

# Cross Conservation Area *Winter Newsletter*

**In this issue:** update on volunteering, dark skies awareness, birding at the ASCCA and more!



Dick Choy

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## Update on volunteering

An update from our Volunteer Coordinator

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers for another great year! We wouldn't be able to run our programs or maintain and conserve the ASCCA without you. All of your contributions mean so much to us. 2018 started well into winter, which didn't seem to want to go away until April. Due to snow, we had to reschedule our annual volunteer recruitment session. I'd like to thank our volunteers for their enthusiasm in helping to recruit, train and shadow new volunteers. To new volunteers, we hope you enjoy volunteering with us!

As for the summer, it was hot and smoky, but this didn't seem to discourage our volunteers, who led successful day camps, stewarded the ASCCA and worked on various outdoor projects. With funds from the Alberta Conservation Association, we were able to take down and install several miles of fencing along our east and north boundaries.

Volunteers were a great help this past year with taking down old fencing, as well as with several other projects, including a successful honey harvest. Our steward volunteers continue to

regularly patrol the area with detailed reports, and our education volunteers have been delivering excellent outdoor education programming. It also was the third year of our CreekWatch program to monitor Pine Creek at the ASCCA, partnering with RiverWatch Alberta.

Last year we held a Stampede BBQ and Elk BBQ and Bugle. Special thanks to the Lovin' Tuneful barbershop quartet for wonderful entertainment at the Bugle, and Saffron Personal Chef Services for delicious catering. We had our annual Volunteer Celebration this year Feb 2,

with entertainment from Rob Lennard, the 'History Wrangler.' I'd also like to acknowledge Glenn Schultz as the 2017 recipient of our Volunteer of the Year award, as well as Bruno Arnold and Elizabeth Griffin, who both received the award for 2018.

If you are interested in volunteering with the ASCCA, please call 403.931.1042 or email [info@crossconservation.org](mailto:info@crossconservation.org)

- Anna Aldridge

*ASCCA volunteers working on taking down fencing this summer.*



# Beaver pair finds new home

By Holly Duvall, Executive Director, Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation

In June 2016, a North American beaver kit was admitted into our care at the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC). She was estimated to be between four and six weeks old and had suffered an injury to her tail.

Beavers naturally spend two to three years with their parents, so it was unusual to find such a young kit on her own. Unfortunately, we rarely get much history on the patients admitted to us, but we suspect that she may have been picked up and dropped by a predator. Due to the length of time beavers spend with their parents, we knew early on that this would mean she would remain in our care for up to two years.

In June 2017, we admitted a two-year old male beaver that was found in a storm drain in Calgary after suffering from deep bite wounds to his lower back.

After extensive supportive care, he recovered and was moved to an outdoor enclosure, next to the female beaver. One evening, staff saw both beavers interacting with each other through the fence that separated them. Over the next few days, they continued to see this behaviour, which was unusual as unrelated beavers in captivity typically do not get along well.

Through consultation with other wildlife rehabilitation centres that have experience with beavers, we made the decision to introduce the two together through a series of supervised visits. They got along swimmingly, and we decided to keep the two beavers together and release them both the following spring.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018, both beavers were returned back to the wild at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area. We were thrilled to work with the ASCCA to find a site on the grounds for the beavers to move into. We hope this pair will continue to thrive and live a very long, healthy life together.

*Below - beaver pair at AIWC*

*Bottom Left, Right - beaver pair enjoying their new home at the ASCCA*



The beavers were only two of the many animals we care for each year. Since 1993, AIWC has been a champion for the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned wildlife. Accredited through the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, AIWC serves the needs of Alberta's diverse wildlife in Calgary and southern Alberta.

As a registered charity, AIWC relies on charitable donations and dedicated volunteers to support the more than 1,600 varied animals in need of care every year. AIWC welcomes Alberta's injured, orphaned, and oiled wildlife, small and large, from hummingbirds to moose calves.

95% of animals are injured or orphaned due to human activities. The most common causes of injury are window strikes, vehicle collision, hitting power lines, barbed wire, fishing line entanglement or ingestion, domestic cat and dog attacks, and exposure to toxins. Often wildlife is orphaned by needless rescuing of babies who should have been left where they were.

To report wildlife in need, please call our wildlife hotline at 403-946-2361. To learn more about AIWC and the work we do, visit our website at: [www.aiwc.ca](http://www.aiwc.ca)



## Birding at the Cross Conservation Area

Long-time birder and ASCCA volunteer Chris Mills shares his experiences

**Chris Mills has been volunteering with the ASCCA since 2015. He is part of a dedicated group of volunteers with the knowledge and experience required to hike off-trail to do a detailed nature survey of the area's wildlife. Chris is passionate about birding and has written the following account of what he's experienced birding on the ASCCA.**

I was sitting just below the Fescue Trail hoping that the volunteers with whom I was hiking would decide to come back down the hill and save me having to climb up to join them. It was spring and down below me there was a pair of bluebirds scouting out nest boxes.

Across the coulee, a Northern Harrier was coursing along the fence line hoping for a foolish vole to show himself. I was thinking that the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area really is a great place to bird. Apart from being a fine example of the Foothills region of Alberta, uncluttered with acreages and noisy mechanical devices, it embraces some very different ecosystems that harbour a range of bird species.

The ASCCA's fescue grassland is perfect habitat for Savannah and Clay-Coloured Sparrows and even the occasional Vesper. Fencing through the area has been decorated with birdhouses. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows compete for the most desirable spots. As I have already mentioned, the Northern Harrier loves hunting for voles along grassy slopes using updrafts to save unnecessary flapping.

From up above, you can see Red-Tailed Hawks and ravens and even the occasional eagle. If you are lucky you may catch sight of a Great Grey Owl sitting like a statue up in a spruce tree. The ASCCA is sparrow country with song, Lincoln, White Throated and White Crowned all contributing to a cacophony of song. There are wrens and chickadees in the willow bushes and back in the trees are warblers and flycatchers.

In spring if you are lucky you will see the mating flight of a Ruby Throated Hummingbird above the willows along the creek. As you move up the hill away from the valley you get into dry aspen woodland. Many of the birds along the valley will spend time in the aspen but you will also see some species that prefer the drier areas. Orioles and Red Breasted Grosbeaks flit in the upper branches. In the early morning you may hear the haunting song of a Swainson's Thrush along with the drumbeat of an amorous Ruffed Grouse.

Back in 2016 the aspen forests suffered an outbreak of tortrix moth caterpillars and for weeks the aspen woodlands were full of insect eating birds - wrens, orioles, grosbeaks and flycatchers. The last ecosystem is the wetlands of which the ASCCA has a limited amount, however it is increasing as beavers have been reintroduced to the area. The area includes the headwaters of Pine Creek and has a lot of wet wooded valleys with habitat that varies from mixed meadows right through to groves of old spruce. Its wetlands hold a range of ducks including Mallard, Green Winged, Blue Winged and even the occasional Cinnamon Teal. Waders are moving back onto the ASCCA as the wetlands grow including snipes, sora, sandpipers and others.

When you have a spare hour, grab your binoculars and your hiking boots and come out and enjoy the birds of the ASCCA. The best way to enjoy birding is to find a spot with reasonable vision and just sit and look and listen.

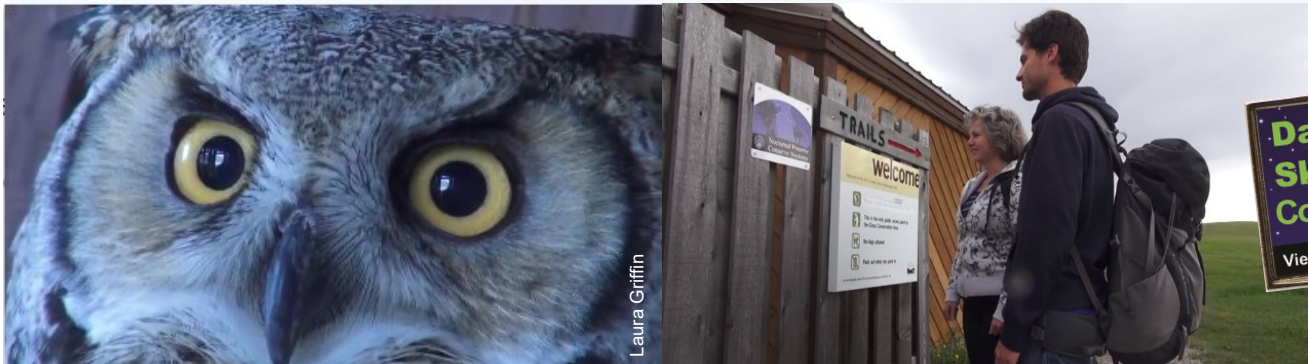


Above - Great Gray Owl  
Below - Mountain Bluebird  
Left - Common Redpoll



## Join the dark night

Help us to raise awareness about the value of dark skies and the impacts of light pollution



Are you tired of watching the same old cat videos on YouTube? Why not try skunks, or bears or synchronized elk dancers? All of these animals star in the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area (ASCCA)'s new film - "**Join the Dark Night: Nocturnal Preserves**". The film is a great way to learn about what Nocturnal Preserves are and the impacts they can have on a community and the wildlife that lives there. Please support our work for conservation and light efficiency advocacy by settling in with some popcorn to watch the film.

To watch this film, please go to our YouTube channel at Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area and click on the "Join the Dark Night Nocturnal Preserve" video or search for the name in the YouTube search bar. The video will also be shared to our Twitter and Facebook pages at @ASCCConservation.

We would like to thank our sponsors the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan and TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for their generous support of this project. We would also like to thank the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), Rothney Astrophysical Observatory (RAO),

Foothills County, Cochrane Ecological Institute, Banded Peak School, Collingwood School, and Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society for providing us with experts, passionate citizens to interview, and animals to film. Everyone featured in the film shares a passion for making our communities light efficient and it was truly inspirational to be able to work with them.

We would also like to thank the work of the "Protect the Dark Skies Around Calgary" group for their generous contributions and consultation on this project. If you would like more information about the work they're doing or their petition for the Calgary SW Ring Road to install better lighting please visit <http://ptds.ca/>

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous support and dedication of the RASC Calgary Centre in helping us to become Canada's first Nocturnal Preserve and for creating the designation, as it acknowledges the importance of Dark Skies for primarily ecological benefits. Without them the inspiration for this film would not have been there.

- Laura Griffin

The ASCCA, Foothills County, RAO, and RASC are partnering to raise awareness in our community about the value of dark skies, and the negative impact of light pollution. Light pollution (unnecessary or unwanted light), can prevent us from viewing the stars and other celestial objects. It also disrupts circadian rhythms in wildlife and people, which directly impacts our health.

To inspire our neighbours to help create a more light-efficient community, we have created a website at [DarkSkyCountry.ca](http://DarkSkyCountry.ca) with information about the importance of dark skies. We are also inviting people to send us photos that demonstrate how they are helping to reduce light pollution. While supplies last, we will be sending complimentary Dark Sky Country pins to everyone who participates. If you'd like to participate, email [info@crossconservation.org](mailto:info@crossconservation.org) with your photo, name, and mailing address.

We would like to acknowledge the Calgary Foundation for their financial support of this initiative.

- Anna Aldridge

View from the ASCCA showing sky glow from Calgary

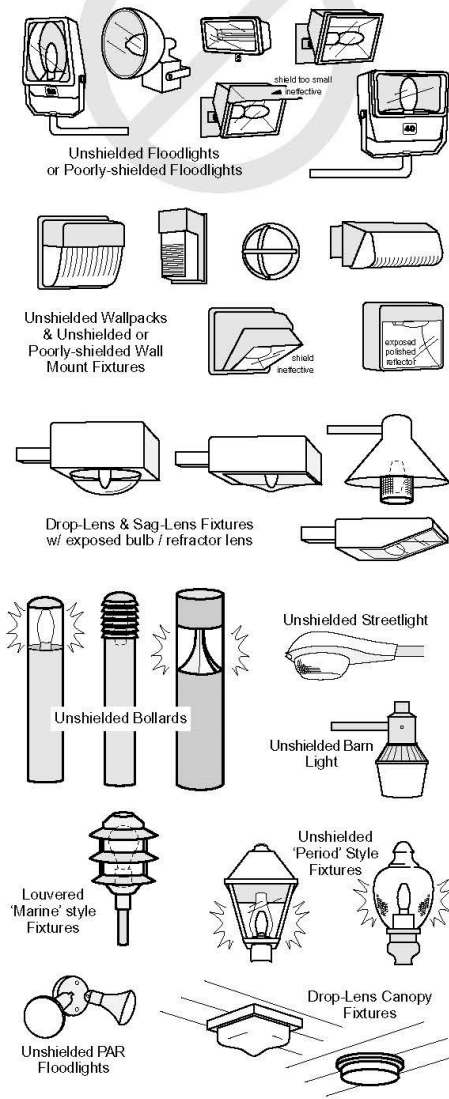


# Better Lights for Better Nights

Help eliminate light pollution. Select the best fixture for your application using this guide. Use the lowest wattage bulb appropriate for the task and turn off the light when it's not being used.

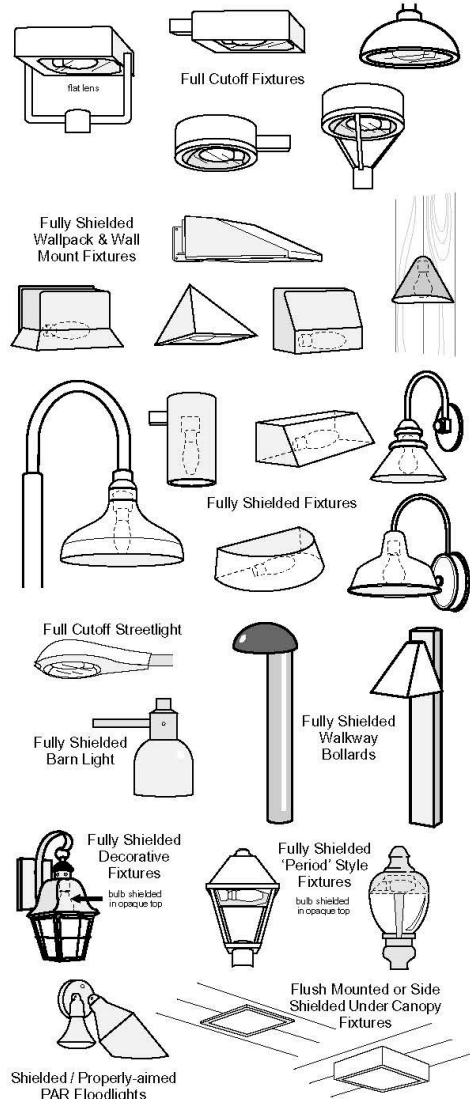
## Unacceptable / Discouraged

Fixtures that produce glare and light trespass



## Acceptable

Fixtures that shield the light source to minimize glare and light trespass and to facilitate better vision at night



Rendered for the Town of East Hampton, NY by Bob Crelin ©2015

presented by the

**Dark Sky Society**  
www.darksksociety.org

Illustrations by Bob Crelin, used with permission. You may freely copy and distribute this document.

# Winter greetings from a sleepy bear

Written by "GRrgtggr" the bear, translated by ASCCA summer student Zachary Mager

Hello! It's *GRrgtggr* the bear. I wanted to write my second letter to all of you since the last one was written over a year ago and a lot has happened since. First you may ask how I am writing to you at this time of year when I should be sleeping. Well, according to scientists, and my own internal clock, I am not a true hibernator. I'm simply not as impressive as the wood frog, who is able to freeze solid during winter hibernation and defrost upon spring to hop again.

Since I am such a large animal, I go into a process called torpor. In torpor my body slows down, and I sleep for large periods of time, however on a nice sunny winter day like this I can wake up groggy (having no impact on

my writing skills I assure you). That is why in summer I must eat and eat and eat, storing enough food so I don't have to leave the warmth of my den during the winter. If you ever do hear a large growl during the winter, do not investigate, that is a hungry bear, and not a happy camper.

Speaking of summer, the last was quite enjoyable. You might have seen signs of me along the trails if you weren't lucky enough to see me at a great distance. Signs along the trail included my scat which yes, I left lying about. If you took time to take a peek, you would have seen the many berries I found around the Cross. Thinking of them makes my stomach growl! The berries included buffalo berries, saskatoons, and raspberries amongst others. I also got myself into a couple of ground wasp nests for a tasty insect treat. These were easy to come by last summer. As I am still a kid at heart and a fun-loving bear, you might have seen my claw marks on an aspen tree after I climbed it.

In my last letter, I wrote about safety measures and respect when you find yourself unexpectedly in

the company of a bear. I must say that the ASCCA leadership camp kids last summer did an incredible job when they spotted me by the aspen shelter. One of the girls calmly made deer antlers to notify the leaders of my presence (a signal campers and school groups make when they see an animal to quietly direct people's attention to them). I have poor eyesight, so I stood up on my two hind legs to get a better smell of the group. This was my territory, so I did not leave, nor did I walk closer to the campers. The group quickly got the point and *slowly* walked back the way they came, leaving me alone. When they were a great distance away, they started singing camping songs to ensure I would not follow them. I prefer my peace and quiet, as do all bears. Speaking of which, it's time for me to get back to napping.

That is all for now.

Big yawn!  
Best Regards,  
GRrgtggr



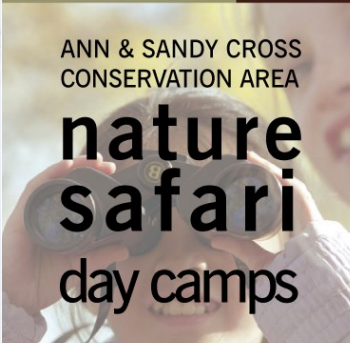
GRrgtggr, asleep in his den

Pierre Tremblay

AMVC

## what will you discover this summer?

cost: \$140-\$175  
please contact:  
Laura @ 403.931.2042  
e-mail lgriffin@crossconservation.org  
visit www.crossconservation.org



ANN & SANDY CROSS CONSERVATION AREA

# nature safari day camps



- fun-filled treks
- creative eco-crafts
- make new friends
- exciting nature-based games



dates: *Leadership Week!*  
July 2-5 (ages 13-15)  
July 15-19 (ages 9-12)  
July 22-26 (ages 6-9)  
Aug 6-9 (ages 6-9)  
Aug 12-16 (ages 9-12)

## Looking into native grassland restoration

ASCCA summer student Robbie Mar summarizes the research he completed this past summer

In May of 2018, I was offered a position at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area through the United Nations Association in Canada's Green Spaces program, a placement program for recent graduates, and students looking for work related to environmental protection and sustainable development. As a biosciences major looking to work in the field of conservation or environmental management, working at the ASCCA gave me useful experience for my future career, and provided a good introduction to conservation work.

From late May, until the end of August 2018, I worked at the ASCCA to help establish a plan for a volunteer-led project to restore and improve the environmental health of the remaining areas of native prairie at the Cross. Specifically, I was focused on researching methods on removing, or



limiting the spread of non-native pasture grasses such as timothy hay-grass, and smooth brome, and replacing them with native rough fescue grass. There are a number of potential benefits to doing this, as restoration of native grassland provides better habitat for a number of different wildlife species, supports a greater diversity of plant life, and provides better grazing for livestock.

In addition to carrying out research on grassland restoration methods, I also located a suitable site to carry out a restoration project in the future, and tested a chemical free method of vegetation removal that could potentially be used called soil solarization, which involves placing a covering such as a tarp on top of an area of soil, and leaving it for a period of several weeks, so that it traps heat beneath it and raises the temperature of the soil high enough to kill any pests, pathogens, or seeds in the soil. If successful, future restoration projects can use this method of soil sterilization to kill the seeds of invasive plants present in the soil, allowing for native grasses and other plants to be established without competing against invasive species.

## Education for high needs schools

Support from the Alberta Conservation Association has helped even more students experience nature

Imagine spotting a herd of deer in the wild for the very first time. You watch excitedly, observing them from a safe distance, trying to figure out what their next move might be, admiring their beauty while being surrounded by nature. Unique experiences like these and more were had this year by students attending outdoor education programs at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area.

Students from many different backgrounds were able to experience our programs due to a generous donation from the **Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)**. This donation provided funds to enable schools facing financial limitations the opportunity to come to the ASCCA to explore and learn in nature. Many students had not previously spent time within a natural setting and some had not ventured much outside their own community. A day in the outdoors provided the chance for students to explore with many hands-on activities to deepen their understanding and create memorable moments.

The students attended programs through the seasons, enjoying the colours of the fall to the wonders of winter. They watched a herd of 20+ deer bound across the field, saw a weasel scurrying about, learned about plants, and so much more. The sense of wonder and the enthusiasm of the students was always a highlight in the day.

Teachers appreciated the opportunity to visit the area and felt their students benefitted greatly from the experience. Here are just a few of the comments they shared with us.

**"It was an amazing day! So great for kids to be outdoors."**

**"Students were able to see actual tracks made by different animals in the snow."**

**"Thank you again for the wonderful experience. The class enjoyed it so much."**

A big thank you to the ACA, the participating teachers and students, and our education volunteers who all contributed to the success of our programs and unforgettable memories created in nature.

- Maureen Luchsinger



## Research at the ASCCA

Research into wildlife and habitat flourishes at the ASCCA

It's been another busy year for projects at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area. When the area was founded, Ann and Sandy expressed their wish that the ASCCA be made available for academic research. We have been fulfilling their mandate through projects undertaken by academics and staff from the University of Calgary, Mount Royal University, University of Saskatchewan, and St. Mary's University.

Typically, we work with the instructors at the universities to find research topics of interest not only to the students but to us as well. They must also fit within the course curriculum when undertaken by students. We have learned a lot from the research undertaken here over the years. Recent and current research areas have included:

- Constructing Beaver Analogs (structures) on Pine Creek
- The Pros and Cons of Beaver

- Reintroductions
- Management of the ASCCA in the Absence of Natural Fires
  - Elk Management
  - Richardson Ground Squirrel Population
  - Thirteen-Lined Ground Squirrels
  - Badgers
  - Poisonous Plants Found at the ASCCA
  - Bumble Bees and Pollination
  - Role of Coyotes at the ASCCA
  - Native Grass Reintroduction Strategies
  - Carbon Sequestration

As the research papers are made available to us, we will post them to our website whenever possible. If you are interested in learning more about a particular project, please contact us.

- Greg Shyba



Greg Lewallen from the University of Saskatchewan examines beaver analog.

## Cross Conservation School

What do you call a unique and inspiring educational program where nature is your teacher and your classroom is the great outdoors? Where you are immersed in the landscape learning the cultural, ecological and biological aspects of the natural world? Where exploration and discovery is encouraged? Where the land has many stories and you become part of its story?

Chevron Open Minds Cross Conservation School was started in 2000 and quickly became the cornerstone of our educational programming. As part of Campus Calgary / Open Minds, this program inspires students to become environmental stewards over the course of a week spent at the ASCCA.

Students experience the wonders of nature through hands-on exploration that encourages and stimulates critical thinking, problem solving and journaling. The variety of topics to explore are endless. Students expand their world by learning about the importance of habitat, wildlife, ecosystems, biodiversity, the

interconnectedness of all living things, cultural uses of the land, stories, stewardship, and an environmental conservation ethic. They can even test their physical and mental boundaries with hiking and all-weather wilderness immersion resulting in feelings of empowerment and classroom comradery.

Cross Conservation School encourages students to slow down and look deeply at the natural world. We make time for those teachable moments when some mysterious scat or tracks have been located; a herd of deer is grazing along the trail; or the majestic soaring of a red tail hawk in search of its lunch. These are the moments that inspire and create wonder that continues to resonate long after the week is complete. A huge thank you to Chevron Canada Resources for supporting and sustaining this award-winning program that continues to thrive and evolve!

- Maureen Luchsinger



Maureen Luchsinger





**Ann & Sandy Cross  
Conservation Area**  
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160 Street West  
Foothills AB  
T1S 4K9

**From all of us at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area,  
thank you to our donors, partners and volunteers!**

We would like to thank the Alberta Conservation Association, the Calgary Foundation, Chevron Canada Resources, Fluor, Foothills County, the Government of Canada CSJ Program, the Government of Alberta STEP Program, the Government of Alberta Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program, Hammerhead Resources, Pembina Pipeline Corporation, Rampart Oil Inc, and UNAC Green Spaces for their support in 2018. We would also like to acknowledge and thank each of our individual donors. Thank you for making Ann and Sandy's legacy possible.

To donate online scan QR Code



**Stay Connected!**

*Join our online communities by following @ASCConservation on Twitter and Facebook.*



Thank you to Anna Aldridge, Chris Mills, Greg Shyba, Holly Duvall, Laura Griffin, Maureen Luchsinger, Robbie Mar, and Zachary Mager for your contributions to this newsletter.

If you are interested in contributing to our next newsletter or have any feedback for us, please email [info@crossconservation.org](mailto:info@crossconservation.org)

## Support the Legacy

Visit [crossconservation.org/donate](http://crossconservation.org/donate) for more information.



### How can you get involved?

Sponsor a community conservation learning event (food/drinks, etc.)

Bring your team to the ASCCA for environmental volunteering/team-building including:

- Tree planting
- Removing invasive weeds
- Fencing repair and install
- Various other special projects

Or rent our building for a function or retreat

#### Other examples

- Become a significant sponsor for our conservation education programs
- Help us to build a space for outdoor events
- Sponsor the building of a new picnic shelter
- Contribute to installing new trail signs and improving trail conditions (for example, adding gravel to improve traction)

Donations cover everything from the costs of bringing students out for education programs, paying staff salaries, upkeep of our building and daily operations, maintaining trails, putting up wildlife friendly fencing and reintroducing native species (such as beavers).

Please contact us if you would like to donate to our general fund or a specific area. Contributions from our valued donors and volunteers are absolutely essential and allow us to continue our mission.

Email [info@crossconservation.org](mailto:info@crossconservation.org) or call 403.931.1042. Together, we can continue Ann and Sandy's conservation legacy.

