



Tuesday, October 06, 2015

## Moving Forward into Fall: Message from Executive Director, Gary Redmond

As summer draws to a close, it's the time we enter back into our fall routines, and for many in Alberta communities, this means attending synergy group meetings. This fall feels different for many synergy groups though. In some areas, the economic downturn has resulted in less development activities. Some synergy groups struggle with their role. When this happens some wonder if they should continue. There's no perfect answer, as groups need to decide on their own. We have seen many groups finish their work when the activity levels do not warrant keeping a group active. In other places though, the groups have felt that they want to continue in order to maintain the relationships and keep the good work alive, particularly for when resource development activities pick up again. To keep active they have dusted off previous projects to start updating them and have kept the social aspects of synergy alive. Our membership numbers have fluctuated year-to-year between 20 and 30 groups. If you are facing uncertainty in your group, let us know if we can help in any way.



We continue to promote the synergy model, most recently via meetings with the National Energy Board, Alberta Energy Regulator, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Alberta Environment and Parks, and IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation) conference in Portland, Oregon where folks from as far away as Newfoundland and Australia excitedly asked to learn more about synergy. We also continue to chat up synergy in communities that would benefit from a synergy model. In June, we welcomed our newest member to the synergy family – Clearwater Trails Initiative, which is a group focused on addressing pressures of off-road vehicles in close proximity to oil and gas activities in the central foothills. We also have a new synergy initiative in the County of Grande Prairie called Wapiti Area Synergy Partnership (WASP) who have applied for endorsement by (and membership in) Synergy Alberta.

Of course, we have our annual conference around the corner and are also looking ahead to our spring workshops, following a very successful energy literacy engagement with Dr. Jason Donev from the University of Calgary in May. We will also be reaching out to the members regarding endorsement expectations (from the Synergy Guidebook) that are expected to be completed by the end of 2015. While most member groups have met all the necessary requirements, there are a few we still need to receive information on. We are here to help of course, so no need to fret if there's anything missing at this point.

Have a great fall and I hope to see everyone in early November at the Synergy Conference!

Gary

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## Keeping Vital: the West Central Stakeholders Story

Around the turn of the century, a project southwest of Rocky Mountain House stirred up some community concern, and inadvertently started a movement toward synergy for West Central Stakeholders (WCS).



At the time, some community folks had issues with the project in question, and the company involved, along with the regulator, met several times with the community in a group setting to resolve the issues.

“Given the success of that approach, a broader public meeting was organized to explore the interest in forming an ongoing group of stakeholders to help address industry development issues in a proactive manner,” explains Rick Anderson, WCS Facilitator.

15 years later, the group continues to grow, even through tough economic times, and continues to attract broader diversity in membership and participation. Expanding its scope beyond oil and gas, the group has tackled general community and environmental issues and concerns, and has become more of a community group.

“In addition to oil & gas companies, the regulator, community members, landowners, provincial government agencies and the County, we now have the local media as regular attendees, a coal company, representatives from neighbouring synergy groups, environmental NGOs, the local Chamber of Commerce, and even the occasional banker,” says Rick. “It’s probably one of the broadest ranges of sector participation I’ve seen. We now have organizations approach us asking to become involved!”

Rick adds that the group continues to offer a safe place to have meaningful, candid discussions around often-contentious issues related to industry activities. “It’s a place where you can voice differing opinions and ask tough questions that focuses on supporting respectful dialogue.”

So what does the future hold for the group? Rick says that in addition to having more involvement from student members, they will be increasing the frequency and scope of their newsletter, ‘Across the Fence’, and continue to tap into Synergy Alberta as a resource to connect, share ideas and learn from other synergy groups.

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## The Power of Working Together - Don't miss the 2015 Synergy Alberta Conference!

It's just over five weeks away - the annual Synergy Alberta Conference! Held at the Sheraton Cavalier in Calgary from November 2 - 4, "The Power of Working Together" promises to be another exciting, informative and interactive event you won't want to miss.

The conference provides a unique opportunity for rural landowners, oil and gas companies, regulators, municipalities, stewardship groups and a host of others to come together to share information and find ways to collaborate. Topics will include; Effective Stakeholder Engagement in Communities, Aboriginal Relations, Odour Management, Water Use, and more.

As in past years, we will be holding the Synergy Alberta Annual General Meeting and conducting workshops on Monday, with keynotes, panels and breakout sessions happening Tuesday and Wednesday. We will be Celebrating Synergy on Tuesday evening, you won't want to miss it!

Due to the intimate nature of the venue this year, we will be limiting the number of delegate registrations to 150. You will want to [register early](#) to ensure you get in! Early bird tickets are still only \$690 (plus GST) and of course we have a special rate for our community members of Synergy Groups. We also have some great

opportunities available for [sponsors and volunteers](#).

Keep your eye on the [conference website](#) in the coming weeks for updated list of speakers and the conference agenda!

