

Going Green

In a different time and place, before modern transportation brought food from half a world away, green garbage – trimmings from vegetables, egg shells, coffee grounds, typical kitchen waste, went into the compost for eventual reuse in the garden kept by every prudent home.

Jasper is different, in the midst of a national park, with all manner of hungry animals roaming the streets. An active compost pile would tempt every bear from here to Banff and back. There is an alternative, but according to a study of municipal waste, it is seldom used.

It costs taxpayers \$550,000 a year to gather and dispose of 7,400 tons of trash. Almost half of that could be composted, but this community, which might stand as an example to all in the move to reduce, reuse and recycle, captures less than one third of that stuff that is eventually hauled all the way to Hinton.

With a couple of notable exceptions – Jasper Park Lodge and Pine Bungalows - Jasper's restaurants and hotels do a poor job of managing recyclable waste, but the average homeowner doesn't do much better. That's embarrassing, given that the town has programs and the infrastructure to do much better. All that's lacking, apparently, is the will.

The waste audit exposed the town's nasty habits. It would be interesting to know if Jasper residents have altered those even slightly since last November. Ken Quackenbush, Jasper's manager of environmental services, says we need to make significant changes: "we can make it less convenient to dispose of trash or easier to get rid of separated organic material."

The town has some work to do as well. Taxpayers spend \$164,000 a year to handle 1,400 tons of recyclables – everything from beverage containers to scrap metal. The program recovers just \$50,000 a year, mostly through the sale of paper and cardboard. Just down the road, the Jasper Recycle Depot turns a tidy profit from handling the same material. Depot owner Ryan Hefflick wouldn't be in it if there wasn't money to be made. Whatever the Depot's methods are, Jasper's waste managers need to copy them.

The waste audit showed 64 per cent of what hotels discarded could have been recycled. The exception was Jasper Park Lodge, which manages its own recycling program. Less than 40 per cent of trash from the lodge contained recyclable material and managers of the waste program are working to improve on that.

At Pine Bungalows, Mike Wasuita has embarked on a program that will gradually soften the footprint that the venerable Jasper business makes on the banks of the Athabasca River. Going green has to be a way of thinking. If you can do that, he advises, "you can do all the small things that add up to the big picture." In the words of Lao Tzu, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

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Thinking Green

In Canada, David Suzuki has been leading the environmental movement since the mid-1970s. Suzuki is best known as host of a popular television program *The Nature of Things*.

Bono and the band have often used their fame to draw attention to humanitarian causes around the world. Since 1993, U2 has supported the efforts of Greenpeace to protect the environment.

In recent years, politicians such as Al Gore have become very outspoken about Climate Change. Sustainable Tourism and the carbon footprint we leave behind are very real global issues today.

Pine Bungalows is recognized as one of Jasper National Parks' leaders in environmental stewardship and integrity. Each year, Travel Alberta recognizes businesses for achieving excellence in Sustainable Tourism and this Jasper business was a finalist in each of the past two years. Owned by the Wasuita family for more than 30 years, Michal and his mother Connie have worked hard at minimizing the impact that they and guests have on the land. They believe that

for their business to be truly sustainable, they must recognize the environmental and social factors as being just as important as the financial bottom line.

Some examples of the measures taken at Pine Bungalows include a 50 per cent diversion of waste from the landfill through reduce, reuse and recycling initiatives. They plant native grasses and shrubs on the property and lawns are left natural. Washing machines are injected with the exact amount of biodegradable laundry detergent. The staff uses electric golf carts for on-site transportation and vegetable-based oil is used for machinery maintenance.

"It makes us proud to be a part of the solution and the amount of repeat guests is proof we are on the right track," Wasuita says.