

Volume 2, Issue 2

September

2019



Saddle Hills County
Living



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Cary Merritt Becomes New CAO in Saddle Hills County



Saddle Hills County is pleased to announce the appointment of Cary Merritt to the position of Chief Administrative Office (CAO) effective August 14, 2019.

“We are pleased to welcome Cary to his new duties and responsibilities as CAO and we look forward to working together for the future of the County,” says Reeve Alvin Hubert.

Saddle Hills Council began the process of searching for a new CAO upon the announcement, on May 22, 2019, that former CAO Joulia Whittleton had accepted the position of CAO for the County of Grande Prairie effective July 15, 2019.

“The County has taken important strides forward in the last few years and we are confident that Cary will help us to build on our successes,” says Hubert.

Merritt joined the County in 2014, and has served as Director of Corporate Services since 2016. Prior to coming to Saddle Hills County, Merritt developed extensive experience in both the municipal and private sectors.

“I’m looking forward to taking on the challenges of my new position and look forward to serving Saddle Hills County,” says Merritt, adding, “I know Council has some very significant and important initiatives and goals to achieve and I know that, working together, we can achieve those objectives.”

Staff Wish Joulia Whittleton Well

Before she left to assume her new duties as CAO for the County of Grande Prairie, former Saddle Hills County CAO, Joulia Whittleton, enjoyed a warm and affectionate send-off from Saddle Hills County staff.

“I can say without a doubt that Saddle Hills County has some of the best municipal employees anywhere in Alberta and it has been a true pleasure serving the people of Saddle Hills County these past few years,” she said.

Whittleton joined the County as CAO in July of 2016 and oversaw a number of significant projects and accomplishments during her time with the County.

“I know I speak for all of Council when I say that we wish Joulia every success at the County of Grande Prairie and we thank her for her exceptional service to the ratepayers of Saddle Hills County,” said Reeve Hubert..

Prior to taking on the CAO position in Saddle Hills, Whittleton spent 15 years with Mackenzie County in the capacities of the Director of Corporate Services, Assistant CAO, and from 2012 to 2016, the CAO.





Rural Communications TELUS Partnerships

Saddle Hills County has entered into partnerships with TELUS to build two new towers and have TELUS co-locate on one of the Saddle Hills County towers, which will provide additional cellular coverage and high speed internet options for residents.

The new towers will be built in the Bay Tree and Blueberry Mountain areas. Additional mobility equipment will be added to the County’s Sneddon Creek tower located in the Cotillion area. Estimated Completion Date: March 2020.

Intermunicipal Development Plans

In order to ensure that land use planning decisions are made collaboratively with its neighbours, Saddle Hills County is formalizing Intermunicipal Development Plans with two neighbouring municipalities.

The municipalities have already been working collaboratively in this respect, however formal IDPs are now required under Alberta’s Municipal Government Act.

The County has currently completed an IDP with the M.D. of Spirit River #133 and is in the process of preparing an IDP with Birch Hills County. The IDPs will help ensure that when development occurs along shared boundaries, appropriate considerations are made with the neighbouring municipality to avoid conflicting land uses, provide effective transportation systems, and protect physical features and environmentally sensitive areas.

Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework

Similarly, the County has entered into Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF) agreements with four of its neighbouring municipalities and is working on a fifth. ICF’s with the County of Grande Prairie, the M.D. of Spirit River, Clear Hills County and the M.D. of Fairview are in place and the ICF with Birch Hills County is in progress.

The purpose of an ICF is to provide integrated and strategic planning, delivery and funding of intermunicipal services. This framework formalizes existing collaborative works between the municipalities.

“We are lucky to have good neighbours and, more than just a common boundary, we share a mutual commitment to work with one another,” said Saddle Hills County Reeve Alvin Hubert.

Challenging Season For Operations Team

The second quarter saw a lot of activity on the part of the Operations team. Weather was a factor in much of the County's plans for the road network but teams were able to get a lot done.

The 2019 Road Rehabilitation program was nearly 30 percent complete by the end of June. Even with the bad weather, crews completed a good percentage of the dust control and re-graveling this summer.

Road construction, re-graveling, dust control and maintenance lead off Q2

The operations department has been working hard to complete this year's ambitious road program. As of the end of June progress was made in each of the following major projects:

Road Rehab Program	33% complete
Re-graveling	85% complete
Dust control	100% complete
Culvert replacements	82 culverts

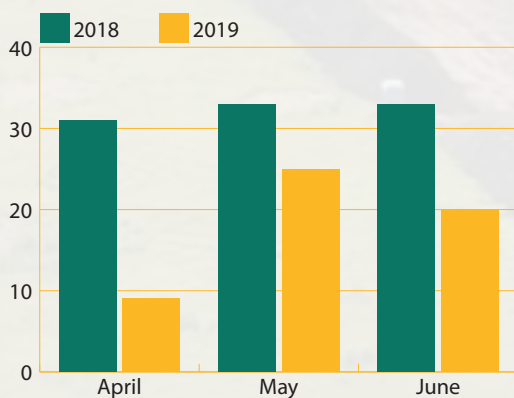


Range Road 104 Culvert Replacement - Completed July 2019
Location: NW 4-79-10-W6

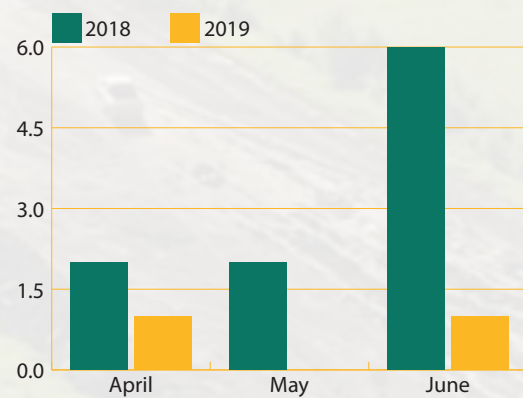
Township Road 824 Construction COMPLETE



Comparative Service Rig Moves Q2



Comparative Drilling Rig Moves Q2



Major Projects Move Forward

Major Projects:

- Gravel crushing at Silver Valley and Fourth Creek - complete
- Savanna Water Treatment reservoir—complete
- Savanna Water Treatment Plant (Tendered and Contracted)
- Working Water Treatment Plant Upgrades
- Rge. Rd. 73 Large Culvert Replacement—complete
- Rge. Rd. 80 Large Culvert Replacement—complete
- Rge. Rd. 104 Large Culvert Replacement—complete
- Rge. Rd. 72 Reconstruction
- Twp. Rd. 824 (1.6 km) Construction—complete
- Gundy Transfer Station Upgrade—complete
- Rge. Rd. 102 Base Paving
- Hwy 725 and Twp. Rd. 811 turning lanes
- Rge. Rd. 72 Large Culvert Replacement
- White Mountain Tower Rd. Large Culvert Replacement
- Rge. Rd. 72 Slide Repair
- Rge. Rd. 134 Reconstruction

Grader Hours to end of June

3,015 grader hours were logged during Q2. 2,773 hours were logged by County staff with an estimated 242 hours contracted.



Work continues on the new Savanna Water Treatment Plant. The project is expected to be complete in 2020.

County Encouraging Composting

Saddle Hills County is hoping to encourage those who aren't already doing so to enjoy the benefits of composting. The County has purchased 50 composters which are for sale through the County office for \$60 a-piece.

"Many County residents, especially rural residents, are already aware of the value and benefits of composting and are engaged in the process on their farms. We're hoping to encourage residents who may not be aware of the benefits of composting to get started," says Environmental Services Manager Darren Lubeck.

Composting is the natural process of 'rotting' or decomposition of organic matter by microorganisms under controlled conditions. The nutrient value of farm compost can be increased by application of superphosphate or rock phosphate at 10 to 15 kg/t of raw material at

the initial stage of composting. Compost is rich in nutrients. It is used, for example, in gardens, landscaping, horticulture, urban agriculture and organic farming. The compost itself is beneficial for the land in many ways, including as a soil conditioner, a fertilizer, addition of vital humus or humic acids, and as a natural pesticide for soil. Composting produces a rich soil supplement which improves plant growth.

In ecosystems, compost is useful for erosion control, land and stream reclamation, wetland construction, and as landfill cover.

Recycling or composting 14,000 tonnes of waste creates nine jobs and seven jobs respectively, whereas landfilling the waste creates only one job.

To learn more about how you can benefit from composting or



to arrange for the purchase of one of the County's composters simply call the County Complex (780-864-3760) and ask for Darren Lubeck or drop by the office at the intersection of Highway 49 and Highway 725.

Rural Potable Water Update

Crews have been busy working on the County's Rural Potable Water project to bring water to residents in the Bonanza and Bay Tree areas.

A dedicated water line from the Bonanza Water Treatment Plant to the Bonanza Truck fill has been installed so that operation of the Truck Fill doesn't affect the future water line to the residents in the area.

The tender has been awarded for the mechanical upgrades to the Bonanza Water Treatment Plant necessary to allow for the rural waterlines in the area.

A Tender is currently being advertised for the service line and connections for all residents along the line.



Construction Underway on new Gordondale Hall

The ground was officially broken on the new Gordondale Hall on April 18, 2019 and construction began this summer.



Work got underway quickly on the new Gordondale Hall once the ground was officially broken.



(Left to right): Wendall Brubaker, Reeve Alvin Hubert, Carla Day, Kelsey Day



(Left to right): Councillor Lawrence Andruchiw, Councillor Ken Titford, Councillor Ed Armagost, Trish Goodheart, Dustin Goodheart, and Councillor John Moen.

Winners Announced For Gardening Contest

The results are in and we have two winners for this year's Visit Our Own Backyard gardening contest.

Trenea Underwood of Bay Tree won first prize for the imaginative way in which she used existing agricultural implements and materials to enhance her property with flowers, plants and vegetables. She wins \$300 in gift certificates valid at Saddle Hills County Greenhouses as well as a \$50 gift certificate for participation and a specially made gate ornament made by Isaac's Ironworks from Silver Valley.

Heather Porrill, also of Bay Tree, won second prize - \$200 in gift certificates - and a \$50 gift certificate for participation.

Judges included Anne Stewart, of Anne's Greenhouse in Fourth Creek, Denise van Rootselaar, from Woking, Cheryl Dwernychuk from Happy Valley and Carla Day from Gordondale. Judging occurred on July 15. The winners will be invited to receive their prizes at a Council meeting in the fall.



1st prize (left to right): Carla Day, Denise van Rootselaar, Anne Stewart, Cheryl Dwernychuk and Trenea Underwood.



2nd prize (left to right): Anne Stewart, Carla Day, Denise van Rootselaar, Cheryl Dwernychuk and Heather Porrill.

Westmark Hall Officially Re-Opened



Left to right: Saddle Hills County Councillor Lawrence Andruchiw, Westmark Farmer's League member Gerd Kramer, Westmark Farmer's League President Lynne Muehrer, Saddle Hills County Reeve Alvin Hubert and Saddle Hills County Councillor John Moen. (Photo by Denise van Rootselaar).

The Westmark Farmer's League held an official grand reopening during the Westmark Farmer's Day.

Fourth Creek Quilters

The Fourth Creek Hall has been put to good use for many community events and programs. One of the most successful of those has been the Savanna Creations quilting club. We caught up to Lyla Yanishewski and asked her to tell us about the work they do.

What do you call yourselves?

Savanna Creations

When did you first get together? How did you originally get organized?

We think that it was around 30 years ago that the club started. At first, the group got together with members taking turns teaching others various crafts. Over the

years, it has evolved into primarily a quilting group but occasionally members sew other items or create other crafts.

How many quilters are members?

47 members in our 2018-2019 fiscal year. We have many local members but also many from distant communities including Grimshaw, Berwyn, Beaverlodge, Falher, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Grande Prairie, and Fort Nelson.

How often do you meet?

We have 3-day quilting sessions at least once per month. Sometimes it's twice per month, especially in the winter. Members are welcome to come to quilt all



three days or any part thereof. They are also welcome to come and shop from our inventory.

Is there a charge to join?

\$20 for a yearly membership from September 1 to August 31.

What happens to the quilts you make?

We donate quilts to many charities such as Dawson Creek Regional Hospital, QE II Hospital, Central Peace Regional Hospital, Grande Prairie Seniors' Outreach, Arctic Missions, Valleyview Long Term Care, Odyssey House, a Canadian soldier, victims of fire, community members who are sick, and many more. Members also create quilts for themselves, their families, and their friends.



at the Fourth Creek Hall. This fabric and notions are available for our members to purchase. Members find this very convenient as we are a great distance from fabric stores.

In March 2018, the club purchased a long arm quilting machine with grants from Saddle Hills County and the New Horizons for Seniors Program (a federal grant). This machine allows members to sew the layers of the quilt together using a computer-driven program or manipulating the machine manually. This machine is very popular with our members. It makes assembling the quilts so much faster and easier with professional looking results. Since March 2018, it has been used to sew over 350 quilts.

Our club also hosts an annual quilt show where members and anyone else who is interested bring their quilts or other crafts to display. Attendees vote on their favourite large and small quilts and those with the most votes win prizes. It is always well-attended.



Can anyone join? Do you need a certain level of skill to become a member?

Anyone can join, no experience necessary. We have many experienced quilters who are happy to help new quilters.

Do you train/teach how to quilt?

Yes, we have many members who enjoy helping others, from choosing fabric and patterns to sewing the quilts. Usually this is one-on-one assistance but sometimes we have mini-workshops. Annually we also have a session when we teach children/youth how to sew and quilt.

Any additional information you'd like to share?

For many years, our club has purchased fabric and notions (sewing supplies) that we keep in storage



Recycling in Saddle Hills County

What Can I Recycle?

Acceptable materials for recycling bins:

Rigid Plastics

(Hard Plastic #1-#7):

Household plastic bottles and containers having the symbols 1 through 7, e.g.: vinegar, shampoo, fabric softener, dish soap, laundry detergent, windshield washer, ice cream pails, yogurt containers and deposit items/pop, water, milk cartoons, juice boxes.

Mixed Paper:

Newspaper, magazines, phone books, catalogues, flyers, inserts, writing and computer paper, paperback books (hardcover books need cover removed), greeting cards, envelopes, disposable paper coffee cups.



Cardboard/Box Board:

Cereal boxes, shoe boxes, tissue boxes, cracker boxes, cookie boxes (remove any plastic liners), brown paper bags, paper egg cartons, flattened cardboard boxes.

Tin:

Soup cans, beverage cans, tin foil wrap and foil trays (pie plates).

Oil Recycling Program

Saddle Hill County has an oil recycling program available at the Blueberry, Bonanza and Woking transfer stations.

The program accepts all types of vehicle oils, oil filters, oil jugs and oil pails. The program also accepts used antifreeze (glycol). There is no charge to drop off your used oil or antifreeze.

Transfer Station Hours

Blueberry Transfer Station

Wednesday and Saturday
10:00 am–6:00 pm

Bonanza Transfer Station

Tuesday to Saturday
10:00 am–6:00 pm

Woking Transfer Station

Tuesday and Saturday
10:00 am–6:00 pm

Gundy Transfer Station

Saturdays only
10 am to 4 pm (BC Time Zone)

All recyclables materials must be dry & clean (no food) in order to be recyclable.

Materials NOT Accepted In Recycling Bins

- Blinds
- Cable
- Car Parts
- Cellphones
- Chip bags
- Christmas lights
- Cutlery
- Food wraps
- Frozen juice cans
- Garden hoses
- Glass
- Insulation
- Laminated per food bags
- Light bulbs
- Mirrors
- Metal clothes hangars
- Nails
- Napkins
- Needles
- Oil containers
- Plastic bags (except blue recycle bags)
- Plastic house siding
- Plastic wading pools
- Powdered drink containers
- Strappings
- Styrofoam
- Tissue wipes
- Toothpaste tubes
- Vacuum cleaner bags
- Wire



Council made a number of important decisions during the second quarter of 2019.

Bonanza and Savanna Wastewater Lagoon project

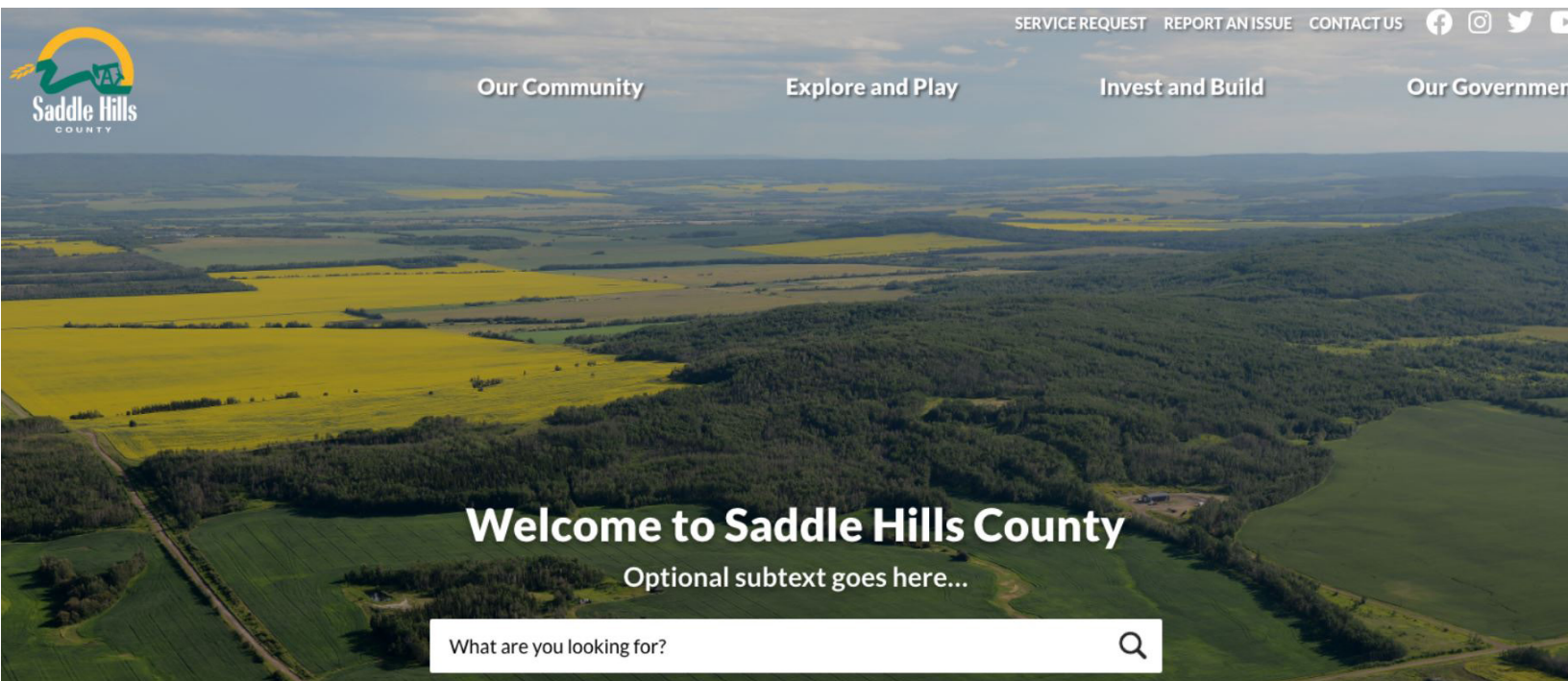
Council voted to approve \$880,000 be included in the 2019 Budget for Bonanza and Savanna Wastewater Lagoon project with funds coming from Rural Water Capital Reserve in order to fund the work required to meet the wastewater standards required of Alberta municipalities.

Highway 725 Turning Lane funds approved

An additional \$134,000 has been added to the project, which will see turning lanes added at the intersection of Hwy 725 and Twp. Rd.811. The project is expected to be completed in 2019.

New County website approved

Council approved the launch of a new website at a cost of \$37,000. The project will involve building a more user-friendly site in order to increase citizens' ability to more easily do business with the County and promote the County more effectively. The new site should launch before the end of the year.



Kid's Innovation Fair

Council directed Administration to organize a Kid's Innovation Fair for children from grades 1 - 12 residing in Saddle Hills County. The event took place on August 24, 2019 and was well attended.

Signs Project moves forward

Council approved a new signs project welcoming visitors on roads leading into the County. Under

consideration are large signs on highways 2 and 49 as well as smaller signs on secondary highways and County roads.

Transportation Services Investigated

Council instructed Administration to communicate the transportation services available through the MD of Spirit River's pilot project through the County website and social media sites as well as at the Central Peace Signal and at County Open Houses. In addition, questions about the need for transportation services were added to the 2019 Resident Survey.

Gravel Haul Rate Set

Council voted to have the 2019 gravel haul rate for contract gravel haulers be set at a rate of \$0.21/tonne/km and \$1.00/tonne loading factor.

Canadian Young Farmers Forum

Terri and Adam Fitzpatrick were on hand to give Council their presentation on their attendance at the Canadian Young Farmers Forum.

Farm Family Awards

Council nominated Doug and Lyla Yanishewski to be the 2019 Northlands/BMO Farm Family Awards recipient for Saddle Hills County to be held in Edmonton on November 6 to 10, 2019.

Riley Nooy Joins Ag Team

Council appointed Riley Nooy as an officer under the Soil Conservation Act and an Inspector under the Weed Control Act and Agricultural Pest Act, effective May 13, 2019.



Toboggan Hill project update

Council instructed Administration to proceed with the Toboggan Hill project in Savanna and add the required components to the scope of work for the Savanna water treatment plant by adding a washroom for the public to the pump house and hill shaping. In addition, Council asked that fencing/barriers and a warming shelter, lighting and parking lot be brought to the 2020 capital budget for consideration.

The County will organize a naming competition for the new toboggan hill during the fall of 2020. The hill is being constructed on the large pile of earth left over from the reservoirs which have been dug for the new water treatment plant.

Central Peace Health Complex Auxiliary Club Donation

Council voted to donate \$30,000 to the Central Peace Health Complex Auxiliary Club in support of the funding drive for an Emergency Ultrasound Machine for the physicians and nurses within the emergency department at the Central Peace Health Complex.

Land acquired and prepared for new supportive living complex

The County entered into a cost-sharing agreement with the MD of Spirit River and other members of the G5 to acquire and prepare the land for the Grande Spirit Foundation to build the new supportive living complex in Spirit River.

History of Saddle Hills County being explored

Council has instructed Administration to investigate the possibility of receiving grants for the publication of a History of Saddle Hills County book. If sufficient grant funds are available Council may approve the project which would lead to the publication of the book – a project which could take up to a year to complete.



Volunteer recognition awards changed up

In 2018, Saddle Hills County developed the Volunteer Commemorative Coin as an acknowledgment for volunteers who contribute their time and energy to support many community activities. The annual coins serve as a collectible and lasting legacy for each volunteer over their many years of service within the County.

Commemorative coins began within the military and first responders. The coins illustrate commitment to training and community.



Those recognized in 2019 included:

1. Volunteer Dedication Category - Carrie & Wally Yanishewski



(left to right): Councillors John Moen and Willis Fitzsimmons, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Carrie and Wally Yanishewski, Councillors Lawrence Andruchiw, Ed Armagost, Ken Titford, Reeve Alvin Hubert.

2. Volunteer Dedication Category - Brent and Yvonne Rogers



(left to right): Councillors John Moen and Willis Fitzsimmons, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Brent and Yvonne Rogers, Councillors Lawrence Andruchiw, Ed Armagost, Ken Titford, Reeve Alvin Hubert.

3. Community Leader Category - Doug and Lyla Yanishewski



(left to right): Councillors John Moen and Willis Fitzsimmons, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Doug and Lyla Yanishewski, Councillors Lawrence Andruchiw, Ed Armagost, Ken Titford, Reeve Alvin Hubert.

4. Helping Hand Category - Brea & Dave Hamilton, and Louise & Mona Viher (absent)



(left to right): Councillors John Moen and Willis Fitzsimmons, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Brea Hamilton, [absent - Dave Hamilton] Councillors Lawrence Andruchiw, Ed Armagost, Ken Titford, Reeve Alvin Hubert.

5. Volunteer Fire Fighters



(left to right): Mike Armagost, Dustin Goodheart, Mike Mandel, Andy Thomi, Bruce Thomi, Gerd Gamer, Chris Thomi, Vince Toews, Laura-Lee Willms, Yvonne Rogers, Brent Rogers, Mike Miller, Don Elliott, Delano Toews, Dimitri Boychuk, Councillor John Moen, Pat Thiesen, Councillor Willis Fitzsimmons, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Councillor Lawrence Andruchiw, Councillor Ed Armagost, Councillor Ken Titford, Reeve Alvin Hubert, Director of Community and Protective Services Brian Ballard.

6. Medical First Responders



(left to right): Mike Mandel, Councillor John Moen, Councillor Willis Fitzsimmons, Mike Miller, Deputy Reeve Kristen Smith, Laure-Lee Willms, Councillor Lawrence Andruchiw, Brent and Yvonne Taylor, Councillor Ed Armagost, Councillor Ken Titford, Director of Community and Protective Services, Brian Ballard, Reeve Alvin Hubert.

Economic & Rural Development Update

Community Development

Home Support Services

Home Support Services was the main focus for the 2nd quarter of 2019. We currently have 17 clients, and two Home Support Workers. Financials to the end of Q 2 are:

Income	\$2,589.25
Expenses	\$8,455.70

FCSS

FCSS has provided **\$81,218.91** in indirect funding to the following agencies in the Saddle Hills County:

Fourth Creek Community Association - **\$15,920.00**

Peace Wapiti School Division - **\$20,034.90**

Bonanza School Junior Kindergarten - **\$8,352.00**

Woking Playschool - **\$1,200.00**

Woking Town Clean - up **\$194.28**

Bonanza School - **\$387.23**

Central Peace Early Childhood Coalition
Music, Movement, Pretend Program for Woking,
Savanna, Bonanza schools - **\$21,400.00**

Youth in Action Afterschool Mentorship Program for
Woking, Savanna, Bonanza Schools - **\$13,258.00**

June 2nd-8th was proclaimed Senior's Week and celebrated by holding an event at the Woking Hall attended by 69 seniors.

Childcare Subsidy Program

In Q1 Council changed eligibility from six years of age to the start of Grade 1. There are currently 13 families and 19 children enrolled in the program.

Economic Development

A Request for Proposal was issued in the first quarter of 2019 for a fertilizer manufacturing facility to convert natural gas to urea - a nitrogen-based fertilizer. Eight engineering firms competed for the contract to conduct the feasibility study and Canitan Engineering Group (Calgary) was the successful incumbent. The County secured a **\$25,000** grant from Community and Regional Economic Support program (CARES) to support the feasibility study.

A public opinion survey of 60 farmers and ranchers operating in Saddle Hills County investigated current business obstacles and what economic initiatives they would support. Another public opinion survey of 30 Woking and 39 Bay Tree households clarified community values and housing needs. This information is useful to developing a housing strategy.

Rural Development

Summer 2019 has been a busy one. Hiring an Agricultural Foreman has allowed us to shift how weed notices are issued and dealt with.

To date, we have issued 54 weed notices for various weeds including Scentless Chamomile, Toadflax, Common Tansy and Orange Hawkweed. Staff are starting to do grasshopper, blackleg, Fusarium and Clubroot surveys throughout the County.

All County ditches were mowed this summer and the County sprayed over 1,100 ha. of roadside.



Saddle Hills County Most Wanted Weeds - 2019



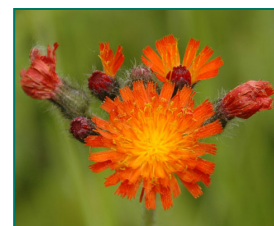
Scentless Chamomile



Toadflax



Common Tansy



Orange Hawkweed

Community and Protective Services Update

The second quarter of 2019 was a busy quarter for the Recreation Coordinator.

At the Cotillion and Hilltop Lake Campgrounds, Seasonal maintenance was performed in preparation for the 2019 camping season including an improved campground inspection procedure utilizing GIS software and the addition of eight new picnic tables including additional tables in the group use area at Cotillion and in the Hilltop Lake Day Use Area.

Campground Expansion projects also progressed. Both campgrounds are on crown land and under a recreational lease. The current leases are up for renewal.

With the plans to expand the campground the boundaries of both campgrounds are changing. Borderline Surveys out of Fairview has been working on completing amended legal surveys of both campgrounds.

Borderline Surveys also worked with George Harris Collaborative (landscape architect) and Sweet-Tech engineering to create a detailed site design including the layouts of the individual campsite stalls and each sites orientation and layout in the additional loops as well as a proposed walking trail around Hilltop Lake. SweetTech Engineering developed a design for protecting the existing access and preventing further

erosion and is currently working on Water Act approval. A site visit with the County staff and a Public Lands Specialist with Alberta Environment and Parks also took place to discuss the recommended design option. Seminars and webinars were attended on the development and maintenance of trails.

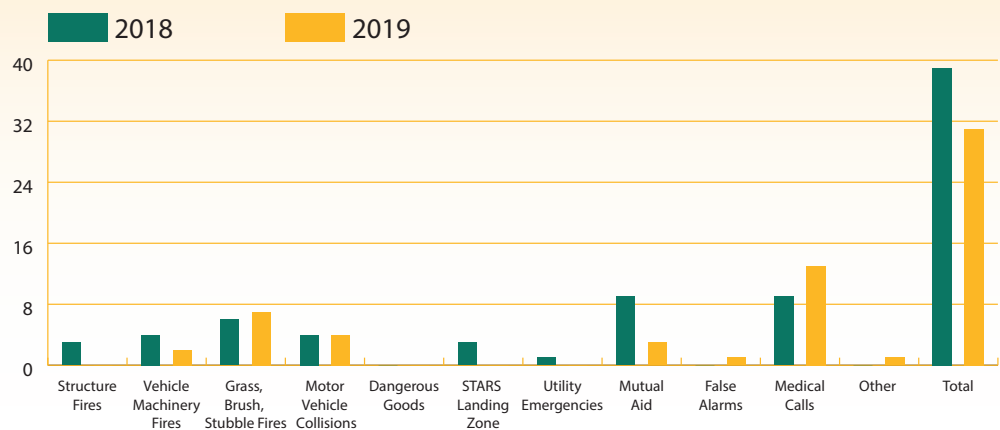
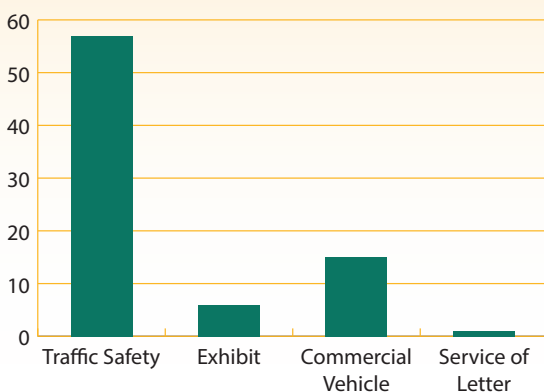
On August 28, 2019 it was announced that Saddle Hills County had acquired the lease for Spring Lake Campground and the campground was officially re-opened for the Labour Day Long Weekend. The County was approached by Alberta Public Lands and Alberta Environment and Parks about taking over the lease from the former leaseholder and Council directed staff to take over the lease, so that the campground would be available for use for the public who enjoy it.



Fire and MFR Services Comparative Occurrences, Q2

* MFR represents – Medical First Responders

Peace Officer Occurrences, Q2



Compassionate Care In Saddle Hills & Central Peace

Victims Services Provide Compassionate Care In Saddle Hills County And The Central Peace

Quietly and without any fanfare, the volunteers who act as Advocates for the Victims Services team in Saddle Hills County are happiest working quietly and out of the public eye.

For anyone unfortunate to have needed their help ... they are angels of mercy.

Deb Cardwell, Program Coordinator of the Victim Services office in Spirit River, manages a team of three Advocates, (Shirley Klatt, Lyla Yanishewski and Betty Yuha) all of whom live in Saddle Hills County. In addition to managing the operation, Cardwell is the fourth Advocate and, as such, she is available, 24/7 on top of her administrative duties.

The Spirit River Victim Services office, a branch of Grande Prairie & District Victims Services, provides service to victims of crime or tragedy throughout the entire region represented by the G5 municipalities (Birch Hills County, M.D. of Spirit River #133, Village of Rycroft, Town of Spirit River and Saddle Hills County).

In order to become an advocate for Victim Services, a volunteer must complete 70 hours of online training, and courses. Each advocate also must pass a police screening which includes a security check. The whole process can take up to three months. Advocates

typically work one-week on-call but, according to Cardwell, they are sometimes called in on other occasions as needed.

When she speaks about her job, it is with a real sense of purpose. She describes it as a dark business but says it is incredibly rewarding.

Can I Give You A Hug

“Sometimes being someone who says, ‘Can I give you a hug,’ during one of the toughest moments of their life, and helping them to feel safer knowing they are being taken care of, is very fulfilling,” says Deb Cardwell.

The organization’s goals consist of lessening the immediate impact of a crime or tragedy on the victim(s) and attempting to alleviate stress on the victim(s) through support, information and referrals. The highly skilled and compassionate staff provide a 24/7 coordinated crisis intervention service following a traumatic event that has had an overwhelming impact on a group. This is called Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and the objective is to reduce negative impacts of an event on the groups and individuals involved.

A critical incident is an unusual, traumatic event which has an impact on groups of people and may overwhelm their ability to cope.





Examples include line-of-duty or work site deaths, a fatality, serious injury or multiple injuries often in unique or unusual circumstances. Advocates never know what to expect when they are called upon, at all hours of the day or night.

“This is really a life-time choice,” says Cardwell. Advocates are well-trained experts at helping victims through the most difficult moments of an incident.

What Happens Now?

Advocates provide consultation services for members of the community impacted by crisis both at the scene and afterwards by providing information and support to assist victims to cope with the effects of crime and tragedy.

“We are there for people at what is often the worst moment of their lives,” she says. “We’re there to answer the question, ‘What Happens Now’, by providing emotional support, and help through the difficult process of adjusting to an often scary new reality.”

The Unit is a policed based, non-profit, charitable society that works with the RCMP to provide support, information and referrals to residents of Grande Prairie and District during times of crisis, trauma or tragedy, whether they are victims of crime, sudden death or family crisis.

Cardwell has been working for Victims Services since 2013 when she worked at their Slave Lake office. She moved to Spirit River in 2014 and was an advocate

in the Spirit River office for nine months when the Program Coordinator position became available. Her position is a 20-hour per month paid position while the rest of her time is spent as a volunteer.

“When I think of our team here in the Central Peace I think they are the best team of Advocates you could ever wish for,” she says.



Community, Family and Friends

Being an Advocate for Victims Services in a rural area such as the Central Peace poses different challenges than the same function in cities.

“The chances of needing to offer care to someone you know are much higher in rural areas than in the city,” she says, adding “Quite often we know the people we are helping.”

One of the more positive aspects of rural life, according to Cardwell is that there is often a very close knit group of family and friends who step in to provide support to victims of tragedy or crime.

Cardwell describes the work of Victims Services as providing comfort and assistance to people who are often at their most vulnerable after a crime, fire, disaster or tragedy. Cardwell says the advocates from Victim Services often go out with police and/or firefighters when called upon. First responders, fire fighters and police are often so focused on the event at hand that they have little time to help residents or victims.

“That’s where we come in,” says Cardwell, adding that the services they provide run the gamut from providing a safe, warm place to sit down away from the scene, to answering questions and providing support and help getting through the process of dealing with the aftermath of a tragedy.

Just The Beginning

Care and comfort at the scene of the accident or tragedy is often just the beginning. The organization helps victims deal with the legal and court system, the aftermath of domestic violence, and any processes through which the victims require assistance.



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In some cases, according to Cardwell, people at the scene of a tragedy may turn down the services offered but, after time passes, they begin to realize they need help. Victim Services stays in touch with victims right through whatever process they are engaged in, including keeping them informed of court dates, doctor’s visits, and follow up when required.

Close Bonds

Victims Services Advocates develop close bonds and provide emotional support to one another as well. Cardwell refers to what she describes as ‘de-briefing,’ a process whereby Advocates rely on each other to share their experiences and help one another deal with the toll of their chosen work.

Those bonds also extend to the larger first responder, policing and firefighting community. “We are a family,” she says, describing the community of professionals and volunteers who are prepared to wake up in the middle of the night and respond to the often tragic emergencies that happen in the life of communities.

Funding for Victims Services comes from the RCMP and the G5 municipalities they serve. Donations are processed through the Grande Prairie office.





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