



#### OUR VISION

An Alberta where the environment is a priority, guiding society's choices

#### OUR MISSION

Ensure that Alberta's laws, policies and legal processes sustain a healthy environment

#### OUTCOMES

Alberta will have strong and effective environmental laws, policies & legal processes

Albertans will be actively and meaningfully engaged in decisions and processes that affect the environment

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# Creating the Grounds for Change

FOR SUPPORTERS & FRIENDS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTRE

WINTER '14

## Paying it Forward

Community group donates large gift as a thank you for environmental law help

In 2008, a small group of land-owners gathered around a kitchen table to discuss their concerns about a coal gas project proposed near Round Hill, Alberta, about an hour east of Edmonton. Residents were concerned about how this proposal would affect their quality of life and livelihood.

Over time, they formed a nonprofit group called The Voice of Community and Land Society (VOCAL), with membership swelling to 200. Throughout the process, they were faced with complex scientific literature, confusing regulatory processes and legal jargon, and they were unclear about their rights.

VOCAL called the Environmental Law Centre, which became an important source of information and support. They made many calls to the staff lawyers, who provided counselling over the phone. They attended some of our webinars, and invited our lawyers to present at a number of community meetings.

"The whole process is overwhelming and it's nice to have someone explain it to us" says Jane Oracheski, a VOCAL member. "The Centre provided us with information that was easy to understand. Your staff helped us



When a coal mine was proposed near his community, Bill Sears used our Environmental Information Service, supported by the Alberta Law Foundation and donors like you.

understand the issues and what our rights were. We are not rich - we were grateful to have someone to call without charging a fee."

In late 2009, the proponent announced it was putting the project on hold, citing changing market conditions and the economic slowdown as reasons. VOCAL continued to engage with residents over the years, but at a public meeting in April 2013, they decided to officially disband.

As they closed down their operations, VOCAL chose to donate nearly \$3000 to the Environmental Law Centre with the funds remaining from their efforts. We are grateful for this generous donation, and honoured to know our services were so helpful to them. This gift will support other groups who use our Environmental Law Information service to help with their environmental concerns.

"I think I can safely say we are all very proud of what VOCAL stood for and what we accomplished in a very short time," says Bill Sears, one of the founding members.

**"Of all the organizations that we worked with and learned from we felt our donation to the ELC would go the farthest in supporting and promoting what VOCAL stood for. Through dedication and a lot of hard work by many people I think we proved that a grassroots group that started around a kitchen table can be an effective voice for change. I would like to thank the ELC for helping us with that."**

Learn more at [www.vocalalberta.com](http://www.vocalalberta.com)

If your community group needs help, visit our website or call 1-800-661-4238.

Thank you very much for your support! Your donations make a difference. We hope you enjoy reading your Winter Newsletter and seeing how you are creating better environmental laws and allowing more voices and perspectives to be heard in decision-making.



### Wellsite Cleanup: it's about time

Join Staff Counsel Jason Unger on February 11 for a FREE webinar on how the Province could improve cleaning up abandoned and suspended wellsites.

For details email [info@elc.ab.ca](mailto:info@elc.ab.ca) or call 1-800-661-4238

*Thanks to the Alberta Law Foundation and the Red Deer River Naturalists for supporting this work!*



## Laws & Policies: keep your eyes on these ones in 2014

You support change that protects the environment

### Genuine Interest Standing

If there has been any lesson from Northern Gateway, it is that there is a need for better clarity around who should participate in environmental decisions. Who knew that among hearing participants, environmental groups were actually underrepresented, compared to industry, landowner and aboriginal representatives? Further, could broader standing to raise legitimate public concerns actually enhance industry's social license to operate?

Thanks to a \$57,000 grant from the Max Bell Foundation, we are wrapping up a law reform project on Standing at Environmental Boards and Tribunals. We are proposing realistic reforms that reflect a middle-ground solution in this highly-polarized debate. Stay tuned for the results of our work.

The time to push for change is now as the Alberta Energy Regulator develops its hearing

system. And we need your help to champion the reforms we are proposing. In particular, we must dispel concerns that broader participation causes meddling and unnecessary delay. Our preliminary research suggests otherwise. We need to raise \$20,000 to fund the additional research that is critical to move our argument: that broader standing in Alberta would benefit all parties.

### Municipal Government Act

Cities and towns have an untapped potential to play a key role in environmental protection. Municipalities are responsible for local land-use planning through municipal development and area structure plans. Private land-uses are also managed at the local level. Municipalities should be better supported to protect the environment.

Starting this spring, the Alberta Government will consult the public on the Municipal Government Act,

effectively opening a window for changes. Your donations help us promote reasonable changes. You can also participate. Follow our blog for updates on consultations, and the improvements we recommend.

### Caribou Recovery

The Province has begun caribou range planning in response to the federal recovery strategy under the Species At Risk Act.

Most caribou ranges in Alberta are highly impacted by human activities resulting in significant declines in populations. Turning around this trend will not be easy and will undoubtedly involve significant economic tradeoffs.

Thanks to your support, we are at the range planning table to promote substantive policy changes that could help caribou. We are engaged in the multi-stakeholder range planning for the Little Smokey and A La Pêche Caribou herds. These initial range plans will likely have implications for the rest of Alberta's herds.

## A New Year, a New Website

A new, improved online presence, thanks to generous donors

Throughout 2013 we redesigned and updated our website in order to get up to date with technology, refresh outdated materials and provide you with a better layout. The site was launched in November and we are very pleased with the results.

Please visit the site at [www.elc.ab.ca](http://www.elc.ab.ca) where you will find a treasure-trove of

resources on environmental law and policy developments in Alberta and beyond.

We would like to thank Mountain Equipment Co-op and Alberta Culture's Community Spirit Program for their generous support. We could not have undertaken this project without their generous funding.

**What do you think about our website? We'd love to find out what resources or pages you find most valuable, or hear any suggestions for improvement.**

**Share them with Leah at [lorr@elc.ab.ca](mailto:lorr@elc.ab.ca).**

## EPCOR gets people talking about land-use planning in Alberta

**The floods of June 2013 made many Albertans acutely aware that land and water are connected.** What happens with one affects the other. At that time, the provincial government was in the midst of developing the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) covering the major river basins of Southern Alberta. The plan would outline areas for headwater protection and provide guidelines for the types of activities allowed on the landscape.

Thanks to a generous \$19,200 donation from EPCOR, we hosted outreach sessions in three communities in Southern Alberta about how a land-use plan could impact the watershed. With co-host Yellowstone 2 Yukon, we

engaged 120 Banff and Canmore citizens in lively discussions about land-use planning and water protection. We also hosted a smaller conversation in Okotoks.

Not only did EPCOR support the project financially, but also provided staffers Stephanie Neufeld and Matthew McCrank who presented at the sessions to share EPCOR's perspective on watershed management along with their own technical expertise.

Our partnership with EPCOR continues. This spring we will host similar outreach sessions in the Edmonton area as the province launches land-use planning for the North Saskatchewan Region.



Photo courtesy of Jillian Lynn Lawson

**You are also strengthening land-use planning.** Your donation helped us participate in the official consultation process and submit our recommendations for the proposed plan. Without your support, we would not have been able to provide this balanced analysis to the government. You can view our recommendations on our website.

**Support from EPCOR and donors like you helps more Albertans participate, which could lead to better planning and more conservation for areas such as the Porcupine Hills, pictured above.**

**Thank you for investing in this work.**

## Raise your glass & celebrate!

### Meet our new Directors

As important as it is to have lawyers on our Board, it is just as important to have others who represent the broader community. That's why we are pleased to announce two new appointments to our board. **Robert Nichol** is Vice-President Woodlands for Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc. (Al-Pac). With over 30 years in the Canadian forestry industry, Bob sees his involvement with the ELC as an opportunity to participate in developing sound environmental principles.

**Dr. Gregory Taylor** is a Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, and the former Dean of the Faculty of Science at

the University of Alberta. An environmental toxicologist, his research focuses on understanding the mechanisms plants use to tolerate stresses such as metal toxicity and nutrient deficiency in soil. Having served on a number of boards, Greg brings valuable perspective and experience to our board.

Bob, Greg and the rest of the Board look forward to meeting and speaking with you throughout 2014.

### Congratulations, Gavin!

Every two years, deserving Alberta lawyers are recognized as "Her Majesty's Counsel, learned in the law, for the Province of Alberta," or Queen's Counsel (Q.C.), by the provincial government.

In December, Gavin Fitch, our Past President and a partner at McLennan Ross LLP, learned he was among those appointed.

To be eligible for a Q.C. appointment, individuals must demonstrate professional qualities, competence, and superior contributions to the administration of justice, the legal profession and the community. Gavin is well-known for his work on regulatory hearings, in addition to his community volunteerism - he has served on our Board since 2003!

Join us in congratulating Gavin for this well-deserved accomplishment!



*Join us in toasting Gavin's designation as Queen's Counsel.*

*Do you know (or are you) someone interested in serving on our Board or getting more involved in our work? Call Kim at 1-800-661-4238*



## Environmental Law Centre

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**Donating to the Environmental Law Centre is a powerful statement of your commitment to protecting the environment and responsibly developing our natural resources.**

The Environmental Law Centre protects the environment through strong laws, policies and legal processes. We believe that Albertans should be meaningfully and actively engaged in decisions that affect the environment.

Your tax-creditable donation makes a difference. You support the thousands of people who annually access our online and in-person environmental information services. This year, we plan to raise \$170,000.\* Please contact us with any questions you may have.

**Thank you for your generous support!**

\*it will cost us approximately \$20,000 (12%) to reach our fundraising goals



# You are important to us!

You've heard from us, now we'd like to hear from you. We appreciate all feedback and suggestions; your responses are very important to us. Mail to: #800, 10025 106 Street, Edmonton AB T5J 1G4; Fax: 780-424-5133; or email your scanned reply to: kkiel@elc.ab.ca. **All who reply will receive a free ELC publication of your choice! Thank you for your support!**

What kind of events would you like to attend? What speakers or topics would you like to see?	
Are you interested in joining an Expert Advisory Committee on an environmental law issue? (meet 1/year, with occasional calls/emails). Please indicate your particular interests.	
How can we improve our communications to you?	
Why do you support the Environmental Law Centre? Which projects or programs are most important to you?	
Please include your name to receive a free ELC publication (your choice)! Thank you!	

### **Please accept my gift to the Environmental Law Centre:**

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(Cheques payable to Environmental Law Centre or donate online at www.elc.ab.ca)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Please charge my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Am/Ex

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ PC. \_\_\_\_\_ Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

May we publicly acknowledge your gift? CVC Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Yes ☐ No, I prefer to remain anonymous Cardholder Signature: \_\_\_\_\_