Summer Nature Interpretation program that our summer staff have developed at Big Lake and the John E Pool Wetland Boardwalk. The program provides free environmental education programming for school age children and their parents. During Covid our summer staff managed to develop a very good program outdoors at the Park.



BLESS Treasurer Miles Constable receives a cheque from St. Albert Community Foundation President Douglas Campbell at the foundation's 2022 Fall Grant Recipient Presentation event on December 14th.

## Highlights of BLESS Activities in 2022

2022 was a busy and productive year for BLESS, starting in May with a very successful and well attended International Migratory Bird Day at the park. The BLESS Summer Nature Program took place through July and August for the 20th consecutive year. BLESS volunteers actively participated with other organizations including Ducks Unlimited and Nature Alberta in their events held at Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park in 2022. This year, BLESS was actively involved in working with Alberta Parks in their initiative to provide signage for the park trail system. BLESS volunteers also added to the signage in the shelter at the park. Volunteers went on several stewardship monitoring expeditions around the park this year. BLESS directors engaged with provincial political representatives to lobby for the park as well as with the the City of St. Albert, providing input and advice to inform the City's revised Municipal Development Plan, municipal park development and the St. Albert West Area Structure Plan. In 2022, BLESS volunteers developed and published the BLESS Animal Guide to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, the third in a series of interpretive guides highlighting natural features of the park.

We are grateful for and applaud the many BLESS volunteers who generously give their time and attention towards conserving our beautiful Big Lake natural area and enriching experiences for those who visit the park.

## Queen Elizabeth II Medal Awards

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, Miles Constable and Pat Collins, two long term members of BLESS were presented with Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medals at a formal ceremony that occurred in Edmonton's Westin Hotel. These medals represent a fitting and well deserved Thank You from St Albert's City Council.

Miles Constable has been part of BLESS for 27 years and has served as President, Vice-President, and is currently BLESS's Treasurer. Miles oversaw the creation of a Breeding Bird Survey of Big Lake in 2003, received a grant to operate a water sampling program of Big Lake and its tributaries in 2006, and received a grant to set up the web camera on Big Lake in 2007. He was also instrumental in getting a grant and hiring a botanist to conduct a plant survey when Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park was newly formed. As

Treasurer, he has been a key person in receiving private, provincial, and municipal grants that have funded BLESS's education program, and rebuilt both the Log Cabin and a viewing platform on Big Lake.

Pat Collins has been part of BLESS for 17 years and has served as President, a Member at Large, and is currently one of BLESS's Vice-Presidents. One of Pat's key achievements has been working on the committee that organizes the hiring of the coordinator for the BLESS Summer Nature Centre, which is a program that operates every summer and teaches young children about the natural environment. Pat is a very active steward of Big Lake, the Sturgeon River, and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, as well as a major participant in BLESS's fundraising activities. He most recently initiated and oversaw the design and installation of the tribute plaque for Bob Lane at the entrance to the BLESS platform.



Miles Constable and Pat Collins

## **Upcoming Events and Activities**

The BLESS Board of Directors will meet early in the new year to plan activities and events for 2023. Details of the planning sessions will be forthcoming in the next edition of this newsletter.

## **St Albert West Area Structure Plan (ASP)**

On October 19th BLESS attended two public involvement meetings that had been organised by the City of St Albert in order to present and discuss their latest draft of the City's proposed St Albert West ASP. BLESS has since sent a formal letter to St Albert City Council outlining our concerns with aspects of the ASP that potentially have a negative impact on the environment adjacent to Big Lake and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park (LHCPP). Key issues and concerns that we have raised include the following:

### **Public Review Process**

There are several studies underway, including an Agricultural Impact Assessment, a Transportation Impact Assessment (TIA), a Servicing Design Brief and a Historical Resource Study. The TIA should review the ultimate classifications for Ray Gibbon Drive, the LeClair Way extension and 137 Avenue. BLESS strongly feels there should also be an Environmental Impact Assessment. These studies should be completed and made available to the public prior to the ASP document being finalized.

Once a complete draft of the ASP document, including all the accompanying studies, has been prepared, there should be a conventional in-person "Open House" where the entire document can be reviewed and scrutinized by the citizens of St Albert. The ASP should not be presented to Council for first reading until after the public has had a chance to comment on the complete document.

### **The Land South of Meadowview Drive**

A comprehensive approach should be adopted for the area on the south side of Meadowview Drive. It should be custom designed to integrate the SWM facilities with the Public Open Space. It should complement and enhance the existing lake shore environment. The industrial parcels on the north side of Meadowview Drive should front into the neighborhood to the north and should be serviced from within the neighborhood. There should not be any industrial buildings on the south side of Meadowview Drive. There should be an appropriate tree lined buffer that will create an attractive major entrance road into the City of St Albert.

### **Overall Roadway Network**

The LeClair Way extension should be the minimum size and classification needed to handle projected future traffic volumes. The ultimate classification for Ray Gibbon Drive should be the minimum necessary to accommodate predicted future traffic volumes. It should not be designated a Freeway – unless a new traffic study is carried out that clearly shows that this is the only possible long-term solution.

We have since heard from Tracy Tsui, city planner, that there may be changes made to the ASP as a result of what the City heard at the public meetings. She has also told us that the ASP will likely not be finalized until "late Q1 2023". BLESS will be continuing to push for there to be an in person open house at that time, so that the public can review and comment on the revised document, including the attached reports, prior to it being submitted for first reading of Council.

BLESS has also sent our comments on the proposed ASP to the Province’s Parks Management and Planning Department. We believe that it is important that they also review the implications of what the ASP is specifying for the areas adjacent to LHCPP.

### **Political Engagement**

This fall, BLESS directors engaged with members of the provincial legislature to discuss BLESS priorities for funding Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. These priorities were the subject of an article in our June newsletter.

On October 11th, BLESS directors met with Dale Nally, MLA for Morinville-St. Albert and Shane Getson, MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, online through Zoom, to discuss current and future provincial government funding for the park. The two MLAs suggested there would be a better chance of obtaining additional provincial government funding if BLESS could convince municipal governments adjacent to the park to partner in providing financial support.



**Left to right: Al Henry, Marlin Schmidt, Tony Druett, Jon Carson, Marie Renaud**

On October 13th, Marie Renaud, MLA for St. Albert, Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-West Henday and Marlin Schmidt, MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar came out to LHCPP to meet with a number of BLESS directors who took the opportunity to walk with the MLAs along some of the newly signed trails while discussing funding for the park.



**Tony Druett pointing out features of the newly installed trail signs.**

Our hope at BLESS is that funding for Alberta Parks, and Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park in particular, might be a topic for discussion during the upcoming provincial election.



## **Ray Gibbon Drive Widening**

Construction of the west side northbound carriageway of Ray Gibbon Drive has now been completed. The 4-lane divided roadway is now available for traffic to 200 metres north of Meadowview Drive. The multi-use trail on the west side of RGD south of the river has also been completed and is available to the public. There are still some minor improvements, such as benches and garbage receptacles, that need to be completed in 2023. Most of the multi-use trail on the east side of the road north of the river has been installed but will not be officially opened to the public until next summer, when the section along Meadowview Drive will be completed.

At the end of 2022 the City installed a temporary asphalt surface on the Red Willow Trail under the bridge on the south side of the river. This has permitted the trail to be used by the public throughout the winter. It is now planned that the section of the trail under the bridge will be raised by between 0.5 meters and 0.75 meters early in the summer of 2023.



Asphalt path under the bridge at Ray Gibbon Drive

## **BLESS Animal Guide**

December saw the culmination of extensive work by BLESS directors Linda Brain, Lyn Druett and Miles Constable in writing and publishing an Animal Guide to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. The guide has been posted to the BLESS website at [http://bless.ab.ca/Documents/BLESS\\_Animal\\_Guide.pdf](http://bless.ab.ca/Documents/BLESS_Animal_Guide.pdf) and will be available in print form early in the new year.

## **Grey Nuns White Spruce Park Development**

The City of St. Albert has recently completed work on its latest municipal park which is now open to the public. Details of the Grey Nun's White Spruce Park and its amenities can be found on the City's website at <https://stalbert.ca/rec/parks/places/parks/grey-nuns/>.

### **Latest Wildlife Sightings**

We close this newsletter with a recent photo of a moose by BLESS Vice-president Tony Druett taken from the boardwalk at LHCPP. We are always pleased to see ongoing affirmation that this magnificent animal continues to reside in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. If readers should wish to share photos taken in the Big Lake natural area, we would be pleased to include them in future editions of this newsletter.

