



*...working from the mountain
headwaters to the delta lowlands...*

***2009-2010
Annual Report***

“The Athabasca Watershed is comprised of 94 rivers and a minimum of 150 named creeks and 153 lakes. Near Lake Athabasca, the Athabasca, St. Claire, and Peace River systems form the largest fresh water delta in the world.” **Science Outreach, Athabasca University**

All photographs in this report are courtesy of Lavone Olson, Petra Rowell, Connie Simmons, and Jennifer Vanpatten.

About the Athabasca Watershed Council

The Athabasca Watershed Council is a multi-sector not-for-profit society with members from governments, non-government organizations, industry, aboriginal and rural communities and the public. All members have a vested interest in the Athabasca watershed.

The Council is one of several *Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils* created under Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy. As such, the Council's primary task is to champion the implementation of the strategy by undertaking assessment, planning and other activities to address watershed issues in the Athabasca watershed. Council also supports the achievement of the strategy's three outcomes:

- *Safe, secure drinking water supply*
- *Healthy aquatic ecosystems*
- *Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy*

The Council reports directly to its members. The Council also provides advice to the Government of Alberta, who remains accountable for the implementation of *Water for Life*.

The Athabasca Watershed Council is guided by its vision and mission:

Vision

The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, diverse and dynamic.

Mission

The Athabasca Watershed Council promotes, fosters respect for, and plans for an ecologically healthy watershed by demonstrating leadership and facilitating informed decision-making to ensure environmental, economic and social sustainability.

About this Report

This is the Council's first annual report. It covers the period of Council's formation, started by Alberta Environment's development of an Initiators Group for the WPAC in 2008-09, up through the end of the Council's first fiscal year, March 31, 2010. This annual report aligns with the Council's fiscal year as per its bylaws.

This report will soon be made available at www.athabascawatershedcouncil.org.



Message from the President



“We’ve made such terrific progress this year ...I can’t wait to see what the next year will bring!”

We are often so focused on what remains to be done, we rarely stop to appreciate just how far we have come!

This past year, 2009-10, has sped by, and we’ve accomplished a lot. We can feel proud that the Athabasca Watershed Council is now a reality! Through the hard work and dedication of Alberta Environment, the Athabasca WPAC Initiators Group and the Board of Directors, all the important administrative processes required to function as a society are now in place. I can’t thank everyone enough for getting us this far, this fast!

With the Board of Directors and six committees now firmly established, we look forward to the coming year. The Board is eager to improve its knowledge of the Athabasca watershed. The Technical Committee will be working on a state of the watershed report that will tell us where we have good information and where there are data gaps. This will inform future work on selecting watershed indicators and a watershed management plan.

Some say the word “Athabasca” traditionally refers to “a meeting in the reeds”. Similarly, we look forward to getting out and meeting our members out in the watershed. In the meantime, I hope this report gives you an idea of what we have accomplished to date and where we are headed! Stay tuned!

Lawone Olson

Highlights of 2009-2010

Initiator's Group Completes Its Work

Formed in late 2008, the Athabasca WPAC Initiators Group (IG) was struck to lay the foundation of the future WPAC. It provided organizations and people within the watershed an opportunity to collaboratively develop foundational documents required to form a society. With the election of a Board, the work of the IG was complete and it was dissolved.

First Board of Directors Elected

On November 28, 2009, 15 Directors were elected to become the first Board of the Athabasca Watershed Council. From this slate, a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer were also selected. The Board has continued to meet monthly since November.

WPAC Status Granted

Alberta Environment granted the Athabasca Watershed Council Watershed Planning and Advisory Council status for the Athabasca watershed. This commits the Council to championing the goals of the *Water for Life* strategy by undertaking watershed assessment, planning and stewardship activities

Financial Support

The Council is grateful for the support Alberta Environment, Industry, Municipalities, Alberta Culture and Community Spirit and others provided in 2009-10. Without this support, the IG and stakeholders would not have been able to meet nor to have achieved so much in such a short timeframe.

Six Committees Formed

In addition to Executive Committee, the Council formed six standing committees in February. These Committees will undertake the work identified in the Council's strategic plan. Committees include Aboriginal and Rural Engagement, Communications, Finance, Nominations, Stewardship and Technical.

"State of" Work Initiated

The Board of Directors has made the Technical Committee's work on development of a State of the Watershed report a priority. This work got underway in February and will continue throughout the coming year.



Formation of the Athabasca Watershed Council

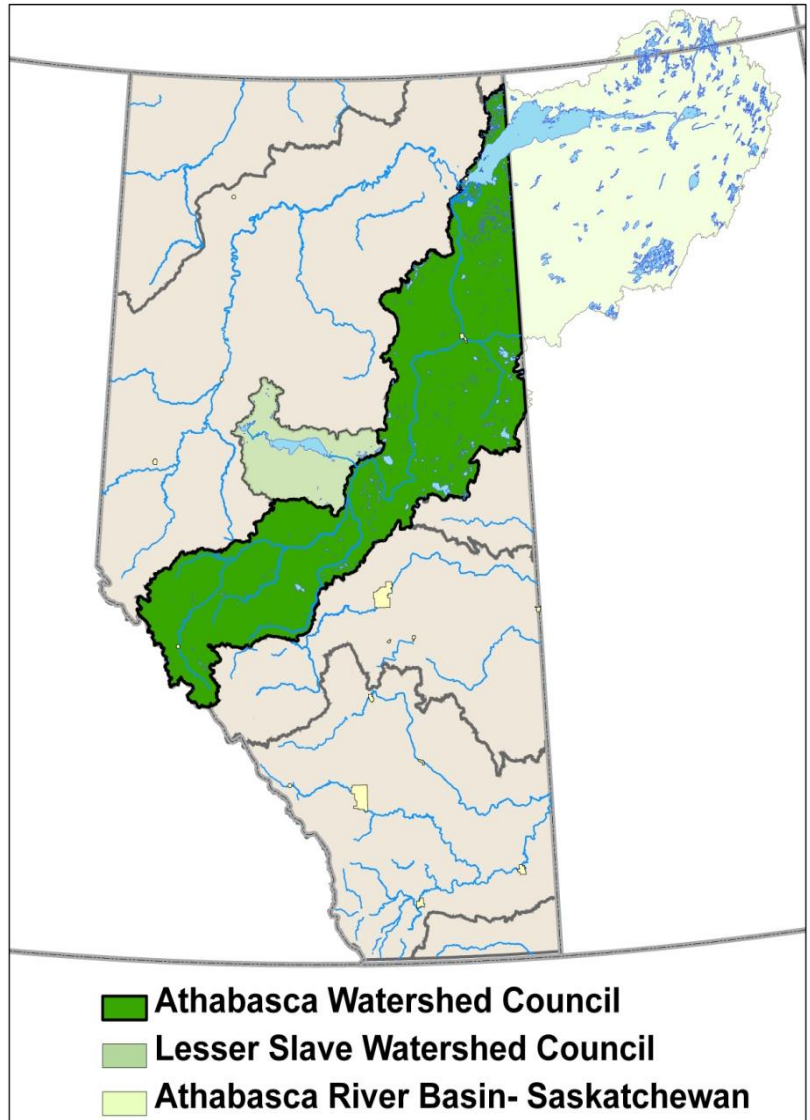
Background and Shared Responsibility

In 2008, the Government of Alberta renewed *Water for Life (2003)*, the province's approach to water management, now and in the future.

The *Water for Life* Action Plan identified the formation of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) across the province's watersheds, including the formation of an Athabasca WPAC by 2012.

WPACs are multi-sector organizations that report on the state of the watershed, lead in watershed planning and stewardship, and make recommendations to decision-makers within the basin that affect the health of the Athabasca River Watershed.

Towards this end, in April 2008, Alberta Environment facilitated a workshop to initiate formation of an Athabasca WPAC. The workshop began a dialogue about an Athabasca WPAC that was further explored by a series of Focus Group sessions in the fall of 2008. The Focus Group sessions resulted in selection of sector representatives and aboriginal volunteers to participate in the Athabasca WPAC Initiators Group.



The Athabasca watershed includes the Athabasca River, all of its tributaries including the Lesser Slave River, and Lake Athabasca. Note, however, that the Athabasca Watershed Council's main focus is the dark green area only.

Structure and Operations



The main task of the Athabasca WPAC Initiators Group (IG), which met for the first time in January 2009, was to put in place the elements required for an effective organization. Following the development of a set of bylaws, the group submitted application for and received incorporation as a society under the name *Athabasca Watershed Council* on August 21, 2009.

The IG then focused on drafting several administrative and planning documents including operational policies, a three-year strategic plan and a First Year Operational Plan and Budget. They also developed requirements and a form for membership and agreed on the date and place for the first **General Meeting of the Athabasca Watershed Council** to be held in Athabasca, Alberta on November 28th, 2009. At this meeting, the Initiators Group was dissolved and the first Board of Directors of the Athabasca Watershed Council was elected.

Since its election, the Board of Directors has met monthly. The Board works, to the extent possible, by consensus: that is “general agreement” where after considering all interests, values and positions, the end result is a decision that everyone can “live with”. The Board is guided by the Athabasca Watershed Council’s common vision and mission. The Athabasca Watershed Council:

Values ecological health as foundational to all life. * Believes water is a blessing and a gift: essential for the environment, society, economy and the spirit. * Values integrity, trust and transparency. * Respects the environment and people. * Respects all points of view. * Values inclusiveness. * Believes in consensus-based decision-making. * Values and respect the aboriginal communities, culture and knowledge in the Athabasca watershed. * Respects economic necessities. * Values creativity, innovation and risk-taking. * Values a high standard of achievement and conduct. * Is responsible and accountable to its members. * Values timely responses to issues. * Is purpose-driven.

Funding

Support for the IG and the Board of Directors throughout 2009-10 was provided in-kind by Alberta Environment and hence is not reported on by the Athabasca Watershed Council. In-kind support of the sectors and individuals involved was also significant. With the Council beginning to administer and track its own funds as of April 1, 2010, its first financial report will be provided in the 2010-11 annual report.

Council Achievements and Progress

With 2009-10 being its formative year, the Council focused on getting its administrative “feet” planted firmly on the ground. Other activities, such as education and outreach, are now poised to get underway in the new fiscal year.

Progress towards Goals

Goal #1 ~ Ensure the Athabasca Watershed Council is an effective, efficient and sustainable Watershed Planning and Advisory Council.



The Council held its first general meeting (November 28/09) where members elected a Board of Directors from which a President and other Executive officers were chosen. The Board then approved a 3-year strategic business plan and held monthly meetings throughout the remainder of the fiscal year. The Board applied for and received WPAC status and secured core funding from Alberta Environment for 2010-12. Other tasks towards achieving this goal included completion of a policy and procedural guide, recruiting an interim administrator, and initiating work on securing full-time staff, an office and other administrative requirements.

Goal #2 ~ Improve watershed knowledge and understanding within the Athabasca Watershed Council.

In this, its initial year, the Board of Directors focused on improving its knowledge of the Athabasca watershed. A number of reports from previous research initiatives, such as the Northern River Basins study, were circulated and read by board members. The Board also invited guests into its monthly meetings, hearing presentations on the Lower Athabasca Water Management Framework Phase II, Cumulative Effects Management and the Alberta Water Council.

Goal #3 ~ Champion increased awareness by providing information and education to all.

Council was extremely pleased to see the turnout (approx. 80) of interested individuals at the November General Meeting. From this, the Council has started and continues to maintain a membership base that is now over 100 individuals and organizations. Members were recently sent a letter of welcome from the President, as well as the Council’s first newsletter. Membership requests continue to be received as word of the Council is spread. The Alberta Environment press release regarding its grant to the Council also generated interest in the Council’s activities.

Goal #4 ~ Encourage and work towards protection, conservation and enhancement of the ecological integrity of the watershed.

While work in its first year focused on administrative items, the Council is eager to undertake technical work towards understanding and assessing the aquatic health of the Athabasca watershed. Hence it has made the work of its Technical Committee a priority. This Committee met and developed a terms of reference February 23. It continues to meet monthly and is well on its way to developing a “state of the watershed” report detailing what is known about the health of the watershed and where information gaps exist.

Goal #5 ~ Facilitate development and implementation of integrated planning for the watershed.

The timing of the Council’s formation precluded it from providing input into the Regional Advisory Council’s work to provide recommendations to the Government of Alberta under the Land Use Framework’s Lower Athabasca Regional Planning Process. However, the Council looks forward to seeing the Government’s release of a draft plan for consultation in the near future.

Goal #6 ~ Promote best practices to help achieve healthy aquatic ecosystems, safe and secure drinking water supplies and reliable quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

While the Council itself has not had time to look at how to achieve this goal in the Athabasca watershed, it applauds the work of the Alberta Water Council, which has made Source Water Protection a priority in its new business plan. The Athabasca Watershed Council will support this work through communications with the other WPACs and the WPAC representatives on the Alberta Water Council and its projects.

Work of the Committees



In addition to the Executive Committee, which is responsible for hiring and supervising staff, administering funds, etc, the Council has created six additional committees to undertake the following:

Communications - to keep those that live, work and play in the Athabasca basin informed of the activities and progress of the Athabasca Watershed Council.

Technical - to understand the physical state of the Athabasca watershed including the state of current knowledge, information gaps and priorities for further research.

Finance - to ensure the Athabasca Watershed Council is financially solvent and fiscally responsible.

Watershed Stewardship - to encourage and enable stewardship activities in the Athabasca basin by collaborating, networking and sharing information, expertise and tools.

Aboriginal and Rural Engagement - to effectively engage people and communities in the work of the Athabasca Watershed Council by providing opportunities to build trust, share information and provide input.

Nominations - to ensure all 16 board positions are filled with the best possible candidates, selected in an open, fair and transparent manner.

Future Directions

So much to do...! The Athabasca Watershed Council expects to have a very busy 2010-11. With a new Executive Director and an office in place, the Council will continue to build awareness of its work and accessibility to its products by establishing a website and continuing to produce a quarterly newsletter for members. The Board is looking forward to meeting Council members in person at the Spring Annual General Meeting in Fort McMurray, as well as learn more about the oil sands from a tour of the area courtesy of Suncor. Work over the summer on a Communications Strategy will help guide the Council in future work to engage industry, governments, Aboriginal and rural communities, stewardship groups and others. The Board also looks forward to experiencing the upper part of the basin with its Fall strategic retreat in the Hinton area.

With work on a state of the watershed report moving forward, Council hopes to be better positioned to provide input on several important initiatives in the watershed including the Lower Athabasca Water Management Framework Phase II and the Land Use Framework Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. We also look forward to learning more about Alberta Environment's work on developing provincial core watershed indicators; the bilateral negotiations occurring under the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement; and work of the Alberta Water Council on Source Water Protection. We know this regional and provincial work will inform our work here.



2009-10 Board Members and Supporters

Board of Directors

SECTOR	MEMBER	AFFILIATION
Non-Government Organizations Sector (3)	Paula Evans (Treasurer)	Crooked Creek Conservancy Society of Athabasca
	David Locky (Secretary)	Athabasca University
	Tom Weber	Clearwater River Committee
Industry (3)	Janice Linehan	Suncor Energy Inc.
	Daniel Moore	Alberta Newsprint Company / Alberta Forest Products Association
	Janice Pitman	National Farmers' Union
Government Sector (3)	Richard Chabaylo	Alberta Environment / Government of Alberta
	Sonny Flett	Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
	Lavone Olson (President)	Yellowhead County
Aboriginal Sector (3)	Doug Badger (Vice-President)	Regional Environmental Action Committee
	Bill Loutitt	Métis Nation of Alberta
	Jerry Cunningham	Métis Settlements General Council
Other Sector (3)	Wayne Brehaut	Public Member-at-large
	Jay White	Public Member-at-large
	Marsha Hayward	Public Member-at-large
Past-President (1)	Vacant	

Supporters

The Board would like to thank all the members of the Athabasca WPAC Initiators' Group and their constituents for their work, input, and in-kind support in creating a firm foundation for the Athabasca Watershed Council. IG members included Mike Allen, Tom Archibald, Jerry Cunningham, Melanie Daniels, Kristen Dieter, Paula Evans, Marek Janowicz, Joseph Jobin, Sarah Kehler, David Locky, Bill Loutitt, Dan Moore, Lavone Olson, Misty Potts-Sanderson, Connie Simmons, Jennifer Stoby, Tom Weber and Jamie Wuite.

Special thanks also go to the following for financial and in-kind support for 2009-10, without which, formation of the Council would not have been possible: Alberta Environment, Alberta Forest Products Association, Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, Alberta Newsprint Company, Athabasca University, Campbell's Music, Garry Neufeld, Nexen Inc., Suncor Energy Inc. and Yellowhead County. Council is especially indebted to Nona Foster for providing its logo. The Board also thanks the following individuals for in-kind and contract secretariat support: Lori Adams, Michelle Giroux, Rick Moyse, Megan Robinson, Petra Rowell, Andrew Schoepf, Kathy Svenshek and Sharon Willianen.

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Coming soon! www.athabascawatershedcouncil.org