



Athabasca
WATERSHED COUNCIL

2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT

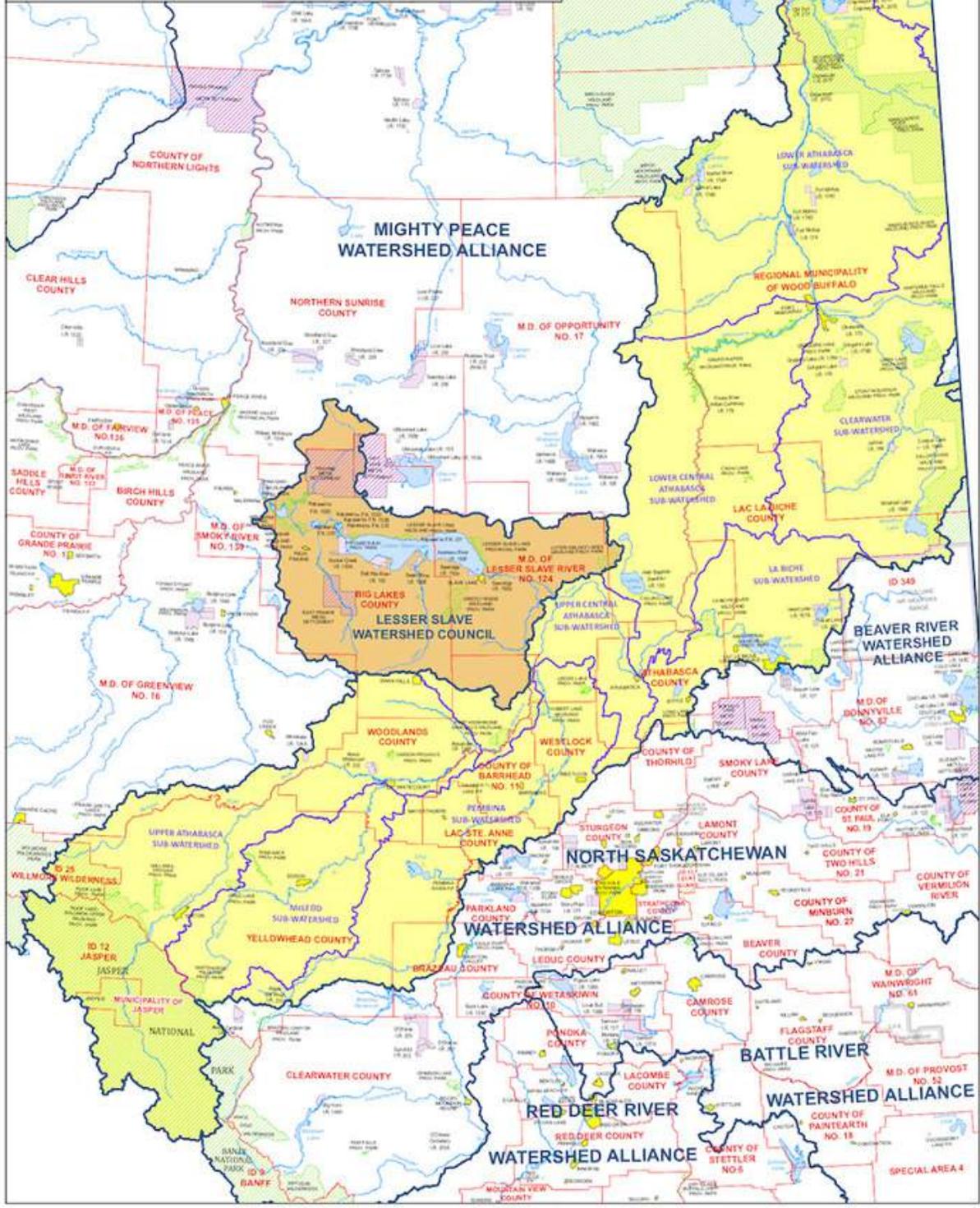
ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL REGIONAL BASE MAP



- ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL
- LESSER SLAVE WATERSHED COUNCIL
- WATERSHED COUNCIL BOUNDARIES
- SUB-WATERSHED BOUNDARIES
- MUNICIPALITIES
- CITY / TOWN / VILLAGE URBAN SERVICE AREA
- METIS SETTLEMENT
- FIRST NATION RESERVE
- PARKS & PROTECTED AREAS

Alberta Environment and Parks

Note: Information as depicted is subject to change. Materials the Government of Alberta assumes no responsibility for dissemination or use of.
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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM CHAIR

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC), I am pleased to present the 2020-21 Annual Report. Given that Covid-19 remained a dominant force in Alberta, the 2020-21 fiscal year continued to be a challenging time for the AWC, as it was for many other sectors of Alberta society. However, staff, committee and board members adapted, even finding efficiencies in the 'new way of doing business', driven by the pandemic and its associated social and economic restrictions. Throughout the year, the Board of Directors continued to be well engaged, holding virtual board and committee meetings, and continuing to move the AWC forward.

Despite working from home for the most part, staff played an integral role in supporting this work. We thank them for their extraordinary efforts in these trying times. A significant challenge was the retirement of our Executive Director, Janet Pomeroy. The Board and I express our heartfelt gratitude for Janet's tireless commitment and work ethic demonstrated throughout her tenure with the AWC. We wish her the very best in her retirement. The search for a new Executive Director was successful and we extend a warm welcome to Petra Rowell. The Board and I wish to thank our many supporters for again keeping the AWC active during these times of uncertainty and change. We especially thank the Government of Alberta for providing our core funding, without which our staff could not do the work of the AWC. As of March 31, 2021, the AWC stands in good stead and looks forward to a productive and effective 2021-22.

- Morris Nesdole, Treasurer and Interim Chair

ABOUT THE ATHABASCA RIVER WATERSHED

The Athabasca River is approximately 1,231 km long, flowing from the Columbia Icefield in Jasper National Park all the way to Lake Athabasca. The Athabasca River watershed is 159,000 square km in size, covering roughly 24% of Alberta's landmass.

Our watershed is diverse, including all or parts of 13 Municipal Districts, 3 Specialized Municipalities, 10 Towns, 9 Summer Villages, 1 village and 4 Improvement Districts. It spans over Treaty 6, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 territories and is the home of many Indigenous people. It also contains several working landscapes that support agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, recreation and more.

Like other watersheds in Alberta, there are many pressures in the basin, including but not limited to surface and groundwater allocations to industry and municipalities, linear disturbances like roads and pipelines, pressures on wetlands and riparian areas, and the many other human activities that may adversely impact the water quality and the health of aquatic ecosystems found throughout the watershed.

To manage the water that we all depend on, we must effectively manage the land that we share. To do that, let's come together to understand the issues, challenges, and opportunities affecting our watershed. The Athabasca Watershed Council works to bring stakeholders, citizens, and Indigenous peoples together to effectively manage the Athabasca River Watershed.

ABOUT THE ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) is a registered charity and not-for-profit organization formed in August, 2009. We work with academia, industry, environmental and stewardship groups, various levels of government, communities, citizens, and Indigenous peoples to provide timely and credible information about the Athabasca River watershed.

OUR MISSION

The Athabasca Watershed Council demonstrates leadership and facilitates informed decision-making in the Athabasca River watershed by bringing stakeholders and Indigenous peoples together to promote, foster respect, and plan for an ecologically healthy watershed that supports social responsibility and economic sustainability.

OUR VISION

The AWC strives to keep the Athabasca River watershed ecologically healthy, socially responsible, and economically sustainable.

OUR VALUES

- We value integrity, trust, and transparency.
- We respect all points of view.
- Water is a blessing and gift and is essential for environment, society, economy and the spirit.
- Respect the environment and people.
- We believe in consensus decision making.
- We respect economic necessities.
- We value a high standard of achievement and conduct in the WPAC.
- We value ecological health as foundational to all life.
- We value timely responses to issues.
- We value and respect the Indigenous peoples, culture, and knowledge in the Athabasca Watershed.
- We value inclusivity.
- We value creativity, innovation, and risk taking.
- We are responsible and accountable to all members.
- We are purpose driven.

WHAT IS A WPAC?

The Athabasca Watershed Council is one of eleven Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) in Alberta. WPAC's are independent, not-for-profit organizations that work within four main program areas:

- Education and Outreach
- Environmental Stewardship
- Watershed Evaluation and Reporting
- Watershed Management Planning

OUR GOALS

Long Term Goal 1: The AWC is a credible authority on the Athabasca watershed and earns recognition for its leadership and expertise.

Long Term Goal 2: Stakeholders and Indigenous peoples throughout the Athabasca River watershed have access to information, are knowledgeable about the condition of the

watershed, and are actively engaged with the AWC in mobilizing resources and commitments to achieve shared outcomes.

Long Term Goal 3: Athabascans have defined desired outcomes for the Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan and the AWC has healthy and active relationships with Athabascans and others in meeting these outcomes.

Long Term Goal 4: AWC promotes the alignment and integration of land and water statutory and non-statutory policies, plans and programs across jurisdictions where needed to achieve Water for Life goals and a healthy Athabasca River watershed.

Long Term Goal 5: AWC has a reputation for organizational professionalism, balanced representation, sustainability, effective and efficient use of resources and makes strategically wise and evidence-based decisions.



WATER FOR LIFE STRATEGY

The Water for Life strategy outlines the Government of Alberta's commitments to manage and safeguard Alberta's water resources, now and in the future. The strategy has been the vehicle for managing Alberta's precious water resources since its release in 2003. Because it has been such an effective tool for managing Alberta's water resources, the Government of Alberta renewed the strategy in 2008 and released a renewed action plan in 2009. These documents continue to promote 2003 strategy goals including:

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

The strategy also promotes three key directions for achieving goals including:

- Knowledge and Research
- Partnerships
- Conservation

The Athabasca Watershed Council strives to see the Water for Life strategy achieved in the Athabasca River watershed. You can read more about the Water For Life strategy and WPAC involvement on the Alberta Government website [here](#).



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

To ensure that AWC is representative of all voices from across the watershed, the Board of Directors is comprised of elected and appointed seats from each specified stakeholder and partner group. As outlined in the Board of Directors Terms of Reference, the Board of Directors has a maximum of 21 members (including the past Chair) representing specified positions for industry (5 seats), non-governmental organizations (5 seats), governments (5 seats), Indigenous (3 seats), and Members-at-Large (2 seats). Each seat is allowed 1 alternate.

Brian Deheer | Board Chair

Stewards of Lac La Biche Watershed
(Health or Environment)

Dan Moore | Vice Chair

Alberta Newsprint Company/ Alberta Forest
Products Association (Industry - Forestry)

Morris Nesdole | Treasurer

Baptiste & Island Lakes Stewardship Society
(Stewardship)

**Abdi Siad-Omar | Alberta Environment and
Parks**

Planning (AEP Representative)

**Dr. Greg Piorkowski | Alberta Agriculture and
Forestry**

(Provincial/Federal Government)

Robert Esau | M.D. of Lesser Slave River

(Municipal – Upper Basin)

Larry Armfelt | Athabasca County

(Municipal – Middle Basin)

Sterling Johnson | Lac La Biche County

(Municipal – Lower Basin)

Janice Linehan | Suncor Energy Inc.

(Industry - Oil & Gas)

Janice Pitman | Private Organic Farm

(Industry - Small Agricultural Producer)

Andrew Hutchinson | Bighorn Mining Ltd.

(Industry - Mining & Utilities)

John Ritchie | Individual

(Indigenous)

Marv Fyten | Individual

(Health or Environment)

Tom Weber | Clearwater River Heritage Society

(Stewardship)

Dr. Robert Holmberg | Athabasca University

(Research & Academia)

Tim Polzin | Individual

(Member-at-Large)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ALTERNATES:

Curtis Brock | Alberta Environment and Parks
(AEP Representative)

Lavone Olson | Yellowhead County
(Municipal – Upper Basin)

Colleen Powell | Town of Athabasca
(Municipal – Middle Basin)

Victor Gladue | M.D. of Opportunity
(Municipal – Lower Basin)

Terry Sheehan | Individual
(Industry - Small Agricultural Producer)

Jamie Giberson | Aspen Regional Water Services
(Industry - Mining & Utilities)

Rick Zroback | Individual
(Member-at-Large)

Chantel Quintel | Individual
(Indigenous)

Joel Gervais | Individual
(Health or Environment)

**Lorraine Johnstone MacKay | Athabasca River
Voyageur Canoe Brigade Society**
(Stewardship)

Paula Evans | Crooked Creek Conservancy Society
(Stewardship)

Dr. Scott Ketcheson | Athabasca University
(Research & Academia)

Bill Grieve | Individual
(Member-at-Large)

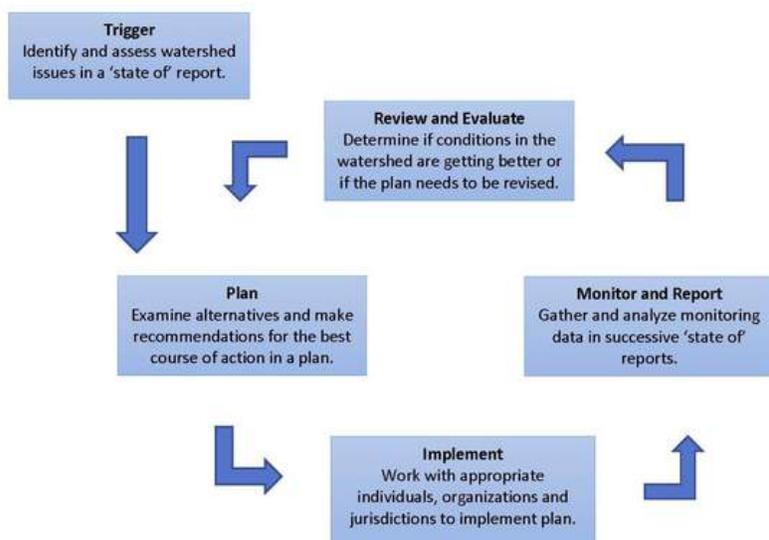
INTEGRATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) is a document that guides decision makers towards ensuring that watershed management is integrated with other land and water initiatives and is occurring in a trusting, collaborative atmosphere where water information is shared, stakeholders and the public are knowledgeable about water issues, and there are opportunities to be engaged in watershed stewardship.

While the final steps to complete the document are being carried out, the AWC and its partners are already moving forward with implementation on several fronts. Considered a “living document,” progress will be reported on by the AWC annually. The plan will be reviewed in detail, and if required, renewed, every five years, or as special circumstances warrant.

In 2020-21, the Athabasca Watershed Council moved closer to completion of the IWMP. With approval of the Technical Committee and the Board of Directors, the most recent draft has been posted on the website for a final round of public input in early 2021-22. The plan focusses around eight major goals as follows:

1. Everyone in the Athabasca River watershed has access to safe, secure drinking water.
2. Aquatic ecosystems are healthy and biologically diverse.
3. River flows and lake levels meet social, cultural, economic and environmental needs.
4. Natural land cover is conserved, and cumulative land use pressures on water are mitigated.
5. Traditional Knowledge informs decision-making and planning.
6. Policies and plans are aligned for watershed health.
7. The impacts of climate change on watershed health are known and inform community preparedness.
8. Sub-basin and lake assessment, planning and stewardship initiatives are supported.



PEMBINA RIVER WATERSHED SHORELINES PROJECT

The goal of the Pembina River Watershed Shorelines Project is to increase watershed resilience in the Pembina River watershed through riparian habitat assessment, restoration, education, and conservation. The AWC has been working with Fiera Biological Consulting that has developed a method to rapidly map and assess riparian areas and pressure on riparian areas. Riparian areas have considerable ecological, economic, and social value for Albertans; therefore, underst-

-anding riparian areas is essential to the restoration, education, and conservation of this habitat. For more information on riparian areas in Alberta, visit: www.riparianresourcesab.info/

A total of 19 waterbodies (1,600 km) were assessed in the Mid-Pembina Watershed Riparian Assessment by Fiera. 53% (847 km) of the shoreline assessed was classified as High Intactness. Intactness was used as a measure of riparian condition because the relationship is well established between an intact riparian zone and the function of the aquatic environment. High intactness refers to an area that has not been altered or impaired by human activity. 18% (284 km) of the shoreline assessed was classified as Moderate Intactness, 9% (147 km) of the shoreline assessed was classified as Low Intactness, and 20% (323 km) of the shoreline assessed was classified as Very Low Intactness.

You can read the full Mid-Pembina Watershed Riparian Assessment report on our website here: awc-wpac.ca/pembina-project/

Mid-Pembina Watershed Riparian Area Assessment

FINAL REPORT



Project #2012
December 2020

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



Alberta Environment and Parks

PEMBINA RIVER WATERSHED SHORELINES PROJECT

This year, the AWC has also put together shoreline restoration funding to support landowners in the Pembina River Watershed. An important focus is to work with local landowners on projects that protect and improve the health of shorelines and streambanks, such as riparian fencing, alternate watering systems, and willow staking.



Funders for this project are:

- Watershed Resilience and Restoration Program
- Plains Midstream

Partners for this project include:

- Highway 2 Conservation
- Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society
- Lac La Nonne Protection and Enhancement Society
- ALUS Lac Ste. Anne County

Lake Shoreline & Left Bank Intactness

- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

Woodlands County

County of Barrhead

Westlock County

Sturgeon County

Lac Ste. Anne County

Map 1. Mid-Pembina Watershed Riparian Area Assessment, Intactness for lakes and left bank of rivers that were included in the study (prepared by Fiera Biological Consulting).

UPPER ATHABASCA RIVER WATERSHED BIOMONITORING PROJECT

The Athabasca Watershed Council launched the Upper Athabasca River Watershed Biomonitoring Project in May, 2020. This three-year project will monitor benthic macroinvertebrate communities in the Upper Athabasca River watershed. The Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) sampling protocols will be used, along with the Sequencing the Rivers for Environmental Assessment and Monitoring (STREAM) eDNA metabarcoding analysis, and taxonomic analysis.

For the first year of this project, the AWC completed necessary training in September, 2020 in the Oldman Watershed with Living Lakes Canada, Oldman Watershed Council, North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, Blood Tribe Land Management, and Elbow River Watershed Partnership. The AWC also received financial support from Alberta Ecotrust Community Grant and Alberta Conservation Association Conservation, Community, and Education Grant. The AWC then identified local study objectives for this project.

The Upper Athabasca Watershed is in the eastern slopes of Alberta where an increase in pressures from human uses naturally impacts water quality, species at risk, and aquatic ecosystems. An increase in comparable monitoring is needed to measure change throughout this region. Therefore, the AWC and its partners are working together to perform biomonitoring in the eastern slopes using the CABIN protocols to measure change in macroinvertebrate communities over time.



ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL YEAR IN REVIEW

The AWC's rolling three-Year Strategic Plan drives its activities, with progress on 5 goals as follows:

- **Goal 1:** In 2020-21, the AWC continued to improve its own knowledge of the state of the Athabasca River watershed with efforts to assess riparian health in the Pembina watershed and benthic invertebrates in the headwaters contributing to the WPAC role of monitoring and reporting.
- **Goal 2:** As per its WPAC role of education and literacy, the AWC also continued to improve the knowledge of stakeholders via information posted on its website, distributed through its newsletter and social media and via presentations, particularly to municipal councils and industry groups.
 - A presentation to the Alberta Boreal Careers Virtual summit reached 230 junior and high school students.
 - Additionally, a photo contest, calendar and the AWC annual report were used to raise awareness about the Athabasca River watershed.

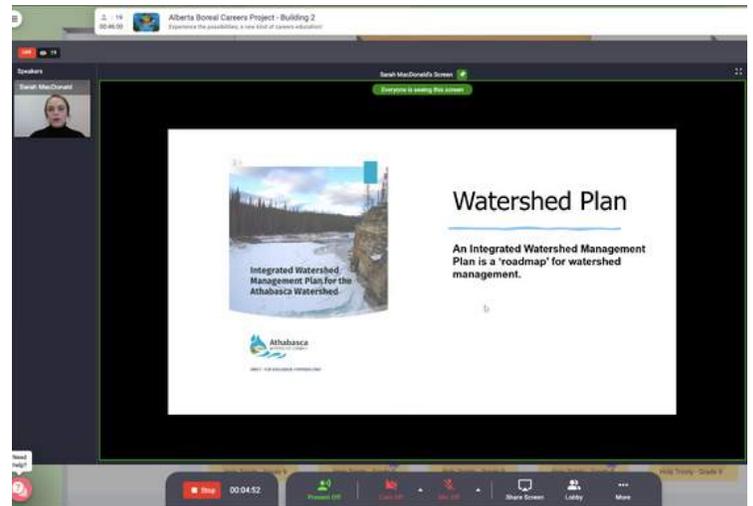


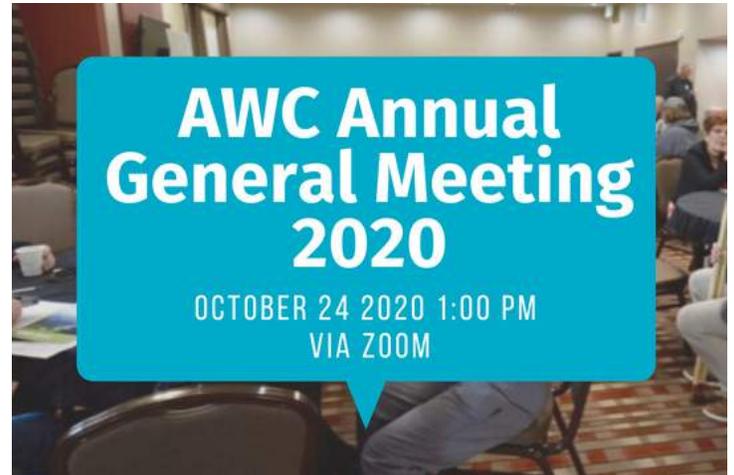
Photo: Sarah MacDonald presenting in partnership with Inside Education
Photo credit: Laura Pekkola



Photo: Cover of AWC 2021 Calendar
Photo credit: Carol Boyce

ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL YEAR IN REVIEW

- **Goal 3:** Significant progress was made in 2020-21 on the Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP). This document has now been reviewed and approved by the Technical Committee and the Board. As a final step, the plan has been posted on the website for public feedback.
- **Goal 4:** Closely aligned with work on the IWMP are efforts to convene and collaborate with other land and water policy, planning and best practices initiatives. Towards this goal, AWC representatives participated or provided input to other WFL partnerships, as well as a number of lake and municipal policy and planning initiatives.
- **Goal 5:** Finally, the AWC continued to improve its own internal efficacy, maintaining a staffed office in the Town of Athabasca, organizing quarterly board meetings and the Annual General Meeting, and ensuring work of the board was carried out via several committee meetings and an approved budget.



Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan



DRAFT Prepared by the AWC Technical Committee for Public Review, May 2021

MEET OUR STAFF



Petra Rowell- Executive Director

Since 2003, Petra Rowell, B.Comm, B.Sc., P.Biol. has assisted a number of watershed partnerships in developing policies, plans and projects to support implementation of Alberta's Water for Life strategy. She has recently joined the Athabasca Watershed Council and is looking forward to being a part of the team and helping the Council to deliver its mandate in the Athabasca River watershed.



Janet Pomeroy- Past Executive Director

Janet R. Pomeroy, CMA, CPA, CAE took the helm at the Athabasca Watershed Council in May of 2018, bringing over 20 years of management experience to the organization. After working closely with the Board of Directors and staff to build capacity in the organization, and overseeing the Council's 10th anniversary in 2019, Janet retired in early 2021. We wish her well!



Sarah MacDonald- Watershed Coordinator

Sarah MacDonald is the Watershed Science Coordinator at the AWC and has been a staff member for over 2 years. Her work is to fill data gaps in the Athabasca River watershed with the AWC's projects that involve riparian assessment and restoration in the Pembina River Watershed and biomonitoring in the headwaters of the Athabasca River Watershed. She also gives presentations to youth and stakeholder groups on AWC projects.



Indah Holmberg- Administrative Coordinator

Indah Holmberg is currently a student attending Red Deer College and has worked as the Administrative Coordinator at the AWC for over a year. She manages the AWC website, newsletter, and social media pages, providing the latest information on events and news throughout our watershed. She maintains communication between our members, staff, and other WPACs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2020-21 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the following:

Alberta Conservation Association
Alberta Environment and Parks (Government of Alberta)
Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
ATB Cares (Alberta Treasury Branch)
Brazeau County
Canada Summer Jobs (Government of Canada)
Canadian Special Risks
Plains Midstream
TD Friends of the Environment
Trans Mountain
Watershed Resilience and Restoration Grant Program (AEP)

And our many individual donors... we couldn't do it without you!

2020-21 IN-KIND SUPPORT

We would like to thank the following organizations for their in-kind support of AWC board members, committees, programs and activities:

Alberta Environment and Parks
Alberta Newsprint Company
Alberta Water Council
Alberta WPAC's
ALUS Canada (Lac Ste. Anne)
Aspen Regional Water Services Commission
Athabasca Advocate
Athabasca County
Athabasca Heritage Society
Athabasca University Repository of the Athabasca River Basin
Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society
Baptiste and Island Lakes Stewardship Society
Barrhead No. 11 County
Bighorn Mining - Vista Mine
Brazeau County
Clearwater River Heritage Society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2020-21 IN-KIND SUPPORT

Cows and Fish Alberta Riparian Habitat
Management Society

Crooked Creek Conservancy Society

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Foothills Research Institute

Fort McMurray First Nations

Highway 2 Conservation

Healthy Waters Lac La Biche Stewardship
Society

Inside Education

Lac La Biche County

Lac La Nonne Enhancement and Protection
Association

Living Lakes Canada

Municipal District of Lesser Slave River

Municipal District of Lesser Slave River

North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

Parks Canada

Science Outreach of Athabasca University

Suncor Energy Inc.

Tom's Marine and Sports

Town of Athabasca

University of Guelph

West Central Forage Association

Yellowhead Synergy Group

Yellowhead County Agricultural Services

University of Guelph

Westlock County

World Wildlife Fund Canada

Yellowhead County





AWC-WPAC.CA

**OUR WATERSHED. OUR
RESPONSIBILITY.**

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