

EMERALD AWARDS

Awards celebrate balance

Every year for nearly the last quarter century, environmental leaders from across the province gather to recognize and celebrate outstanding projects in environmental stewardship at the Emerald Awards. This year's celebration, the 24th, will be presented June 4 at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton.

"The Emerald Awards aim to be the catalyst to raise the expectations and performance of environmental stewardship," says Gregory Caswell, communication and outreach manager at Alberta Emerald Foundation. "People across Alberta feel passionate about the need to balance the development of our province's rich resources with careful stewardship of the environment and, every year, Albertans celebrate



CONTRIBUTED

that balance with the Emerald Awards."

From small entrepreneurs to big energy producers, the Alberta Emerald Awards recognize and applaud dozens of environmental leaders, showcasing projects that demonstrate environmental excellence and set an example for everyone across the province. The outstanding environmental initiatives are undertaken by

individuals, not-for-profit associations, large and small corporations, community groups, and governments from across Alberta.

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to consider entering their projects that may seem everyday to them but could be extraordinary to someone else.

"Often, organizations engage in an environ-

mental practice that seems commonplace to them, but it's likely that their hard work and dedication could inspire others," Caswell says.

Since 1992, the Emerald Awards has shared more than 2,500 examples of creative thinking and innovation in environmental management systems, technologies and education programs. By celebrating this excellence with the Emerald Awards, the Alberta Emerald Foundation is helping raise the public's awareness of the growth in these different areas in recent years.

"We are really excited about and inspired by the examples of environmental leadership from around Alberta that make up this year's list of finalists," Caswell says.

Every year, the Alberta Emerald Foundation receives nominations in 10 established cross-sectoral categories with a panel of impartial judges reviewing the nominations and choosing a maximum of three finalists in each of the categories.

Since its inception, the Emerald Awards has recognized more than 450 finalists and 250 recipients. Over the years, each of the organizations or individuals nominated, made a finalist or awarded a winner of an Emerald Award has, in their own unique and individual way, helped Alberta balance its growth and resource development with the preservation of our environment.

ON THE ROAD TO PROTECTING WILDLIFE

The single largest threat to biodiversity in urban areas is habitat loss and fragmentation. As tracks of habitat are converted into smaller more isolated remnants, it becomes even more important to maintain functioning ecological connections between patches.

In 2007, after extensive community engagement, the City of Edmonton decided to develop a connected system of natural areas to form a functioning ecological network that would accommodate biodiversity and build on the work to protect the North Saskatchewan

River Valley and extensive ravines throughout the city.

To accomplish this goal, the city developed a tool called the Wildlife Passage Engineering Design Guidelines to "help our ecologists and engineers plan and design passages for wildlife, where our road network and ecological network intersect," says Grant Pearsell, Edmonton's director, parks + biodiversity, urban planning and environment, sustainable development.

"We now have 27 wildlife passages either

constructed, under construction, or in the design. These passages range in size from improvements to the roadway design where animals can pass across quiet roads to much larger projects where bridges have been designed to accommodate moose passage underneath."

And while Edmonton's population has increased by 160,000 since 2007, collisions with wildlife have decreased by 51 per cent.

It means a lot to be selected as a finalist for the Emerald Awards as it acknowledges the ef-

forts the city has put into the project, Pearsell says. "Without these awards, the dedicated work by our environmental professionals might not be noticed. Being a finalist also showcases the work that the City of Edmonton is doing to show dedication to be better environmental stewards for our community."

Celebrating environmental achievements with the Emerald Awards helps showcase what is possible, he says. "There is a lot of excellent environmental work completed that no one hears about."