

How we do it: Prioritizing snow clearing on roads

Snow clearing is a fact of life in northern Alberta and Athabasca County has programs and services to help make winter safer and easier for everyone.

Keeping roads clear of snow and sanded is a big task each year. Preparations for the winter season begin well before the snow flies by mixing the winter's supply of sand and salt.

When the snow does arrive, grader and snow plow truck operators then work together to clear public roadways according to a plan which prioritizes bus routes, hills, heavily travelled roads and other key areas first. Residents who purchase snow flags, and seniors who receive driveway snow clearing at no-cost as part of the Driveway Snow Clearing Program are then looked after.

Grader operators aim to clear driveways as soon after a snow event as possible as part of this program but must put public road safety first. Delays can occur. Sometimes it snows for a week at a time and equipment has to go over these prioritized roads more than once.

The Driveway Snow Clearing Program is part of the overall services provided to rural residents in Athabasca County. Driveway snow flags are sold to interested rural residents at a cost of \$50 per flag and are good for one snow removal. A Hold Harmless Agreement must be signed by the property owner before snow flags can be purchased.

SAFETY & SNOW MOVING EQUIPMENT

Chances are if you drive in the County this winter you will encounter Athabasca County workers either conducting snow removal or



An Athabasca County snow plow and sand truck clears snow in Rochester after a snowfall. Snow removal operators in the County share the road with drivers while focussing on the work at hand. Slowing down when approaching equipment reduces the chance of damage and the possibility of a collision.

driving to their next snow removal job. The equipment they operate is big and for the most part moves slowly.

Grader and snow plow operators are focussed on the job at hand. You can assist increase safety by following a few simple driving rules:

- Slow down to ensure our operators know you are behind or approaching from the front;
- If approaching from behind, stay back 15 metres and continue to follow. Our operators will pull over and let you pass when it is safe to do so;

• If you are meeting a piece of equipment, slow down to reduce the chance of damage to your vehicle and County equipment from flying rocks or a collision.

Going too quickly around snow removal equipment puts both yourself and our operators at-risk. Driving with courtesy and caution is the priority of our operators. You can make these your priorities too!

For general inquiries contact the Public Works Department, Mon. to Fri., 8 am to 5 pm at 780-675-2273. The after hours Emergency Contact Line is 780-689-9000.

Protect your belongings and safety this season

New constables to arrive in new year

Athabasca RCMP issued a couple of reminders to residents in a report to County Council: take the keys out of your vehicles; lock up your belongings; and drive with caution as the region experiences worsening winter conditions.

Investigations undertaken by the RCMP have led to the recovery of \$120,000 worth of items in the County. Although the items were not stolen from within the County, any property left out is susceptible to thieves.

Car thefts were noted as being on the rise. This is largely due to vehicle owners leaving the keys in their unlocked vehicles for

convenience.

A high number of vehicle collisions have also taken place. Over a three-month period ending in November there were 170 collisions on roads within County boundaries. Of them, 40 per cent were due to animal hits.

While there is very little drivers or the RCMP can do about the number of animals in the region,

or weather conditions, drivers can slow down and increase the chance of stopping or avoiding an animal hit or collision with another vehicle.

An historical increase to the number of calls for assistance to the Athabasca RCMP has been recognized by the force. Soon two new RCMP members will be joining its ranks.



athabasca county connection

A newsletter for residents and businesses of Athabasca County

December 2013

Community halls supported by program

If you recently attended a Christmas Party at a local community hall, chances are it may have received support from Athabasca County's Community Hall Assistance Program.

Athabasca County recognized the important role community halls play in the lives of those living in the municipality and created the Program to relieve some of the fundraising burden from volunteers.

Today the program is overseen by the Athabasca County Recreation Board and the Manager of Recreation. Upon approval of its annual budget by County Council, operating assistance grants are awarded to community organizations who actively maintain and operate a Community Hall.

The amount of each assistance grant is 50 per cent of the previous year's power and gas bills.

Another part of the program includes building and liability insurance coverage which offers halls a reduced rate and the option to buy-down to a lower deductible. County staff also provides insurance and risk management support to community associations as they manage their facilities.

To be eligible for the program the property must be within the Athabasca County boundary, be part of the assessment roll, and have a facility that is available to the general public through rentals or a free bookings.

So far there are 19 community organizations which meet the criteria of the program and are listed as part of County Policy 7625 that guides the qualification process.

County hosts World Town Planning Day event



Celebrated in 30 countries, Athabasca County hosts an annual World Town Planning Day workshop to highlight the valuable contributions sound planning makes to society.

This year the event took the form of a Design Charrette Workshop led by Professor William Pol and Russell Schnurr of the GIS and Urban Planning

program at Fanshaw College in London, Ontario.

The workshop was designed to give those who attended skills in organizing a Design Charrette, viewed as an innovative way to gather and share ideas from a variety of stakeholders.

Continued on Page 3.

Participation and dialogue key to success

REEVE'S MESSAGE

The Municipal Election has concluded and I have been given the privilege of serving as Reeve of Athabasca County.

I offer my sincere appreciation and thanks to those residents who placed their trust and faith in me and all Council members to lead Athabasca county in a positive direction.

As the new Council team begins work, it is my hope that we can move forward to resolve issues and concerns with fairness and equity.

The election was a positive challenge that gave the residents a chance to voice their thoughts.

It is through this kind of participation that our County will continue to develop and grow into a vibrant, thriving region that new people will increasingly choose to relocate to with their families and businesses.

We are all a part of this County and together we make it a great place to live.

On behalf of Athabasca County I wish everyone all the best of the Holiday Season and a very Happy New Year.



Doris Splane



Athabasca County
at the centre of it all

www.athabascacounty.com

The Athabasca County Connection newsletter is produced bi-monthly and is available to every resident by mail or electronically through email or on our website.

To receive or cancel your copy call the County Administration Office at 780-675-2273 or sending an email to connection@athabascacounty.com

Join us on social media



On behalf of County Council and all County Employees
**Have a safe & happy
Holiday Season!**

County Briefs

A Christmas Gift Idea

Do you have a outdoors enthusiast in the family? Help them enjoy the County's boat launches and outdoor areas by purchasing a 2014 Seasonal Day Pass.

The pass gives them unlimited access to any County operated recreational facility. They are available for \$30 each or \$40 for a family pass. Details and the passes are available at the County Administration Office 780-675-2273.

Rochester rest area closes

County Council has agreed to free the Rochester Agricultural Society from a 20-year agreement to operate a rest area along Hwy. 2 near Rochester.

The Society took over operation of the site from the County for maintaining the rest area but says it had been struggling to keep it up.

The road to the rest area will be blocked by barriers for the winter and plans to further decommission the site made in the coming months.

Events calendar available on County website

There are many great events hosted by individuals and organizations which make our region a great place to live.

If you have an event that you wish to share with others, or view events going on in the County, you can do so by viewing the events calendar on our website homepage.

All submissions must be open to the public and all contact information must be included as part of the online submission process.

Holiday office hours

All Athabasca County offices, including Family and Community Support Services, and Public Works, will be closed from Wednesday, December 25 through Friday, December 27 for the Christmas holiday.

The office will be open during regular business hours on Monday, December 30, but closed for New Year's Day, Wednesday, January 1, 2014.

Please travel with caution if you find yourself driving during the holiday season and return home safely to your friends and neighbours.

Meeting discusses problem wildlife

Agricultural producers and residents of Athabasca County are being asked to report all incidents where predators are believed to be putting livestock or people at risk.

The request was made by Grant Chapman, Senior Wildlife Biologist, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD), at a Problem Wildlife Workshop held in Athabasca on Tuesday, November 26.

The workshop was an opportunity to increase awareness of problem wildlife concerns and to provide dialogue between AESRD and the Solicitor General with interested public.

A more accurate reporting of problem wildlife is required to paint a true picture of the need for resources in terms of provincial wildlife predation compensation programs and to give AESRD an idea of where areas of high predator populations exist.

"If we are getting a lot of reports in an area it gives us the case to bring more resources in," explained Chapman, who works out of the Lac La Biche office.

Compensation programs for attacks by five key predators exist: grizzly bear, black bear, cougar, wolf and eagle. The claims only apply to certain livestock and must be verified through the Alberta Solicitor General's office before they are paid out.

The Government of Alberta is aware of higher numbers of predator attacks and has appointed Regional Problem Wildlife Specialist Mike Ewald to a position in the Solicitor General's Office to review all the claims. Compensation for vet bills and medications, as well as for livestock lost to predators, are in place but they must be reported in a timely fashion to increase the chances of qualifying.

2014 seasonal campsite rates change

Athabasca County is a popular place for many Albertans and visitors from out-of-province to experience the great outdoors. The County operates and maintains many campgrounds, day use sites, boat launches and municipal reserves for the public to enjoy.

Two of the campgrounds operated by the County - Forfar Recreational Park and Hope Lake Campground - offer the camping enthusiast the ability to apply for the use of a seasonal campsite.

This year the County's Recreation Board conducted a review of the rates charged for the use of seasonal sites at these two campgrounds. Comparing the services and rates and offered to others in the region, results showed the rates were much lower at the two County campgrounds than at comparable facilities.

"On average the survey found that seasonal sites are going for about \$1,800 per season in the area," says Grant Burge, Manager Recreation Services.

"We want to be able to continue to offer a high



Trent Keller, farm production specialist for Athabasca County (left), Justin Gilligan, Athabasca area wildlife biologist AESRD (centre) and Luke Chernish, problem wildlife specialist for Athabasca County along with over 30 County residents, attended a Problem Wildlife and Predation meeting at the Athabasca Agri-plex. Chernish oversees County programs for problem beaver and coyotes.

He suggested to producers the more often they check their herds the easier it is to confirm a loss to a predator. "The onus is on the producer to conduct regular checks," said Ewald.

The meeting was also the introduction of Justin Gilligan as a new Athabasca Area Wildlife Biologist with AESRD. Sightings of problem wildlife can be reported to him by calling 780-675-8229 or via email justin.gilligan@gov.ab.ca

Issues and concerns with problem wildlife should be reported to Fish and Wildlife Officers in Athabasca by calling 780-675-2419.

The meeting was hosted by Athabasca County, the Athabasca and District Agricultural Society and the Government of Alberta.

level of service and quality facilities. It was felt that increased revenues would help us conduct some needed upgrades to the campgrounds that will help them continue to be a popular seasonal camping destination."

Upcoming work to the campgrounds includes:

- Upgrading campsites (fire pits, tables)
- Group area facility improvements
- Enhancing the trail system
- Boat launch repairs and improvements

As a result, Recreation Board members submitted a recommendation to Council to increase the rates for seasonal campsites to \$1,750 per season, to bring them on par with others in the region. The Recreation Board also recommended the removal of a two-month booking option to allow greater accessibility to campsites for everyone.

The deadline for submitting 2014 seasonal campsite applications is December 31, 2013.

World Town Planning Day features design charrette

Colinton was used as the case study at an annual World Town Planning Day workshop held in Athabasca.

Continued from Page 1.

The County's Planning and Development department, planners from Alberta, local councilors, entrepreneurs, and members of the general public were in attendance.

As participants learned the steps of running a successful design charrette, the hands-on workshop took them through the processes steps of gathering, sharing, and disseminating ideas for the community of Colinton.

This year's workshop was unique because the facilitators used Colinton as case study. Specifically, the Charrette focused on the former CNR land located across the General Store, in the center of the Hamlet.

Participant designers identified the strengths,

weakness, opportunities, and constraints the plan area consists of such as: the gazebo, skating rink, children's park as well locating land use for future growth.

The groups were split into four design teams who looked at Colinton's attributes, areas to improve along with growth ideas surrounding urban growth, before coming up with two designs each for the community.

The four groups then presented their site design ideas to the entire group allowing for a discussion and critique of the plan area. Everyone had the opportunity to see all the ideas, reasons behind them and ask any questions.

Hands on design workshops have become the accepted model for community engagement in the planning community.

"There's no best solution to design and planning problems," explained Professor Pol to workshop attendees.

"Expert decisions are not necessarily better than lay decisions and the input of community partners through strong engagement is key to having a successful outcome."

Students at Fanshawe College are currently working on a project for Community Living Elgin, a non-profit organization that helps those who require assisted living.

The organization owns a piece of land they want to develop into a self-sustaining facility by using the income generated from a new building that will be 25 per cent clients and 75 per cent revenue generating suites. The idea is being well received and students at the college are using their skills to come up with a design for the building.

Something similar will happen from the ideas shared at the Athabasca workshop.

Fanshawe College is tasking their students with coming up with a visual design which will be shared with Colinton residents at a future Area Structure Plan meeting.

Smoking Education Program



Peace Officer Ryan Alice speaks to students at Rochester School about the laws surrounding smoking and youth. It is illegal to possess tobacco if you are under the age of 18.

Athabasca County Peace Officer Ryan Alice has teamed up with Alberta Health Services to continue a Smoking Education program in area schools.

The first session of the school year was at Rochester School on Monday, November 18.

Students were taught not only about some of the 7,000 chemical traces that tobacco contains, but also about the laws surrounding youth and smoking.

They include fines of \$115 for youth under 18 with tobacco,

a Summons to go to court followed by a mandatory three-month smoking awareness program after which the fine can be lifted.

It's all part of a goal to reduce the number of youth smoking. Statistics show that smoking kills one out of every two people who light up.

Laws are currently being discussed at provincial level to ban flavoured tobaccos and products that make tobacco attractive to youth.

Know a woman who makes exceptional contributions to build family farm success?

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Farm Woman
of the Year
Award

Nominate her today for one of two awards:

Pioneer Farm
Woman Award

Modern Farm
Woman Award

Nomination forms are available by:

- Visiting the Athabasca County Administration Office,
- Download from www.athabascacounty.com
- Calling Roxanne at 780-675-2273.

Nomination deadline: January 3, 2014.

Brought to you by Athabasca County Ag Services Board