

# Southern Foothills Community Stewardship Initiative

## Results from the Second Round of Community Forums Held February 28 – March 2, 2011

Forum Raw Data – Grouped by Themes

**Bullets are verbatim from the second round of public forums. The data from the four communities has been grouped under the theme areas that were used for discussion. The discussion themes were derived from the first round of public forums.**

### Water: Quality and Quantity

#### **Values, Essential Services and Benefits:**

- Without water we have nothing
- Water is life
- Supports ecosystem
- Supports wildlife
- Watershed feeds all the way to Hudson's Bay
- Water is a limiting factor to growth
- Use of fresh water for drilling oil wells
- Drinking water for man and beast
- Okotoks is held up for growth until they figure out how to get more water
- "Water is life"
- No trees: too much erosion, nothing to help hold the water in place
- New forests need more water whereas older forests expend less
- Fescue grass is efficient at holding water and very hard to replace fescue
- Is there fescue replacement?
- Essential service to the area yet we don't know how much we have? We need an inventory.
- Lineham Creek- spring run-off is incredibly dirty (looks like manure)! What is in the water? Cattle access to creek?
- Water Quality: Where is the contamination? Source of contamination? What is the contamination and at what level?
- Value of the water is tied to what's using it
  - PEOPLE

- WILDLIFE
- LAND (Agricultural and otherwise)
- INDUSTRY
- RECREATION
- HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS
- Life – human life/ecosystem life. Humans can only live 8 days without water. They can live only 8 minutes without air
- Economic activity
- Rough fescue supplies 15 – 80% of water
- Provides designated recreation area

**Bottom Line: Indicators: How do we know things are changing?**

- Talk to landowners
- Peer reviewed science
- Ecosystem is being paved: (pavement, JN’s interpretation)
- Too much sulphur in water can bind up trace minerals and cause mineral deficiencies resulting in imbalances.

**Management Strategies**

- Have to respect and replicate natural systems to the extent possible
- The further away from natural systems the more trouble we’re in
- Incentives → Voluntary → hard to so “No”, you can’t do that here.
- Encroachment
  - Trees from the west
  - Human activity
  - Recreation
  - Natural systems disrupted ie. Fire suppression
- Large area without knowledge of quantity; how do we divide it? What are the priorities?
- Planning for the future-drought, deforestation
- Maintaining the upper watershed-snowpack, fescue retention, riparian land and the value of each
- Maintaining the sub-watersheds
- Okotoks-water is directly tied to local recreation use; fishing, camping, river use
- Oil and Gas using lots of water and moving to saline; water usage research into alternative sources (deep water?)
- WASTE WATER AND STORM WATER usage
- Access to technical information and applying based on personal information
- Support for educational initiatives based on the studies being done
- Information on all steps in the process
- Information before the report

- Counsellors spreading the message of what's being done and progress
  - Social Media
  - Volunteers to take on some of the work load; how do we motivate other to take on some of the information spreading and awareness?
  - How do we access the senior demographics and stewards demographics (who might be busy ranching?)
  - Everything on list is key for water
  - EDUCATION is a great starting point for watershed:
    - Why do we need it?
    - What do we use it for?
  - Support for existing programs!! U of C education initiative
  - Get others into the conversation
    - Local newsletters
    - Forums
    - Articles and columns on local water studies and initiatives
    - CURRENT INFO.
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- Assessment of GROUND WATER with public access to the study
  - Need to communicate to all demographics- a website isn't enough
  - Is there a quarterly update that could go out?
  - People running municipalities need to educate. Does it need to be its own job? Educating and spreading information about water? Committee concentrated solely on water?
  - Urbans need to understand where the water is coming from and what it's used for.

## Air

### **Benefits, Essential Services and Values:**

- "Air is life"
- Clean air: good health
- Less drain on health care system
- We breath it and it does everything else
- Health implications → good air improves quality of life. When Quality of Life declines, increased \$\$\$ on health care system

### **Bottom Line, Indicators, Risks**

- Calgary air quality issues are directly tied to ours
- Yellow band coming into Calgary from Millarville
- Higher instances of lung related health problems
- Higher concentration of brain cancers, tumours, Cork Creek Gas Plant
- MS incidences high here
- Risk: sour gas. Clean air has less health risk
- Recognized standards for H2S and particulate matter
- Air quality advisory warning to not go outside indicates declining quality of life

- Bad smell indicates declining quality of life
- When we can see it, it could be transported from other places on air currents
- Health indicators related to air quality – eg. Asthma
- Increased levels of sickness/death from sour gas events
- Noise pollution → from motorized recreational or non- motorized
- Suspended particulate from intensive livestock operations, altered landscapes. These susceptible to wind erosion
- Feedlots – value is that clean air smells good
- Sour gas
- Feedlots-particulates
- Asthma
- Noise pollution

### Strategies

- Carbon capture
- Sour gas poisoning people and cattle
- Forest fires
- Identify what is disrupting the air quality?
- HEALTH: Landscapes and therefore people
- Sour gas tied to asthma and local health risk –flaring - also coal usage for energy
- RESEARCH: proactive
- CRAZ: Calgary Regional Airshed Zone, gird monitoring system
- MONITORING AND EDUCATION; municipalities, public and INDUSTRY
- Tougher regulations on industry
- Industry help fund air monitoring initiatives
- Mandatory reporting of exceeding limits
- Trading of pollution air credits?
- Comprehensive look at air shed
- Proactive action for air shed
- Industrial and public regulations
- Reducing emissions in general
- Communication of studies done: If they're being done where is the info?
- Forestry and it's speed; Water usage and forest ratio; Not mandated to plant a new tree; No planting program. Need tree planting program
- Plans that make forestry a renewable resource
- Prioritizing air quality over economic gain
- All the \$\$\$ in the world can't buy water or air
- Care now – monitoring air traffic and land traffic
- What's our plan B?
- Communication with neighbouring communities about air and pollution
- Priorities are globally backwards

- We can't change the world but we need to look into our own backyard – looking at local solutions, setting a good example for other to follow
- Phasing from point A → point B now as opposed to ten years down the road
- Economically complicated because industry both funds environmental initiatives and causes the most issues
- RESEARCHING alternatives to energy: further research into how to implement natural resources in a renewable way
- A slow process of diversifying our energy portfolio
- Industry accountability and regulations
- Good data and monitoring
- Good emergency response plans that include multiple ways to reach residents in case of leak (cell phones bought by companies). Sirens to warn residents of leak.
- Good data and research re health impacts from sour gas and communication of that data
- Conserve quality: work on keeping quality we have
- Air is mobile. Need to recognize this.
- Management of Point Sources of contamination crucial

## **Native Grasslands and Soil**

### **Values, Services and Benefits**

- Biodiversity
- Natural Beauty
- Food
- Carbon Storage
- Water cleansing and storage
- Native grasslands do all this better than non-native grass
- Goes hand in hand with non-fragmented land
- Native grasslands have natural rejuvenation; they don't require fertilizers; less erosion
- Water sinks (storage)
- Carbon sequestration (sinks)
- Has worked well for 1000s of years. They fit the environment.
- Supports ranching and provides food
- Diverse landscape
- Positive visual impact
- Feed for critters
- Natural water filter
- Carbon sequestration
- Oxygen supplier
- Very hardy and therefore dependable
- Naturally provides fibre therefore promotes water absorption / retention
- Rough fescue sequesters more carbon than forest
- Provides livelihood for agriculture and regenerative economy
- Provides diverse eco-system for various species if properly managed
- Water transfer to aquifer through natural filter
- Retains microbial activity necessary for plant rejuvenation
- Fundamental to the health of water, vegetation, carbon sequestration, diverse insects, mammals, and reptilian species.
- Erosion prevention

### **Bottom Line/ Indicators of Change, Problems or Deterioration /Thresholds,**

- We start losing differing species
- Less pounds gained (cattle production)
- Quality of water compromised
- Prevalent erosion
- Excessive moles because of over abundance of vegetation
- Weed encroachment, including brush and trees
- Tree encroachment

- Weed encroachment
- Invasive species encroachment
- People who have lost touch with grassland and lack appreciation of grasslands are an encroachment
- People buy for the nice landscape and view; that is why they are moving out to the country
- Overplanting and fragmentation disrupts grasslands
- Discussion over whether or not agriculture is currently disrupting grasslands. (Outside of the large potato farm fiasco.)
- Linear effects are a larger danger to grasslands; oil and gas exploration, roads, pipelines. These all disturb the integrity of the land.
- Encroachment of non-native weeds
- Over-grazing
- Question over affects of forestry industry's effect
- Depravation of plant growth
- Increased soil temperature
  - More evaporation
  - More erosion (eg. wind and water)

### **Strategies, Management and Mitigation**

- Responsible grazing
- Incentives to landowners to maintain grasslands; good stewardship
- Good governance and accountability from government because so much of native grasslands are public lands.
- Education: schools and adult ed. at a provincial level
- Continued control and innovation with drilling techniques:
- Directional Drilling
- Managing footprint (oil and gas)
- Strong regulations to ensure this (footprint)
- Reusing sites if they can re-open sites
- Regulators must consider the footprint of new technologies from the beginning: ie: wind power's footprint
- Use the same corridors for different users
- Reclamation methods: for any disturbance of fescue land
- Consider research and development into seeding, planting and reclaiming new fescue land
- Good land use planning
- New ways to go back to natural systems
- Value of REST for land

- Minimize disturbance, compaction, overgrazing, industrial over-development
- Maintain good plant litter cover
- Manage grazing practices
- Consider using fire as a tool
- Identify those lands containing native grass species and establish priority uses on native grass areas
- *Mitigation same as for Poor Soil*

## **Landscape and Aesthetics: Scenery and Character**

### **Essential Services and Benefits:**

- Catalyst for bringing people to our communities → drives economy
- Aesthetics relates to development → main street, western town; not Walmart, which promotes homogeneous
- setback re water
- Beauty- big trees/canopy → insurance/liability focus → cut down sick trees
- Biodiversity
- Economic draw: Film and TV (not as key as it used to be.)
- Good therapy
- Scenery
- Free
- Aesthetic Landscapes are a health benefit
- Health Care: Reduces stress
- Tourism
- Post card for Alberta (Branding)
- Preserve NATURAL beauty
- Looks nice if it's healthy and productive
- Any outside disturbance changes the landscape – once it's gone you can't replace it
- Maintains wildlife and biodiversity
- Inherent benefit
- Lifestyle branded: Clean air, water profiled
- Connects the history including 1<sup>st</sup> Nations' history
- Tourism
- Land base: Cattle operations need to be economical
- Currently have a high quality of life. We have world class views
- Lifestyle components. Being able to see a healthy ecosystem
- Economics has to work. Some people require their land to survive.
- People are leaving because they can't stand to see what is going on. Historic people will be leaving this land.

## **Bottom Line, Indicators of Change**

- Level of threat brings people together
- Input costs are greater than revenue
- World economics, land base, people pressure
- Want to maintain land base and remain economical
- Key value: High quality of land brings high quality of life
- Government is creating the problem. (ie. Logging debris destroying infrastructure downstream.)
- We are providing EG&S to society but influx of people is affecting landowner's ability to provide these services.
- Power lines
- Clear cut logging
- Windmills
- Oil and gas roads
- Roads
- Acreages
- Appreciation of landscape aesthetics versus values of consumer society
- Turning our landscape into a commodity
- Billboards down Hi-ways (Commercial) They are a blight on the landscape.
- We've lost touch with landscape aesthetics
- The Consumer Society- gathering commercial goodies vs appreciating nature's landscapes
- Contrast of Urban "consumption" vs Rural protection of land and production
- Old View: landscape was an asset; New View: landscape is cash flow
- How many billboards are too many?
- Proper planned development to protect agricultural land, increasing density of towns – where's the balance?
- "Rona" and other big box stores: Looking like every other town/subdivision OR Granum with no trees!
- Maintaining integrated historic environment → otherwise will lose some of tourist draw
- Not just beautiful storefronts or camouflage
- CHARACTER = REAL, AUTHENTIC
- Does tourism have good or bad effects? Need a balance ie. Not just retail benefits, there's also ATVs which enjoy and destroy at the same time

## **Strategies:**

- "MAIN STREET PROGRAM" architectural controls like in Black Diamond,
- "Cool Little Towns Initiative"
- Look at best practices in other places, (eg. In Finland # of trees is increasing) and be able to adapt it.
- Overcome narrow-mindedness/ resistance to "importing" ideas
- Sustainability for the region as a top priority → again, economic incentives (not just tax breaks) for good stewardship/sustainable development

- Returning to heritage land uses
- Embracing western aesthetic (security on horseback)
- Need value of landscape articulated by community at large → how can it be understood as a benefit to preserve landscape rather than offering deterrents.
- Community Vision Cohesiveness: Millarville in crisis- need to pull together; sometimes need to almost lose something
- Regulation: no houses on top of hills
- Awareness and Education (Leighton Centre)
- Appreciate what we have and preserve it
- We need to acknowledge there is an “emotional connection” through appreciation: The landscape has real value
- Cumulative Effects management
- How to put a \$\$value on aesthetics?
  - Tourism opportunities
  - Health benefits
- We need to educate re the importance of landscape. Start in early grades to develop appreciation of our landscapes.
- Need regulations to control
  - Development
  - Recreation
  - Subdivisions
- Understanding the carrying capacity of the area (# of people)

## **Connected Landscapes**

### **Values, Services and Benefits**

- Wildlife corridors
- Watershed protection
- Fewer invasive species
- Agricultural land is protected
- Carbon sink
- Adventure
- Integrity of habitat
- Intact landscape results in a healthy watershed
- Natural habitat and wildlife corridors
- Diversity of habitat – balance of grass and trees
- Economic benefits re water, timber, grass, tourism
- Fragmented land results in less management expertise (acreage owners lacking land management skills)
- Protection, habitat, security for wildlife
- Water retention, absorption, and recharge

- Filter through landscape
- Aesthetic – viewscape values
- For ranching operations which need large spaces
- Climate change adaptation → wildlife will adapt better if it has connected landscape for movement
- Holistic landscape → healthier ecosystem functions
- Carbon sequestration
- Resistance to weeds
- Healthier soil microbiology
- Complexity of ecosystem / greater biodiversity
- Essential value: provides a place to provide food for the province and country: It's agricultural capability.
- Make sure the land can reabsorb the ground water
- Visual aesthetic and beauty especially around the towns. ie. SW subdivisions in Okotoks are “ugliest place in the foothills.”
- Maintaining fresh air
- The land naturally sequesters carbon when not fragmented
- Maintains natural wildlife and corridors: fragmenting disrupts habitat
- Inflation of land prices becomes too unreal
- If the land had a voice and a persona, what would it say?

### **Bottom Line/ Indicators of Change or Problems, Thresholds**

- Subdivisions-rural residential subdividing
- Seeing so much development originally gave resident “heart-aches.” Now it's so common we're deadened by it and don't notice it anymore.
- Is the “army” of subdivisions and commuters just going to keep on coming?
- When the water supply can't meet the demand
- Subdivisions are too small
- Road density
- Subdivision
- Rural residential
- Building density
- Development generally
- Chain stores (Big Box)
- High speed roads (paved roads) (Hiway 40)
- Commuting distance from school and work

### **Strategies**

- Measure maximum use – manage for capacity
- Planning model – limit acreage development

- Preservation of plant species
- Constraints
- Cluster development – Burmis , Lundbrek, recreational
- Lobby corporations directly to use best management
- Public education
- Legislation but with option to be repealed
- Tax laws – Capital gains benefits or incentives
- Property taxes – the smaller the parcel the higher the tax
- Transfer of development rights
- Externalities must be accounted for
- Need for an integrated planning model. Ie Eastern Slopes Management Plan
- Education for the public
- Come and visit to enjoy it but you cannot stay!
- Nodes →higher density housing
- Appropriate incentive systems
- Planning paradigm
- Zoning
- Ecological reward/offset for protection of land
- Form partnerships or continue to between MDs and towns
- Reward the act of keeping farmland intact
- Allow owners to derive benefits outside of subdividing
- Non-transferable tax-receipts aren't enough
- A credit system or other incentive which is more flexible, profitable and sustainable than non-transferable tax receipts.
- As a community the local economy should be self-sufficient: regional sustainability
- Find a way to combat inflation and get back to the “agricultural value” of land
- A program needs to have teeth; wishy washy programs can't be effective.

## **Wildlife and Biodiversity**

### **Essential Services and Benefits: Values**

- When an apex predator is healthy, everything in the system is healthy
- Grizzlies as an indicator species of ecosystem health
- Bull Trout or other fish also indicators
- Not necessarily an economic value: has INTRINSIC VALUE
- Hunting, fishing
- Value as an indicator for health: knowing it's there even if you don't see them
- Tourism →drives retail sales →TOURIST DRAW
- Ecological Goods and services from biodiversity
- Fly fishing
- Wildlife viewing

- Ecotourism opportunities
- Trap lines
- Biodiversity keeps ecosystem functions in line
- This area doesn't look like Airdrie ( this is a benefit)
- The green keeps us here
- Landscape aesthetics
- The big sky and the sunshine
- Wildlife (undulates) browse hard vegetation
- Wildlife Scavengers clean up, pest control
- Predators balance numbers
- Economic spin-off – hunting, fishing,
- Tourism
- Wildlife partial indicator of range health
- Economic agriculture sustainability dependant on biodiversity
- Diverse species (vegetation) promotes range health, water percolation, natural carbon sequestration, air rejuvenation.
- Diverse species (animals, insects, reptiles, birds etc)
  - Good indicators of ecological health
  - Provides ag. livelihood

#### **Indicators of Deterioration/ Bottom Line**

- Number of particular species more dominant
- Modification of traditional wildlife ranges
- Erosions
- Traditional birdlife not present
- Predator abundance
- Be aware that some species adapt to altered landscapes-fake indicators of health (dg. Lots of deer)
- Language matters- animals are “its” rather than he/she. This dictates relationship....need to recognize value of interconnectivity

#### **Strategies:**

- Manage for Health in all species
- Economic value for maintaining population health/ landscape→eco-tax?
- Education re bottom line above→changing conversation/language about value of animals
- Challenge to compete with economic benefit of other land uses
- Eco-tax- pay to preserve pristine nature of landscape?
- Reward good stewardship financially or through other public funds (models in B.C.)
- Support initiatives around land use planning and municipal governments who are supporting this
- Highlight successes- can't always take a negative tone/ share without attacking

- Need to know what's out there → effective monitoring without invasive techniques (eg. chips) on an ongoing basis. We're not doing enough
- Need Numbers and Health data
- Maintain wildlife corridors
- Manage the habitat not the wildlife
- Need to accept predation as a risk? Small price to pay to have access especially on public/lease land
- Healthy predators allow population management: Yellowstone example- wolves, deer, songbirds
- Notice once they're gone, eg. Bald eagles, moose
- Balance is required in management (eg. Hunting as a management tool for ungulates, prescribed burning versus fire suppression)
- Need to maintain these services
- We don't want to degrade any more
- Maintaining these services
- Coordinated land use planning and coordination between Ministries and departments (eg. Sharing right-of-ways, sharing roads)
- Long term planning- needs to be more on generational time scales rather than 3-5 year (election time frames.)
- More futuristic vision instead of instant cash in pocket
- Planning should have concrete recommendation with on the ground implications that are revisited every 5-10 years with plan reviews.
- People need to understand their actions affect everyone downstream
- Sometimes we need to say NO and when we do should be prescribed by plans (not everyone in the group agreed with this.)
- Some kind of regional education program
- Higher density housing options: involves education and planning
- Involves a social paradigm shift as there is a resistance to high density