

Saskatchewan Outdoor and Environmental Education Association

by Peta White



Officially founded in 1972 (but existing in another form before that), the Saskatchewan Outdoor and Environmental Education Association (SOEEA) is steadily approaching its 40th birthday and still going strong. A year ago, however, this was not the case.

At that time both the past-president and administrative assistant (a married couple) left southern Saskatchewan for the Northwest Territories; at the same time the then-president decided that he could not continue either.

SOEEA was left somewhat rudderless.

Fortunately, with a strong board of directors in position, and with much dedication and hard work over the past year, the association has returned to fine form. We spent time getting our house in order: checking our books, revamping our website, filing, archiving and creating protocols for record keeping and backing up. We now have a wonderful administrative assistant, an overflowing board membership, increasing general membership and many activities in the planning/action stage.

SOEEA has managed its resources well over the past 30-something years and has accumulated quite a nest egg. Our year-to-year expenses are covered via a grant from the Saskatchewan Lotteries in partnership with Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation (SPRA). This funding covers our many areas of action and projects and provides our administrative assistant's wages.

Recently we held a strategic planning retreat weekend where we invited many of SOEEA's colleagues to look at where we have been, who we are, and our current and future agenda given our position in the field of environmental and outdoor education.

A number of key phrases were gathered at the retreat weekend: learning to contribute from your strength, engaging people, ways to sustain us include working with others, and

contacts are as important as people. We are keeping these in mind as we activate our action plans over the next three years.

SOEEA has identified four target audience groups: formal and non-formal educators (including school administrators), decision makers, partner organizations, and families (general public). Each target group defines a working area for our association and is managed by a board member. We have also identified a number of other areas that have become the responsibility of individual board members. These include communications, archiving and the 40th year celebrations, eco-activities and the usual executive roles.

SOEEA continues to manage three small granting opportunities for our members: the professional development grant, an environmental and outdoor education experience grant and an environmental action project grant. These small grants enable our members to engage in learning actions and activities in the outdoors, often encouraging others to join in.

One of our most successful programs over the past few years has been the SOEEA Ecotour. For this event SOEEA plans an activity that gets its members outdoors into a special environmental area in Saskatchewan, learning and experiencing different aspects of our province. This year our fall Ecotour took us to the Great Sandhills of southern Saskatchewan.

To learn more about SOEEA, please visit www.soeea.sk.ca.

Peta White is a PhD student in the field of environmental education at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. Originally from Western Australia, she came to Canada two years ago. She finds it very rewarding and inspiring to volunteer with SOEEA.