

Press Release- Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society July 8, 2010 Sylvan Lake

The Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society (SLWSS) rejects the proposed Lacombe Area Structure Plan (ASP). The massive County plan for lands surrounding Sylvan Lake creates serious risk to the basin's clean water and stable lake level. The plan fails to assure Albertans that they will be able to enjoy clear clean water, stable water levels, and a healthy Sylvan Lake watershed ecosystem in the future as they do today.

The County proposal calls for addition of up to 20,000 new residents. This is an urban population that is about twice the size of either the town of Lacombe or Sylvan Lake. Urban developments would be built on agricultural and forested land within an environmentally sensitive watershed.

Prof. David Schindler, Canada's top freshwater scientist at the U of A warned Albertans in a past television interview that a shift from the current unique, desirable mesotrophic lake condition would be the regrettable consequence of further intense watershed development. He noted that 50 years of scientific research on lakes still has not delivered a solution for cleaning up a contaminated, eutrophied water body. High nutrient levels from urbanized land use add plant food for blue-green algae. Algae in a lake ecosystem causes stench, fish kills, swimmers itch, and a disgusting green sludge and slime on the shoreline.

"This is not the kind of outcome that Albertans are looking for" says Kim Schmitt, SLWSS president. "The very best tools we have in science, risk management, and economics must be applied rigorously to manage and respect this delicate resource treasure. This is not only an environmental issue; it's very much an economic and a social issue. Currently, assessed value of property in the watershed is around 2 billion dollars. If the lake turns sour these investments are at risk of being significantly deflated. This watershed is not ready for more engineering projects and provincial infrastructure spending. The need is for a timeout and some clear analysis, inclusive thinking and sound creative planning processes."

Eight other governments have jurisdiction in the watershed, not just Lacombe County. The stewardship society notes that this aggressive ASP avoids a critical municipal planning step by excluding the option of a joint Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP) that would seek to balance competing social, economic and environmental values. There are more than 230 lakeside lots available for sale presently with an additional 520+ RV lots approved in the first keyhole development on the lake. This large quantity of lots may represent many years of inventory. The need or urgency to adopt an ASP at this time is most doubtful.

The proposed ASP may well represent the single largest land plan since Premier Stelmach and Minister Morton delivered the Land Use Framework and the supporting Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA). Our Provincial government leaders made a serious commitment to Albertans with the proclamation of ALSA in 2009. They promised to improved stewardship and conservation of our land and water resources for Albertans of the future.

The SLWSS sees the Sylvan Lake watershed as the first big test of Alberta's modern land use principles. This is where the policy rubber hits the watershed road. The current land use planning process at Sylvan Lake is unsatisfactory. An IDP should be presented for debate. The flawed plan that is on the table

disregards the spirit and intent of Alberta's new Land Use Framework and sidesteps the requirement to do so.

This is a new stewardship era for Alberta. Provincial leadership is needed and expected in the special issue-specific case of Sylvan Lake. Creation of a new vision requires a dedicated effort and cooperation by municipalities, counties, provincial and federal government ministries, and the watershed community. Protection of Sylvan Lake will require a "Gold Standard" and a demonstrated respect for its environment. The SLWSS rejects the Lacombe County ASP 2010 because it is deficient in these principles.

For further information please contact:

Kim Schmitt
President, Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society
Tel: (403) 505-3100
Email: schmitt@telusplanet.net

Graeme Strathdee
V.P., Sylvan Lake Watershed Stewardship Society
Tel: (403) 887-8781
Email: strathdeeg@shaw.ca