



**Board of Directors Meeting  
Draft Agenda  
February 9, 2022  
1:30 - 3:30 pm**

Administration AWC is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6661792450>

Meeting ID: 666 179 2450

One tap mobile

+15873281099,,6661792450# Canada

+16473744685,,6661792450# Canada

Dial by your location

+1 587 328 1099 Canada

+1 647 374 4685 Canada

+1 647 558 0588 Canada

+1 778 907 2071 Canada

+1 204 272 7920 Canada

+1 438 809 7799 Canada

Meeting ID: 666 179 2450

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6661792450>

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
1:30	1. Welcome: Call to Order, health and safety, quorum	Chair
1:35	2. Treaty Land Acknowledgement and Indigenous Outreach update	Petra
1:45	3. Administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introductions</li> <li>b. Approval of Agenda</li> <li>c. Approve Past Meeting Minutes (Nov. 22, 2021)</li> <li>d. Approve ED Activity and Financial Report</li> </ul>	Chair
2:00	4. Board Business: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Approve Employee Handbook</li> <li>b. Approve IWMP</li> <li>c. Approve Strategic Plan and 2022-23 budget</li> </ul>	Chair
2:30	5. WFL Partnerships Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. WFL Partnerships Framework Presentation</li> <li>b. Discussion / Approve MOU</li> </ul>	ED
3:00	6. Alberta WPACs Policy and Legislation project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Presentation</li> <li>b. Discussion</li> </ul>	Shannon Frank, Oldman Watershed Council Susanna Bruneau, Legislation and Policy Manager, Alberta WPACs
3:28	8. Upcoming Meeting Dates	Chair
3:30	Meeting Adjourned	Chair



**Board of Directors Meeting**  
Nov. 22, 2021  
Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Summary:**

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) Board of Directors met virtually on November 22, 2021. After a round of introductions including several new municipal members, and approval of the meeting agenda, the board heard a presentation from Dr. Scott Ketcheson (AWC Director, Academia) on his work on wetlands and hydrology just south of Fort McMurray.

Petra Rowell, the Executive Director, then provided an overview of the three-year rolling strategic plan, highlighting current and potential future projects that support the achievement of the plan's five goals. She then asked Board members to think about how to better utilize strengths and opportunities to improve plan implementation and ultimately, the achievement of plan goals.

Finally, the meeting included several administrative items. Petra noted that a quarterly report on activities with financial statements was included in the meeting package, as were the Sept 16, 2021 board meeting minutes. Both documents were accepted as presented. A third document, a revised Employee Handbook, was not approved and will be brought back to the board at its next meeting, February 9, 2022.

**ACTION LOG:**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Completed by:</b>
	Board members to consider the strategic planning questions asked in Agenda Item 2b. and to share their thoughts with Petra via email or phone call.	Dec. 24, 2021
	Petra to post the approved Sept. 16 meeting minutes on the website.	November 30, 2021
	Morris Nesdole and Robert Holmberg to provide comments on the Employee Guide to Dan who will bring the document back to the board in February 2022.	February 9, 2021

**Meeting Attendees:**

SEAT	DIRECTOR	ALTERNATE	Quorum
AEP Representative	Abdi Siad-Omar		√
Provincial/Federal Government	Vacant	Vacant	
Municipal (Upper Basin)	Not yet appointed		
Municipal (Middle Basin)	Gary Cromwell	Robb Minns	√
Municipal (Lower Basin)	Lorin Tkachuk		
Forestry	Dan Moore		√
Oil & Gas	Janice Linehan		√
Small Agricultural Producer	Marv Fyten		√
Agriculture	Vacant		
Mining/Utilities	Vacant		
Indigenous	Cleo Reece		√
Indigenous	Vacant		
Indigenous	Vacant		
Health or Environment	Morris Nesdole	Julie Hink	√
Health or Environment	Brian Deheer		√
Stewardship	Kendra Gilbert		√
Stewardship	Paula Evans	Alia Schamehorn	√
Research and Academia	Scott Ketcheson	Robert Holmberg	√
Member-at-Large	Tim Polzin		√
Member-at-Large	Laura Pekkola		√
Quorum = >50% filled seats (15) = 8			<b>13</b>
<b>Guests and Staff present:</b> Petra Rowell, AWC Executive Director Sarah MacDonald, Watershed Science Coordinator Ashley Johnson, Science and Outreach Coordinator			

**Call to Order**

**1. Administration**

**a. Introductions, health and safety, quorum met.**

As AWC President and meeting Chair, Dan Moore (Director, Forestry) called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. welcoming everyone, encouraging everyone to follow health and safety guidelines, confirming that quorum has been met and giving the following Treaty Lands acknowledgement:

*Athabasca Watershed Council acknowledges that the Athabasca watershed is located on Treaty 6, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 territories. The Athabasca Watershed Council respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Metis, Inuit people whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant watershed.*

The Chair then welcomed the new Director and Alternate for Athabasca County (Municipal, Mid-basin), Gary Cromwell and Rob Minns, respectively. He then invited a round table of introductions.

**b. Review and Approval of Agenda**

The Chair asked if there were any additions to the agenda. There were none. He then asked if there were any blocks to approving the agenda. There were none and the agenda was approved by consensus.

**2. New Business:**

**a. Presentation: Understanding water availability for wetlands and streams in the lower Athabasca River Basin, Dr. Scott Ketcheson, Canada Research Chair in Hydrological Sustainability, Athabasca University**

In an effort to gain a better understanding of some of the other initiatives in the basin and elsewhere that might inform us of our own work plans going forward, Dr. Scott Ketcheson, an AWC Director (Academia), was invited to provide an overview of his work studying hydrology and wetlands at the Stony Mountain Headwater Catchment Observatory south of Fort McMurray. Read a summary of the presentation on the Athabasca River Outflow Blog [here](#).

At the end of Scott's presentation, there were some discussion about how this work relates to Oilsands Monitoring work, AEP wetlands indicator work and other initiatives. (Note: this reinforces the role of the AWC to be a connector between various research and monitoring initiatives and the need for a story map or dashboard to show what initiatives are going on in the basin.)

There was also some discussion about what the big impacts to water quantity and quality will be in the future. Future changes in snowpack, land use, climate change etc. reinforce the need to improve our understanding of the contribution of tributary flows, how water flows over the landscape, contribution of tributaries to flow and water quality parameters like mercury, the implementation of water quality management frameworks, the importance of land use planning and adaptive management, etc. All of these areas are of interest to the AWC as it moves forward.

**b. Discussion: Resourcing the 2022-23 Strategic Plan**

Petra Rowell, AWC Executive Director, provided an overview of the current AWC three-year rolling strategic plan, including some of the current projects that contribute to achieving the strategies five goals. She reminded the board that they did a strategic planning session fairly recently and the vision, mission and goals still appear to be relevant and timely. Hence, she suggested that these components of the plan itself do not need updating, however, implementation actions to achieve the plan goals are limited by financial and human capacity. Hence, she encouraged the board to think about how to find more resources for implementing the plan. In particular, Petra encouraged board members to call or email her with their thoughts on the following questions:

- Are there potential opportunities available to us?
- How do we use existing strengths to better seize opportunities?

- What should staff be doing more of?
- What should board members be doing more of?
- How do we improve AWC relevancy?
- How do we gain more support for the AWC?
- Where would you like the AWC to be three years from now?

During the discussion, it was suggested that staff think about working with municipalities to do source water protection planning. More technical forums would also be beneficial. In regards to funding, it was suggested that staff develop a 'sales package'. Petra noted she had put together a folder of information and sent it out with a cover letter to all new Athabasca MPs in the Athabasca watershed. She will do something similar for MLAs and new municipal councils.

*Action: Board members to consider the strategic planning questions above and to share their thoughts with Petra via email or phone call.*

### **3. Reports and Outstanding Business:**

#### **a. Executive Director's Activity and Financial Report**

Petra pointed out that a quarterly report on staff and committee activities was circulated with the meeting agenda package, which also included financial statements. She asked if there were any questions. There were none and the report was accepted as presented.

#### **b. Approval of Sept. 16 Board Meeting minutes**

Petra noted that the minutes of the Sept. 16 board meeting were circulated with the meeting package. She then asked if there were any errors or additions to the minutes. There were none and the minutes were approved by consensus as presented.

*Action: Petra to post the approved Sept. 16 board meeting minutes to the AWC website.*

#### **c. Approval of Updated AWC Employee Handbook**

Petra noted that the HR Committee worked with a professional HR Consultant to update the AWC Employee Handbook to ensure it meets provincial standards. The committee approved draft was circulated to the board prior to this meeting. Petra asked if there was any edits to the document. Board members Morris Nesdole (Director, Environment; HR Committee Chair) and Robert Holmberg (Alternate, Academia) indicated they had a number of comments and could not approve the document. Given the time remaining in the meeting, it was agreed that all comments on the draft would be sent to Dan, who will work with staff to revise the document and provide it back to the board for approval at the next (February 2022) meeting.

*Action: Morris and Robert to provide comments on the Employee Guide to Dan who will bring the document back to the board in February 2022.*

#### **4. Round Table Updates**

- Paula Evans (Director, Stewardship) thanked staff for their involvement in the successful One Book – One Community program which saw a number of water-related activities in and around the Town of Athabasca. She also thanked Brian Deheer for his efforts to coordinate meetings between the environment and stewardship AWC directors and alternates.
- Laura Pekkola (Director, Member at Large) reminded the board she is a volunteer on a committee with a number of other WPACs working on a series of five ‘watershed 101’ videos. Production of these videos will occur in 2022.
- Brian Deheer (Director, Environment) commended staff for organizing the 2021 WPAC Summit which was well attended and well received by the Alberta WPAC community. He then provided an update on Healthy Waters Lac La Biche, where he is a board member, and who now hold a seat on the Alberta Water Council. Brian also mentioned a number of meetings and initiatives as per his report included as Appendix 1 with these minutes.

#### **5. Upcoming Meeting Dates**

- The next Board meeting is February 9, 2023 1:00 – 3:00 pm via zoom.
- Several board members encouraged staff to think about ways to better engage all members; consider scheduling meetings on weekends and evenings, and once the pandemic and capacity allows, meeting at locations around the basin (e.g., Fort Chipewyan). Also consider recording or finding other ways to share information provided in meetings.

#### **6. Meeting Adjourned**

The Chair adjourned the meeting shortly after 3:00 pm.

#### **Appendix 1. Report To: Athabasca Watershed Council Board From AWC Environment Sector Representative Brian Deheer, Date: 22 November, 2021**

- I am a member of the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) Board, and also sit on the AEN Water Caucus. The AEN Water Caucus holds monthly meetings, and I have attended them regularly for the past year.
- In these AEN Water Caucus meetings, I have heard from various groups about their concerns over the plans to release process water from tailings ponds into the Athabasca River.
- The AEN also has concerns about proposed coal mine expansions in the Hinton area, and the related potential impacts on fish habitat, particularly the endangered Athabasca Rainbow Trout.

- Re: Alberta Water Council: Healthy Waters Lac La Biche is now a member organization of the Alberta Water Council. I am now one of three Environment Sector representatives on the Alberta Water Council (AWC) Board, through the process upheld by contract between the AWC and AEN.
- The Alberta Water Council made an Indigenous relations training Webinar available to Board members, and I participated. It was very helpful and informative.
- I have attended numerous webinars, including most of the WPAC Summit sessions in October. I especially appreciated the session on Indigenous relations on October 8, 2021, which I thought was especially relevant in light of the inaugural September 30 Day of Reconciliation.
- On October 29 (the day of the last WPAC Summit session), I attended two other webinars that fell on the same day as the final WPAC session and overlapped with it a bit. First: the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (the CEC, an institution under the North American Free Trade Agreement, focussing on the environment), through its Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC), held a webinar titled “Sustainable management of transboundary waters: How to build successful collaborations.” The webinar included presentations from several excellent speakers, including Merrell-Ann Phare, one of the commissioners on the International Joint Commission. <http://www.cec.org/media/media-releases/join-us-for-the-jpac-public-forum-on-sustainable-management-of-transboundary-waters/>
- Also on October 29, I attended a webinar from the Environmental Law Centre’s “Reimagining Rivers: Rethinking and Reframing Relationship with the Environment” series. This series included a webinar in June titled “Magpie River as Person,” which regrettably I missed. The webinar on October 29 was “Animals as Legal Beings.” <https://elc.ab.ca/reimagining-rivers-animals-as-legal-beings/>
- I recently attended the “Water Is Life” conference, hosted and organized by the Keepers of the Water, an Indigenous-led, Indigenous-settler-partnership watershed advocacy group. The three-day online conference was excellent, featuring numerous speakers including northern Ontario MPP Sol Mamakwa, Maude Barlow, Winona LaDuke, and various Indigenous leaders and knowledge-holders.
- An article in the Alberta Wilderness Association’s Wildlands Advocate (Summer, 2021), by past AWC-WPAC Board member Carolyn Campbell, describes the recently concluded Moose Lake Access Management Plan for Fort McKay First Nation, regarding their Moose Lake traditional lands. This includes a landmark provision for a ten-kilometre special management zone around the Moose Lake Reserve lands, centred around Gardiner and Namur Lakes. (see article on p.23, <https://albertawilderness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Advocate-Summer-2021-Web.pdf>)



## Executive Director's Activity Report:

November 22 - February 9, 2022

### **Overview:**

- Despite the continued presence of the Covid pandemic, staff managed to enjoy the holiday break and are looking forward to a busy 2022 with both ongoing and several new projects and initiatives to look forward to.

### **Admin, HR, etc.:**

- Staff continue to work from home, with visits to the office as needed.
- Staff meetings are held most Monday mornings at 9:00 am via Zoom, with a review of any health and safety issues, workplans and meetings for the coming week(s), etc.

### **Education and Outreach Projects**

- December saw Ashley wrapping up the annual photo contest and production of the 2022 AWC calendar. You can read about the winners [here](#). You might also want to check out Ashley's [Year in Review](#) blog.
- Although we couldn't get together in person, staff did enjoy a zoom coffee talk just before the holidays. Many thanks to those board members who joined in. We also enjoyed the company of Lesser Slave Lake Watershed Council staff.
- In the new year, Ashley completed a traveling watershed display which is now open to the public at the library in Athabasca.
- Ashley continues to organize the monthly e-newsletter, social media posts, blog and website updates. Staff are adding resources to the website continuously – check out the new additions to the '[Monitoring and Research](#)' page.
- Ashley has taken on the role of promoting the Alberta-Wide Caring for our Watersheds contest in the Athabasca watershed. If board members know of any teachers that may be interested in a classroom presentation, they are encouraged to get in touch with Ashley.

### **Science projects:**

- After conducting fieldwork in the late fall, Sarah oversaw the packaging and shipment of benthic samples to our lab partners and is currently entering data into the CABIN website and preparing to host a Benthic Invertebrate webinar to share our results on February 22.
- On the riparian side, Sarah is gearing up for the 2022 field season. She continues to work on a state of the Pembina state of the watershed report, under the guidance of a Pembina Technical Working Group. She's also broadened her work to include the Tawatinaw watershed. Riparian data is currently being re—packaged into municipality specific reports that will be provided to



our county partners in the program. Sarah also made a presentation to the Northern Fly Fishers (Trout Unlimited Canada).

- Sarah has accepted an advisory role on the ALUS Program's Partnership Advisory Council for Athabasca County, County of Barrhead, Westlock County, and Thorhild County.
- The new year also brought the start of two new science projects which will keep all staff busy through until spring:
  - The Berland-Wildhay Watershed Connectivity [Planning initiative](#) will see the AWC convene a stakeholder group to look at waterbody crossing mitigation in this East Slopes watershed.
  - SAIT student Laura Nethery will be working with the AWC to conduct a Community Drinking Water Resilience survey project in the first quarter of 2022, as her 2<sup>nd</sup> year capstone project.
- Dan, Petra and Sarah continue to meet with other potential partners such as Alberta WaterSmart, the AEP Native Trout Working Group, and others to discuss potential collaborations, projects.

#### **Board:**

- Since their last meeting November 22, Board members have been busy with the review of several important documents including the updated Employee Handbook, the Integrated Watershed Management Plan, and the 2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan. Board input and participation on AWC activities between board meetings is very much appreciated.

#### **Committee Updates:**

##### **Executive Committee, Chair Dan Moore**

- The AWC Executive Committee meets with the Executive Director the first Thursday of every month to discuss day-to-day operations and to prepare the agenda and other materials for quarterly board meetings.

##### **Human Resources Committee, Chair vacant**

- The Employee Handbook was circulated to the board for one last review and should be approved by the board on Feb. 9, 2022. Once it is completed, the ED will continue to review other HR documents including contracts, job descriptions, etc.

##### **Technical Committee, Co-chairs Dan Moore and Robert Holmberg**

- The Technical Committee plans to meet at least quarterly in 2022-23 with the next few meetings (Feb. 4 & 15) looking at how the AWC can support the Upper and Lower Athabasca surface water quality management frameworks.

##### **Communications, Education and Community Engagement (CECE) Committee, Chair Paula Evans**

- The CECE Committee plans to meet quarterly in 2022-23 and held their first meeting January 24. The committee is working with Ashley to develop key messages and performance measures. They will also be overseeing the production of the Athabasca Dispatch quarterly newsletter.

**Other Partnerships:**

- Petra and Morris Nesdole continue to take part in the work of the Alberta Water Council with Morris representing all WPACs on their board as well as being on the drought and source water protection planning teams. The Alberta Water Council will be developing advice on a new Water for Life Action Plan to be completed by the fall of 2022.
- Petra meets and/or corresponds with the other WPAC managers regularly and attended an in-person managers meeting Nov. 30 in Camrose. The AWC, together with the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, took the lead in developing the annual WPAC Compendium. The board will be hearing more about the Alberta WPACs new Legislation and Policy initiative at the February board meeting.
- Ashley meets and/or corresponds with the other WPAC Education and Outreach coordinators regularly. The WPAC E/O Coordinators are organizing an Alberta-wide event for World Water Day, that will take place on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. We have already contacted speakers and are preparing advertisements for the event.
- AWC Director Laura Pekkola continues to support a WPAC project team developing a watershed 101 series of videos.



Staff Benefits Program	\$ 2,400.00	\$ 2,046.00							\$ 2,046.00
WCB Expense	\$ 300.00	\$ 368.00							\$ 368.00
sub contract	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 4,050.00							\$ 4,050.00
<b>Projects</b>									
Consulting Fees			\$ 101,014.25						\$ 101,014.25
Field and general supplies			\$ 723.89		\$ 4,939.95				\$ 5,663.84
<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$ 205,500.00</b>	<b>\$ 147,082.65</b>	<b>\$ 120,482.47</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 6,396.20</b>		<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 4,200.00</b>	<b>\$ 278,161.32</b>
<b>NET</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 53,596.15</b>	<b>\$ 94,060.67</b>	<b>\$ 27,500.00</b>	<b>-\$ 91.85</b>		<b>\$ 3,500.00</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 178,564.97</b>

**Cash on Hand Dec 31, 2021:**

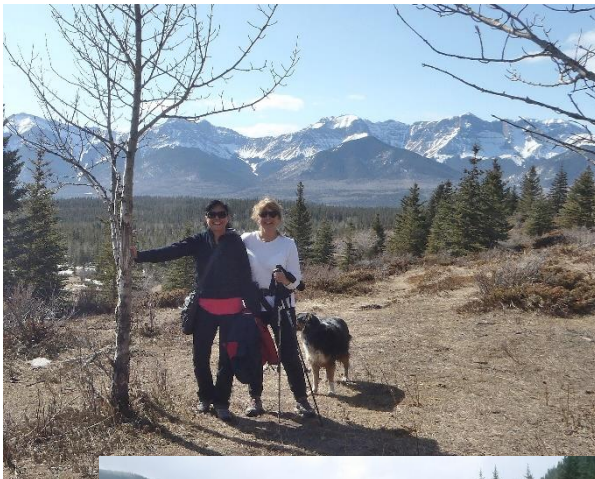
Core Operations Acct	\$ 177,256.88
T-Bill (interest bearing) Acct	\$ 71,170.23
GIC	<u>\$ 10,000.00</u>
	\$ 258,427.11
less \$ rec'd and committed	<u>\$ 177,886.17</u>
Unallocated	\$ 80,540.94

**Grant \$ received but not spent:**

WRRP	\$ 94,060.67
Pembina other	\$ 27,500.00
TD FEF	\$ 3,500.00
AEP core	<u>\$ 52,825.50</u>
	\$ 177,886.17



# EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK



Approved February 2022

# Table of Contents

<b>OVERVIEW</b> .....	4
Purpose of Employee Handbook .....	4
Welcome!.....	4
About Us .....	4
Mandate of the Athabasca Watershed Council.....	5
Vision, Mission and Values.....	5
AWC Board.....	6
Role of AWC Staff.....	6
Executive Director.....	6
Watershed Science & Communications & Outreach Coordinators .....	6
Administrative Support.....	7
Organization Chart.....	7
<b>CODE OF CONDUCT</b> .....	8
Purpose of the Code of Conduct.....	8
Improper Conduct.....	8
Conflicts of Interest.....	8
Technology Use.....	9
AWC Resources .....	9
Confidential Information .....	10
Privacy.....	10
Intellectual Property .....	11
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion .....	11
Open Communication .....	11
External Communication .....	11
Off-Duty Conduct .....	12
Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace .....	12
Respectful Workplace .....	13
Reporting a Complaint.....	14
<b>YOUR EMPLOYMENT</b> .....	15
Employment Type .....	15
Probation .....	15
Hours of Work.....	15

Flexible Work Arrangements .....	16
Remote Work.....	16
Overtime .....	16
Payroll .....	16
Professional Development.....	17
Expense Reimbursement .....	17
Performance Management.....	18
Health Care Spending Account .....	18
Compensation.....	18
Ending Employment.....	19
<b>TIME OFF FROM WORK.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Personal Days.....	19
Statutory Holidays.....	19
Vacation .....	20
Long-Term Illness and Injury Leave.....	20
Maternity and Parental Leave.....	21
Bereavement Leave .....	21
Compassionate Care Leave .....	22
Personal and Family Responsibility Leave .....	22
Other Job Protected Leaves.....	23
Personal Leave of Absence .....	23
<b>WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Safety Statement .....	23
Responsibilities .....	24
Incident and Injury Reporting .....	24
Refusal to Work.....	25
<b>EMPLOYEE RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....</b>	<b>26</b>

# OVERVIEW

## Purpose of Employee Handbook

The Employee Handbook was developed to help you understand our organization, culture, opportunities and some of the behaviour that the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC or Council) expects of all employees. The Handbook is not a contract of employment nor is it intended to create contractual obligations of any kind with the AWC. The Handbook rather aims to describe the standards while conducting AWC business.

The need may arise periodically to change the information within the Employee Handbook. The Council reserves the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any portion(s) of the Handbook at any time. The Athabasca Watershed Council will make every effort to notify you of any official change in policy or procedure. The onus is however on you to know, understand, and adhere to the practices/rules in the Handbook.

Any questions regarding the content of the Handbook should be directed to your direct manager.

## Welcome!

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Executive Director and your fellow employees, welcome to the Athabasca Watershed Council!

We are excited to have you as part of our team and wish you every success here. You were hired because we believe you share our commitment to our vision and mission and can contribute to the achievement of our goals. We believe that each employee contributes directly to the Council's growth and success, and we hope you will take pride in being a member of our team.

This handbook was developed to describe some of the expectations of our employees and to outline the policies, programs, and benefits available to eligible employees. Employees should familiarize themselves with the contents of the Employee Handbook as soon as possible for it will answer many questions about employment at the Athabasca Watershed Council. Additionally, the Handbook should assure good management and fair treatment of all employees.

We hope that your experience here will be challenging, enjoyable, and rewarding.

## About Us

The Athabasca River stretches from the Columbia Glacier in the Columbia Icefields in the Rocky Mountains, to where it meets Lake Athabasca in north-eastern Alberta. Looking from the height of land, the Athabasca watershed, including both the Athabasca River and Lake Athabasca, drains an area of approximately 100,000 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>), of which 90% is in Alberta (with the remainder in Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories). As Alberta's second-largest watershed, the Athabasca watershed accounts for about 24% of the provincial landmass. In turn, it is a sub-basin of the larger Mackenzie River watershed.



As a designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC), the AWC works in partnership with the Government of Alberta, industry, municipalities, non-government organizations, indigenous communities, and residents to achieve Alberta’s *Water for Life* strategy goals. This work includes building relationships, generating and sharing information, supporting education and stewardship, and undertaking watershed assessment and planning for that portion of the Athabasca watershed within Alberta.

## Mandate of the Athabasca Watershed Council

The AWC is a multi-stakeholder registered charity with the Canada Revenue Agency and a not-for-profit society registered under the *Societies Act* of Alberta. It is also one of several Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPAC) created under the Government of Alberta’s Water for Life strategy. As such, the AWC is committed to carrying out the four roles of a WPAC, as well as the achievement of the strategy’s three goals and three key directions in the Athabasca watershed in Alberta.

OUTCOMES	KEY DIRECTIONS	WPAC ROLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe, secure drinking water supply</li> <li>• Healthy aquatic ecosystems</li> <li>• Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and research</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Water conservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenor and Collaborator</li> <li>• Education and Literacy</li> <li>• Policy and Planning</li> <li>• Monitoring and Reporting</li> </ul>

## Vision, Mission and Values

### Vision

The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, socially responsible, and economically sustainable.

### Mission

The Athabasca Watershed Council demonstrates leadership and facilitates informed decision-making in the Athabasca 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.

### Shared Values

- We value integrity, trust, and transparency.
- We respect all points of view.
- Water is a blessing and gift and is essential for the environment, society, economy, and 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.

## AWC Board

The AWC is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of up to 21 members. This includes seats for federal/provincial (2) and municipal (3) governments, Indigenous communities (3), industry (5), non-governmental organizations (5), members-at-large (2), and the past-chairman (1).

## Role of AWC Staff

AWC employees are an integral part of the AWC organization. Staff provide support to the Board and its committees, as well as implementing AWC programs and projects. Staff members may include an Executive Director, Watershed Science and Communications and Outreach Coordinators, and other project and administrative support staff. All staff are committed to the collective good of the AWC and act as custodians and facilitators of the consensus-based process. They will also be expected to communicate to external audiences on behalf of the AWC.

### Executive Director

The Executive Director (ED) is responsible and accountable for, but not limited to, managing and maintaining the staff and the overall administration of the AWC. The ED is responsible and accountable to the Board for the implementation of Board policies and decisions. The ED reports to the Board through the Executive Committee. The ED acts as an advisor to the Board and Board Committees.

### Watershed Science & Communications & Outreach Coordinators

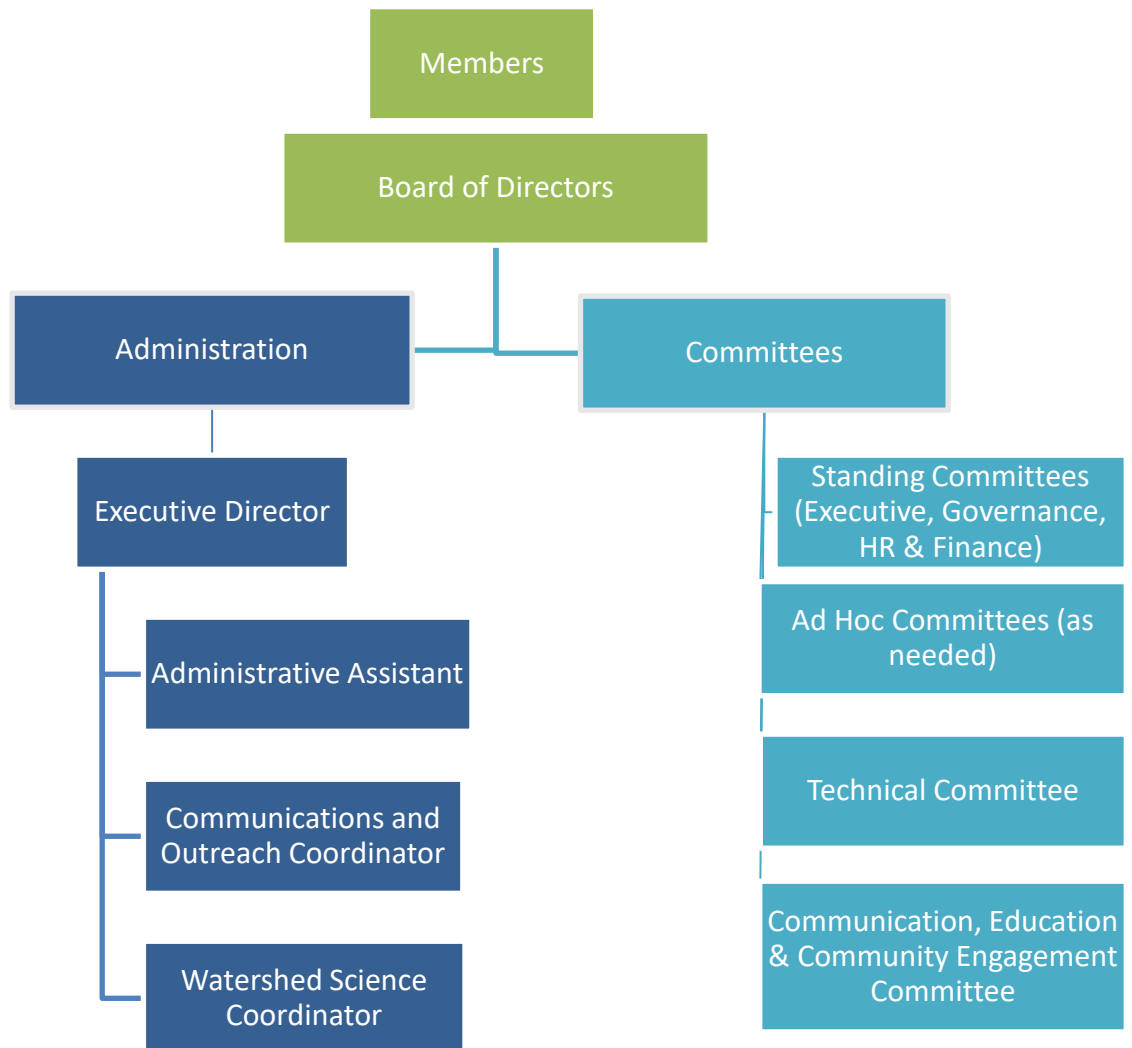
Coordinators may be assigned to an AWC Board committee to provide logistical support and capacity to undertake work. They may also be given projects to manage on their own. Coordinators report to the ED.

## Administrative Support

Administrative staff report to the ED and are responsible for a range of duties to support the ED and operations of the AWC.

All positions have a job description outlining the duties and responsibilities of the role.

## Organization Chart



# CODE OF CONDUCT

## Purpose of the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct was established to better explain the Athabasca Watershed Council's expectations of conduct of all employees.

This Code contains only general information and guidelines. It is not intended to be comprehensive or to address all possible applications of, or exceptions to, the general policies and procedures described. For that reason, any questions concerning personal applicability of any policy or practice should be addressed to your direct manager.

## Improper Conduct

The Athabasca Watershed Council recognizes the importance of establishing and communicating the boundaries applicable to govern employee behaviour. A fundamental principle is an expectation that all individuals, co-workers, members, volunteers, business acquaintances, the public, and property be treated with respect. We expect that you respect the rights and feelings of others and demonstrate personal integrity and professionalism. Employees must always:

- Carry out business dealings in a fair, consistent and honourable manner;
- Act with integrity and without any form of prejudice or favouritism, remaining neutral on all water issues to avoid favouring or being seen to favour any one sector;
- Consider the interests of the AWC first in all business transactions;
- Make purchases on behalf of the AWC without prejudice and at maximum value;
- Avoid using their connection with the AWC or authority for any form of personal gain;
- Deal with utmost honesty and integrity and never participate in improper or questionable business practices;
- Comply 100% with all laws.

The AWC will not tolerate violations of the Athabasca Watershed Council's Code of Conduct.

## Conflicts of Interest

The Athabasca Watershed Council, our members, and the outside world have high expectations of integrity. It is important that a high standard of ethical, moral, and legal conduct be upheld at all times.

A conflict of interest occurs when you use your position at the Council to your personal or private advantage or the advantage of friends or family members. You are responsible for declaring any potential, perceived, or actual conflict of interest to your direct manager.

Conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging in outside work that interferes with your primary job due to your work hours or attendance;
- Making use of Council facilities, equipment, labour, or supplies to conduct outside work;
- Accepting a retainer, commission, consulting fee, or any other fee arrangement or remuneration on behalf of the AWC;
- Accepting a gift with a monetary value of \$50 or greater on behalf of the AWC without management approval;
- Giving preferential treatment to friends or family while conducting business on behalf of the AWC; or
- Acting in a governance capacity without approval of the AWC Board for an organization that has, or is perceived to have, a relationship with the Council.

In the event that you discover a potential or actual conflict or you accept outside employment, you must advise your direct manager immediately.

## Technology Use

All employees are expected to use our computer systems professionally and appropriately.

The computer hardware, software, electronic mail, internet access, voice mail, Council cell phones, and other computer or electronic communications or data storage systems (“computer systems”) are the property of the AWC.

The computer systems have been provided by the AWC for use in conducting operations. All communications and information transmitted by, received from, or stored in these systems are Council records and the property of the AWC. Use of computer systems for personal purposes is prohibited unless approved by your direct manager.

You have no right to personal privacy in any matter stored in, created, received, or sent over the computer systems. The Athabasca Watershed Council may exercise its right to monitor its computer systems for any reason and without your permission.

Accessing the internet is permitted for business reasons. You are asked to limit personal browsing to breaks, always exercising good judgement.

## AWC Resources

AWC recognizes the importance of providing employees with the resources to perform their jobs effectively.

All AWC-provided field and office equipment, computers, phones, systems, and all other like items are considered Council property, furnished to you for business purposes only. You are prohibited from unauthorized possession or personal use of property owned by the Council without the approval of your direct manager.

## Confidential Information

The Athabasca Watershed Council recognizes that employees will come into contact with confidential information and impresses upon the employee's responsibility to always use good judgment to safeguard sensitive Council information.

We define confidential information as any information that would put the Council at a disadvantage if improperly communicated or information that cannot be communicated due to contractual or legal obligations. This could include but is not limited to contract details, internal or third-party data, and financial information.

In the course of day-to-day business, you may encounter confidential personal information, including information on our board members, members, volunteers, contractors, or employees. You have a responsibility to use good judgment and protect this information.

You are required to keep any such matters confidential that may be disclosed to or learned by you. All confidential printed materials must be stored in a secure location until shredded.

## Privacy

The Athabasca Watershed Council is committed to safeguarding the personal information entrusted to us.

The organization is guided by Alberta's *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA). The Act defines personal information as identifiable information about an individual. This includes name, home address, phone number, age, sex, marital or family status, financial information, and educational history.

The AWC collects, uses, and discloses your personal information to establish, manage, or end the employment relationship. We will notify you should we need to collect, use, or disclose your personal information for any other purpose.

The Council will make reasonable efforts to ensure that personal information is accurate, complete, and up to date as is necessary for the purposes for which it is to be used. The AWC will protect personal information with safeguards appropriate to the sensitivity of the information.

Upon written request, the AWC will inform you of the existence, use, and disclosure of your personal information, and will give you access to that personal information, ~~except~~ to the extent that non-disclosure is permitted by PIPA. If the AWC decides not to provide such access, the Council will provide an explanation. You may challenge the accuracy and completeness of your personal information and have it amended appropriately.

Any concern, inquiry or request related to privacy should be made in writing to the Executive Director.

## Intellectual Property

The Athabasca Watershed Council recognizes the importance of protecting its intellectual property and requires its employees to do the same.

Any product, technology, system, program, service, process, or methodology that you develop relating to your employment with the AWC during or outside working hours, on or off of Council premises, becomes the property of the Council. Such information should not be removed from the premises, nor divulged to anyone other than authorized persons, and should be used for the benefit of the AWC only.

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

The Athabasca Watershed Council is committed to recognizing and respecting human differences and similarities.

All decisions pertaining to recruitment, hiring, training, transfers, dismissals, layoffs, compensation, hours of work, benefits, performance reviews, and all other terms and conditions of employment are made without regard to race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income, sexual orientation and other future protected ground which may be written into Alberta Human Rights legislation. You are expected to treat all employees, contractors, volunteers, members, and business acquaintances with dignity and respect and in a fair and non-discriminatory manner.

## Open Communication

The success of the Athabasca Watershed Council is based on teamwork. It is important that we openly communicate with each other in a positive and respectful manner.

We encourage you to take what may be a difficult step to discuss conflict openly. Our "Open Communication" policy encourages direct communication between employees and with management to resolve problems. Sensitive issues or frustrations arising in the workplace should be discussed respectfully with any person who can help to resolve the challenge to ensure resolution at an early stage.

If you believe an issue cannot be resolved through discussion with your co-worker or direct manager, you may escalate the issue to the Executive Director.

## External Communication

Council information released externally must be controlled in such a way as to protect and preserve the Athabasca Watershed Council's interest.

There may be opportunities or situations when you are approached to publish, interview, discuss, or present on behalf of the AWC. It is important to our brand and legal requirements that all external

communication on behalf of the Council be pre-approved. Written or electronic approvals must be obtained from the Executive Director before proceeding with the following:

- All external communication distributed via the general media (including newspapers, magazines, radio and TV) or by printed media (including brochures, brochures, leaflets and direct mail);
- Literature and other such material relating to the AWC or its services;
- Electronic communication, including but not limited to: electronic versions of any of the print media mentioned above, social media platforms, blogs, chat rooms, forums, comment boards, videos, email, and text messages;
- Speeches, interviews, and other discussions with members of industry organizations or professional associations; or
- Commenting to the press.

## Off-Duty Conduct

The Athabasca Watershed Council takes pride in its reputation within the community and is committed to creating an environment free of inappropriate conduct by its employees.

You are a representative of the AWC and what you do away from work, including the use of social media, could negatively impact our organization. As such, your off-duty behaviour must not:

- Damage the organization's reputation and goodwill within the community;
- Materially and adversely affect your job performance or the job performance of other individuals;
- Divulge private information regarding AWC to any person or entity that is not authorized to receive such information;
- Make libellous, slanderous, or maliciously false statements towards or concerning the AWC or of its employees, contractors, volunteers, members or strategies.

## Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace

The Athabasca Watershed Council aims to provide a work environment that is healthy and comfortable for all employees. As per Alberta's *Tobacco, Smoking and Vaping Reduction Act*, the AWC office is a smoke- and vaping-free public workplace.

The moderate use of alcohol during social business situations such as business dinners, parties and trips is allowed. However, Employees should use caution and always ensure they have a designated driver or make use of cab services the cost of which will be reimbursed by the AWC.

Please also keep in mind that during such social events, you may be interacting with colleagues, volunteers, members, and business acquaintances. You are an ambassador for the organization and are expected to behave as such at all times. Alcohol or drug abuse in business-related situations is not acceptable.

Employees believed to be impaired during work hours due to drugs or alcohol may be asked to leave the premises and not return to work until indicated by the Executive Director. Employees found to



be repeatedly impaired during work hours due to drugs or alcohol and who refuse help, may have their employment terminated immediately with cause. The Council supports treatment for drug or alcohol dependency through programs available in the community.

You must notify your direct manager should you use prescription or over-the-counter drugs that may impair your ability to perform your job or affect the safety or well-being of others.

## Respectful Workplace

The Athabasca Watershed Council is committed to the principle that employees are entitled to a work environment free of conduct that in any way diminishes their safety or dignity.

Workplace harassment and violence may be found to be directed to and by any person in the workplace. It may be subtle or overt, and abuse may be deliberate or unintended. Events may be a single incident or a series of incidents. Abuse can affect both men and women and may be directed by or towards employees, contractors, volunteers, members, business acquaintances, and the public.

Workplace harassment is defined as a single or repeated incident of objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comment, bullying, or action intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group. It's a serious issue and creates an unhealthy work environment, resulting in psychological harm to workers.

Harassment can include verbal or physical abuse, threats, derogatory remarks, jokes, innuendo, or taunts. Sexual harassment can include unwanted or unsolicited physical contact, leering, dirty jokes, pictures or pornographic materials, comments, suggestions, innuendos, requests, or demands of a sexual nature. It does not include any reasonable conduct of an employer or a manager related to the normal management of employees. Differences of opinion or minor disagreements between co-workers are also not generally considered to be workplace harassment if steps are taken to resolve the conflict.

Violence, whether at a work site or work-related, is defined as the threatened, attempted or actual conduct of a person that causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological injury or harm. It can include:

- physical attack or aggression
- threatening behaviour
- verbal or written threats
- domestic violence
- sexual violence
- all other forms of harassment

If an inappropriate situation arises:

- Address the individual if you are comfortable doing so, to let them know that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask them to stop;

- Report the incident. If the behaviour persists, report it to the Executive Director. Should you not be comfortable reporting the incident to the Executive Director, you may do so to the Human Resources (HR) Committee Chair;
- Once a complaint is received, an investigation may be undertaken. In most cases, both the complainant and the individual who is alleged to have acted inappropriately are interviewed along with any persons who may be able to provide relevant information;
- Where warranted, the Council will promptly take corrective measures which could include counselling, discipline, or dismissal;
- If required, the Council may take additional steps to address an issue, depending on the specifics of the situation and on the advice of the HR Committee, the Board, or other solicited expertise.

When filing a formal report of an incident, record details of the incident, the nature of the incident(s), and the name(s) of any person(s) who may have witnessed the incident(s).

All employees have a responsibility to cooperate with efforts to investigate and resolve matters pertaining to this policy. The complainant is assured that no complaint under this policy made in good faith will subject the complainant to reprisal of any kind. Reprisals will not be tolerated and disciplinary action may be taken against those who engage in such activity.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible to carry out an investigation, take corrective action, or to inform employees of a threat or potential threat.

## Reporting a Complaint

We ask that you report any instances of unprofessional conduct encountered at the Athabasca Watershed Council. We value an open environment in which we discuss our problems, concerns, and challenges with the appropriate person.

To resolve such matters efficiently and effectively, the AWC recommends the following process:

Problems or concerns should be discussed with your direct manager. Quite often, a solution can be found in a short time. With complicated situations, time may be needed and appropriate methods utilized to resolve the problem.

If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily, or you are not comfortable discussing your problems or concerns with your direct manager, you may submit a written statement to the Executive Director. Should you not be comfortable submitting a written statement to the Executive Director, you may do so to the HR Committee Chair.

Your concern will be directed appropriately within the Council as required. You will be advised as to any referral of your concern and kept updated on the status.

The Athabasca Watershed Council strives to resolve disputes in the manner described above. As every situation is unique, the Council may at times deviate from these steps.

# YOUR EMPLOYMENT

## Employment Type

Each employee at the Athabasca Watershed is classified into an appropriate employment type to provide consistency in the administration of payroll and the application of Council guidelines.

The employment types are:

- Salaried full-time employees: defined as employees who work 36.25 hours per week and are paid a regular salary.
- Hourly full-time employees: defined as employees who work 36.25 hours per week and are paid by the hour.
- Hourly part-time employees: defined as employees who work variable hours as scheduled by their direct manager and are paid hourly.

Employment may be for an agreed upon term or for an indeterminate duration.

## Probation

A probationary period allows for a period of time for a new employee and the Athabasca Watershed Council to evaluate suitability.

Your first ninety (90) days of employment are probationary. During this time, employment may be terminated by either party for any reason, with or without cause, and without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

Employees may be required to provide the AWC with a current driver's abstract and/or clear criminal record check.

You can expect your direct manager to conduct an informal review of your performance at the end of this period.

## Hours of Work

The Athabasca Watershed Council's objective is to effectively manage operations while supporting employees in achieving a balance between work and personal life.

The AWC full-time staff generally work Monday through Friday, 7.25 hours per day from 8:15 am to 4:30 pm resulting in a 36.25 work week. The Council covers two fifteen (15) minute breaks in those hours with a one (1) hour unpaid lunch break. Part-time staff work variable hours as scheduled by their direct manager. Changes to your schedule require your direct manager's approval.

While the specifics outlined in this section are generally the standard, you may also be expected to work different or additional hours (including evenings or weekends) from time-to-time as requested by your direct manager.

The AWC captures all employee hours with the use of timesheets. Timesheets are completed monthly and submitted the last business day of the month. The timesheet record includes hours

worked, holidays, banked time accrued and used, and personal days. Timesheets must be approved by your direct manager.

## Flexible Work Arrangements

The Athabasca Watershed Council also recognizes that employees may require flexible hours of work. ~~We ask that you~~You must obtain your direct manager's approval in advance should you wish to make a change to the standard work schedule.

## Remote Work

Working from home is a work arrangement in which an Athabasca Watershed Council employee may be able to perform work from a home office on a regular or occasional basis.

While there may be benefits to working from home, it may not be a feasible option for all employees. Not all employees have the job responsibility, discipline, or off-site work environment conducive to working away from our offices. (Note the AWC office is currently located in the Town of Athabasca, however this may change from time to time.)

Remote work requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and must be approved in advance by your direct manager.

## Overtime

While the Athabasca Watershed Council encourages work/life balance, it may be necessary at times for employees to work overtime.

All overtime must be authorized in writing by your direct manager in advance of being worked. Any hours above 7.25 hours in a day or 36.25 hours in a week for those working a standard work week will be compensated with banked time.

You will be required to sign an overtime agreement and will receive time off with pay (banked time) in accordance with Alberta Employment Standards. All banked time must be taken within 6 months of the end of the pay period in which it was earned and with the approval of your direct manager. Staff are only allowed to accrue 2 weeks' worth of overtime before they must take some time off to reduce their total.

Please note that some positions are exempt from overtime, including directors, managers, and some professional positions.

## Payroll

The AWC processes payroll monthly for electronic payment on the last business day of each month for the time period preceding the payment as per submitted timesheets.

## Professional Development

The Athabasca Watershed Council supports the professional development of its employees.

You are encouraged to seek professional development opportunities that meet the requirements of your current role and the needs of the organization. Please submit your request in writing to the Executive Director. Your request should include:

- description of the professional development opportunity;
- benefits to you and the Council;
- costs inclusive of registration/tuition, books, travel, and accommodation.

Each request will be judged on its own merit by the Executive Director and will be subject to the availability of funds and the needs of the AWC. You may be required to sign a tuition reimbursement agreement depending on the nature and cost of your professional development request.

## Expense Reimbursement

The Athabasca Watershed Council reimburses expenses incurred while employees are conducting business activities.

You are expected to act responsibly and professionally when incurring and submitting costs. Expenses are to be approved in advance by your direct manager. You will be reimbursed for reasonable expenses on the submission of the original receipts and a completed expense claim. Alcoholic beverages are not reimbursable unless pre-approved by the Executive Director.

### Meals

Meals may be claimed when travelling and when at meetings for any meals not provided. Meal amounts may be claimed as per the AWC Expense Rate Sheet (Appendix 1).

An employee must not claim a meal allowance if a meal is provided at no cost unless the employee declines the meal because of a demonstrated dietary restriction.

### Travel Costs

Travel costs by private vehicle will be reimbursed based on the most direct and cost-effective route and will be reimbursed as per the AWC Expense Rate Sheet. Receipts are required for other reasonable transport costs such as airfare, parking, rentals, and taxis.

### Accommodation Expenses

Reasonable accommodation expenses will be reimbursed on submission of a paid receipt. Private accommodations without a receipt will be paid as per the AWC Expense Rate Sheet.

### Per Diem Costs

Per diem rates for each 24-hour period while on travel status can be claimed as per the AWC Expense Rate Sheet.

## Performance Management

The Athabasca Watershed Council is committed to continuously identifying, measuring, and developing employee performance in alignment with the key goals of the Council.

Your direct manager is responsible for supporting you in setting goals, providing feedback, offering professional development opportunities, formally reviewing your progress, and recognizing your achievements. Your direct manager will formally review your performance annually in December. A process, instructions, criteria, etc. will be made available to staff via AWC performance evaluation forms.<sup>1</sup>

Ongoing and/or serious performance issues may be considered a disciplinary matter and will normally lead to a verbal warning, a written warning, a suspension, and culminating in dismissal should the performance issue not be corrected. Problems of a more serious nature may require more immediate and severe corrective action.

## Health Care Spending Account

The Athabasca Watershed Council supports the health and well-being of employees by offering a Health Care Spending Account.

Full-time permanent employees are eligible for this benefit after three months of service. An annual health care spending allowance of \$1,500 is available for full-time employees. Allowances are replenished annually on January 1st.

Please see the Executive Director for further details or enrolment.

## Compensation

The Athabasca Watershed Council's compensation structure is intended to allow us to retain, motivate, and develop talented employees who share our values and contribute to our success.

Salary and wage increases are recommended by the Executive Director to the Board of Directors for approval.

Your compensation is a confidential matter and we ask that details of your individual compensation remain confidential. ~~Other than to~~ You are welcome to discuss any issues of concern ~~compensation matters~~ with the Executive Director.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that while the Executive Director also goes through a performance review in December, the process for this is described in the AWC Administrator's Guide and or on the AWC Executive Director's Evaluation Performance form.

## Ending Employment

While the Athabasca Watershed Council strives to maintain positive and long-term relationships with its employees, situations may arise in which the relationship must come to an end.

Should it become necessary to terminate employment with just cause, no notice of termination or pay in lieu of notice will be issued. Should your employment be terminated without cause after the expiration of your probationary period, the AWC will provide you with either working notice or pay in lieu of notice, or a combination of notice and pay in lieu of notice equal to the requirements under the applicable provincial employment standards legislation and/or your employment contract, if specified.

Should you choose to resign from your employment with the Council, you are to provide your direct manager with two (2) weeks' written notice.

Any AWC property issued, such as computer equipment, keys, parking passes, or a Council credit card must be returned to your direct manager.

## TIME OFF FROM WORK

### Personal Days

The Athabasca Watershed Council recognizes that there will be times when you are unable to attend work due to sickness, injury, or unplanned personal or family situations requiring your immediate care and attention.

To assist you in these situations, you are entitled to up to eight (8) paid personal days annually when an absence from work is required due to sickness, injury, appointments, and other personal obligations. Entitlements for part-time and new employees will be pro-rated to reflect the hours or time worked. Any additional days off will be deducted from your pay unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director.

Personal Days must be requested and approved in advance by your direct manager. You are asked to report an unanticipated absence before the start of your workday or as soon as reasonably possible.

Personal Days are allotted annually on January 1st of each calendar year. There is no pay out or carry-over of unused Personal Days should an employee not use their full entitlement. Employees will not be paid out for accrued Personal Days should they leave the Council for any reason.

### Statutory Holidays

The Athabasca Watershed Council supports employees observing public holidays. Full-time employees are given paid time off for the following statutory holidays:

- New Year's Day

- Family Day
- Good Friday
- Easter Monday
- Victoria Day
- Canada Day
- Heritage Day
- Labour Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Remembrance Day
- Christmas Day
- Boxing Day

Should any of these days fall on a Saturday or Sunday, the holiday will be observed on the Friday immediately before or the Monday immediately after, as determined by the Executive Director.

Part-time employees are paid out statutory holiday pay on each paycheque.

## Vacation

The Athabasca Watershed Council understands the importance of time off. You are encouraged to use the vacation time earned each year for rest, relaxation, and personal pursuits.

Vacation is accrued on each paycheque for salaried employees and paid out on each paycheque for hourly employees. Vacation entitlement is based upon your service as follows:

- Two weeks after the first year of employment, and
- Three weeks after three years of continuous service.

Vacation entitlement may be granted early to mature hires with relevant industry experience. This is at the discretion of the Executive Director. You may carry over a maximum of 10 (ten) days of vacation into the next calendar year provided the time is taken within the first 6 (six) months. Any vacation time not carried over will be paid out in the first pay period of the calendar year.

All vacation time will be pre-approved by your direct manager. On termination of employment, any vacation accrued but not taken will be paid out.

## Long-Term Illness and Injury Leave

The Athabasca Watershed Council supports employees who are required to take extended leave due to illness or injury.

The AWC does not offer short-term disability benefits but will provide you with up to sixteen (16) weeks of unpaid time off subject to receipt of a medical certificate issued by a physician.

Employment Insurance (EI) provides long-term illness and injury benefits to individuals who are unable to work because of sickness, injury, or quarantine. Contact Service Canada Employment Insurance for more information.



You must provide your direct manager with notice as soon as reasonably possible in writing of the date the leave begins and the expected date of return.

You are required to provide your direct manager with a minimum of one (1) weeks' notice upon your expected return. You may be asked to provide a Medical Ability to Work form upon your return.

When you return to work, your employment is guaranteed in a similar position at the same salary level. Employees on this leave are considered to be continuously employed for the purpose of calculating years of service.

## Maternity and Parental Leave

The Athabasca Watershed Council celebrates your growing family.

Maternity leave is unpaid leave granted to a female employee for pregnancy, delivery, and care of her new-born child. Parental leave is unpaid leave granted to either parent caring for their new-born or adopted child.

Any employee who gives birth or adopts a child and who has been employed by the Council for at least 90 days prior to the date on which the leave period is to begin, is eligible to take a leave of absence in accordance with Alberta law (up to a maximum of 78 weeks).

The full period of the leave is granted without pay. The AWC will issue a Record of Employment on commencement of leave which allows you to make a claim for maternity or parental benefits under the federal Employment Insurance program. Contact Service Canada Employment Insurance for more information.

At least six (6) weeks' written notice is required before commencing leave unless this is not reasonably possible due to a medical condition or circumstances related to an adoption. You must provide at least four (4) weeks' written notice to return to work or to change the date you will be returning to work.

Your employment is guaranteed in a similar position at the same pay upon your return. Employees on this leave are considered to be continuously employed for the purpose of calculating years of service

## Bereavement Leave

The Athabasca Watershed Council recognizes the impact that the death of a loved one has on an individual and supports employees who are coping with this situation.

A maximum of five (5) days of paid leave will be allowed for bereavement for a spouse, common-law spouse, child, parent, guardian, sibling, grandchild, or parents-in-law for permanent full-time employees. A maximum of one (1) day of paid leave is granted for attending the funeral of friends or family not listed above. Only scheduled workdays will be eligible for payment of bereavement leave.

Paid or additional time off for special circumstances may be approved by your direct manager.

## Compassionate Care Leave

The Athabasca Watershed Council is committed to supporting an employee who needs time away from work to care for a family member facing a life-threatening illness or injury.

Compassionate Care Leave provides up to twenty-seven (27) weeks unpaid leave to provide emotional support, arrange health care, or directly provide health care to an ill family member who has a significant risk of death within twenty-six (26) weeks. The full period of the leave is granted without pay.

For the purposes of this leave, a family member means:

- An employee's spouse or common-law partner (who is a person who has cohabited with the employee in a conjugal relationship for a period of at least one year);
- A child of an employee or a child of an employee's spouse or common-law partner;
- A parent of an employee or a parent of an employee's spouse or common-law partner.

The Compassionate Care Leave benefit is a benefit provided by Employment Insurance administered by Service Canada. Please note that the number of weeks of leave exceeds the Employment Insurance benefit length by one (1) week in recognition of the waiting period. Contact Service Canada Employment Insurance for more information.

You must provide your direct manager with two (2) weeks' written notice of the date compassionate leave begins and the expected date of return unless you are unable to do so, in which case the notice must be provided as soon as is reasonable and practicable under the circumstances.

Compassionate care leave may be taken over more than one period, but no period may be less than one week in duration.

You are required to provide your direct manager with a minimum of one (1) weeks' notice upon your expected return.

When you return to work, your employment is guaranteed in a similar position at the same pay. Employees on this leave are considered to be continuously employed, for the purpose of calculating years of service.

## Personal and Family Responsibility Leave

The Athabasca Watershed Council supports employees who have personal and family responsibilities to attend to by providing time off.

You are eligible for up to five (5) days of unpaid leave in each calendar year for personal sickness or short-term care of an immediate family member. Attending to personal emergencies and caregiving responsibilities related to the education of a child are included. This leave is in addition to the AWC's Personal Days policy.

Immediate family members are defined as:

- Partner (spouse, adult interdependent or common-law)

- Parents, foster parents, guardians
- Children, foster children, wards, partner’s children
- Siblings
- Grandchildren
- Grandparents
- Any other person living with you as a member of their family.

When you return to work, your employment is guaranteed in a similar position at the same pay.

## Other Job Protected Leaves

The Athabasca Watershed Council offers several other types of job-protected employment leave including domestic violence leave, citizenship ceremony leave, child or family member critical illness leave, reservist leave, and death or disappearance of child leave.

Most job-protected leave under Employment Standards are unpaid. However, an employee who wishes to take such leave may be eligible for Employment Insurance. Contact Service Canada toll-free at 1-800-206-7218 for more information.

For more details on the leaves available to you, please refer to provincial employment standards.

## Personal Leave of Absence

The Athabasca Watershed Council understands that an employee may require a leave of absence for personal and/or educational obligations.

You must make your request for unpaid personal leave of absence in writing to your direct manager.

Your needs and the needs of the AWC will be considered when determining whether to approve your leave request. Vacation entitlement must be used before a personal leave of absence is taken.

The Council is under no obligation to provide you with your job or a comparable job at the conclusion of your leave.

# WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

## Safety Statement

The Athabasca Watershed Council, you, and your co-workers must take reasonable precautions to ensure that the workplace is safe. The AWC complies with all requirements for creating a healthy and safe workplace in accordance with the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Regulations, and Codes.

You are entitled to three basic rights under the Alberta OHS Act:

- Right to know about potential hazards and have access to basic health & safety information on site;
- Right to participate in workplace health and safety discussions and health & safety committees;
- Right to refuse dangerous work and protection from any form of reprisal for exercising such right.

## Responsibilities

The Athabasca Watershed Council demonstrates its commitment to providing a healthy and safe workplace by:

- Taking reasonable steps to prevent injuries
- Complying with Workers Compensation Board (WCB) regulations
- Implementing safety precautions to protect employees and assets
- Providing you with applicable safety training
- Encouraging your participation in our health and safety culture
- Responding to your ideas, questions, or concerns regarding safety
- Enforcing all established safety regulations and work methods
- Providing an Emergency Response Plan and communicating your responsibility to read and be aware of the plan.

As an employee, you are expected to take an active part in maintaining this environment. You are expected to observe all posted safety rules, wear appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), and adhere to all safety instructions provided by your direct manager. Please note that the cost of some PPE may be reimbursed by the AWC, if approved prior to purchase. The workplace should be kept neat, clean, and orderly. You must report any accidents or injuries, and report any unsafe equipment, working condition, process or procedure, immediately to your direct manager.

It is your responsibility to read and understand the Emergency Response Plan. It is also your duty to know the location of all emergency exits, fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and first aid stations.

## Incident and Injury Reporting

Understanding all health and safety related incidents is critical to ensuring corrective action is taken.

Incidents will be investigated by the Athabasca Watershed Council. These may include:

- Unsafe Conditions
- Unsafe Behaviour
- Major Incidents
- Minor Incidents
- Injuries
- Property Damage
- Environmental Damage

Once the incident has been identified, the Council will perform a cause analysis to determine the action required to ensure the incident does not reoccur. Corrective action implemented may include a change in procedure, maintenance, or new equipment. Investigation findings will be communicated and necessary follow-up maintained.

Any workplace injuries requiring treatment beyond first aid or which result in time off work must be reported to your direct manager.

## Refusal to Work

Under the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Act, Regulations, and Codes you have the right to refuse dangerous work and are protected from any form of reprisal for exercising this right.

If you have reason to believe your work is likely to endanger you or someone else, it is your responsibility to report the problem in writing to your direct manager and provide your reason. The Athabasca Watershed Council will then investigate the report of refusal and take remedial action to eliminate the danger. During this time, you may be assigned to alternate work without loss of pay. No other employee may be assigned until the imminent danger is removed.

## EMPLOYEE RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have received from the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC, Council or “the Organization”) a copy of the Employment Handbook (Handbook). I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to read and understand the Handbook. I further acknowledge that failure to follow the rules set out in the Handbook may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

I am also aware that I may discuss any questions I may have about the Handbook with my direct manager.

I understand that the Handbook contains general statements about the AWC’s policies and procedures and are not intended to limit the organization's discretion to manage in any way. The AWC reserves the right to depart from these general statements when, at its sole discretion, such departure is warranted. Moreover, the AWC has the right to revise, amend, add and/or delete any of its policies and procedures at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee’s Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director’s Name (printed)

## Appendix 1 – Athabasca Watershed Council Expense Rates

Reasonable expenses may be claimed by any staff member attending, in person, a designated Board of Directors meeting, Annual General Meeting and any other meeting, worksite or conference where the staff member has been approved to attend by their direct manager.

Reasonable expenses are defined as:

Meals: may be claimed when traveling and when at meetings for any meals not provided, as follows:

- 1) Breakfast - \$9.20
- 2) Lunch - \$11.60
- 3) Dinner - \$20.75

Travel Costs: Travel costs by private vehicle will be reimbursed based on the most direct and cost-effective route and will be paid at a rate of \$0.505 per km. Receipts are required for other reasonable transport costs such as air fare, parking, rentals and taxis.

Accommodation Expenses: Reasonable accommodation expenses will be reimbursed on submission of paid receipt. Private accommodations without a receipt will be paid at \$20.15 per night.

Per Diem Costs: A staff member may claim a \$7.35 per diem rate for each 24 hours while they are on travel status.

# Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan



February 2022



*From the mountain headwaters to the  
delta lowlands . . . our watershed, our  
responsibility.*

## The Athabasca Watershed Council

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) is a multi-sector, consensus-based charity, formed in 2009. As a designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC), the AWC works in partnership with the Government of Alberta, industries, municipalities, non-government organizations, Indigenous communities and residents to achieve the goals of Alberta's [Water for Life strategy](#). This work includes building relationships, generating and sharing information, supporting education and stewardship, and undertaking watershed assessment and planning for the Athabasca watershed in Alberta.

The AWC is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of up to 21 members. This includes seats for federal/provincial (2) and municipal (3) governments, Indigenous communities (3), industry (5), non-governmental organizations (5), members-at-large (2) and the past-chairman (1). The work of the AWC is guided by its vision and mission:

**Vision:** The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, socially responsible, and economically sustainable.

**Mission:** The Athabasca Watershed Council demonstrates leadership and facilitates informed decision-making in the Athabasca 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.

### For more information, contact us at:

**Mailing Address:**

Athabasca Watershed Council  
PO Box 1058  
Athabasca, Alberta T9S 2A8

**Street Address:**

5101-50<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Athabasca, Alberta T9S 2A8

**Phone:** (780) 213-0343

**Email:** [admin@awc-wpac.ca](mailto:admin@awc-wpac.ca)

**Website:** <http://www.awc-wpac.ca/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/AthabascaWatershedCouncil/>

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/awc\\_wpac?lang=en](https://twitter.com/awc_wpac?lang=en)



Photo: Office of the Athabasca Watershed Council in the Town of Athabasca.

## Executive Summary

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) was formed in 2009 as a not-for-profit society. In 2019, the organization became a registered Canadian charity, celebrating ten years of engaging others about water issues throughout the Athabasca watershed, as well as working to fill information gaps and share learnings. The AWC is one of eleven multi-stakeholder Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils that have partnered with the Government of Alberta, industries, municipalities, non-government organizations, Indigenous communities, and the public to undertake watershed knowledge-building, education and outreach, state of the watershed assessments and management planning throughout the province.

The Athabasca River is one of North America's longest free flowing (i.e., undammed) rivers. It starts in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta and flows northeast, passing through the urban centers of Jasper, Hinton, Whitecourt, Athabasca and Fort McMurray before entering Lake Athabasca and the Peace-Athabasca Delta (an internationally recognized wetland, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most important waterfowl nesting and staging areas in North America). The Athabasca River is part of the Mackenzie River system that eventually drains into the Arctic Ocean.

For the purposes of this report, the Athabasca watershed includes all of the lands in Alberta that drain into the Athabasca River and Lake Athabasca, making up about 24% of the province's landmass. The watershed includes 37 municipalities and 15 Indigenous communities. It also supports a number of activities including traditional Indigenous land use, recreation, hunting and trapping, forestry, agriculture, oil and gas, mining, transportation, and utilities.

The development of the Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) was a collaborative effort led by the AWC. This plan identifies specific goals that build on previous work including the AWC's own stakeholder engagement initiatives and State of the Watershed Reports (Phases 1-4). As such, it strives to balance the environment, community, and economy with the protection and management of watershed resources. Goals are further broken down into strategies and actions that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. The goals include, in no order of priority:

1. Everyone in the Athabasca watershed has access to safe, secure drinking water supplies.
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.

The purpose of the Athabasca IWMP is to provide information, guidance and recommendations to the decision-making authorities, municipalities, Indigenous partners, natural resource managers, industries, academia, users, stewardship groups, and residents regarding the Athabasca watershed. In conjunction with Alberta's *Water for Life Strategy* (2003), it addresses the complexity of watershed management issues that transcend landscapes, ecosystems, jurisdictions, and water users in the Athabasca watershed.

Implementation of the IWMP will rely on the commitment of a network of diverse partners, working collectively and independently, to achieve shared goals. Progress will be reported on by the AWC. Working together, the AWC and its partners can ensure *Water for Life* and IWMP goals are achieved in the Athabasca watershed.

## Acknowledgements

*We respectfully acknowledge that the Athabasca watershed is within Treaty 6, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 Territories as well as Regions 1 and 4 of the Métis Nations of Alberta. We are grateful for the Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who have lived in and cared for these lands and waters for generations. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of the many Indigenous people whose presence continues to enrich the Athabasca watershed. "We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those in whose territory we reside or are visiting."*



The development of this plan would not have been possible without the in-kind time and effort contributed by the AWC Technical Committee members, AWC board members and the organizations they represent. The AWC also acknowledges Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), as well as our municipal, industry, individual and other donors, for their financial and technical support. Finally, we thank staff and the many individuals who contributed their input through various forums or by providing feedback on successive drafts. As they say, it takes a village, and we look forward to continuing to gather input on this plan, which will change and evolve over time, to meet the needs of the Athabasca watershed and the people in it.

**Photo Credits: All photographs used in this report were provided by AWC staff or members, unless otherwise noted.**

# Contents

Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan .....	1
The Athabasca Watershed Council.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Acknowledgements .....	5
Contents.....	6
List of Acronyms.....	7
Introduction .....	8
The Athabasca River.....	10
The Athabasca Watershed.....	11
An Indigenous Perspective .....	14
IWMP Purpose.....	16
IWMP Goals.....	17
<b>Goal 1. Everyone in the Athabasca watershed has access to safe, secure drinking water supplies. ...</b>	<b>18</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	18
<b>Goal 2. Aquatic ecosystems are healthy and biologically diverse.....</b>	<b>20</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	20
<b>Goal 3. River flows and lake levels meet social, cultural, economic and environmental needs .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	23
<b>Goal 4. Natural land cover is conserved, and cumulative land use pressures are mitigated.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	26
<b>Goal 5. Traditional Knowledge informs decision-making and planning. ....</b>	<b>28</b>
Strategies and Actions.....	28
<b>Goal 6. Policies and plans are aligned for watershed health.....</b>	<b>30</b>
Strategies and Actions.....	30
<b>Goal 7. The impacts of climate change are known and inform community preparedness.....</b>	<b>32</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	32
<b>Goal 8. Sub-basin and lake assessment, planning and stewardship initiatives are supported. ....</b>	<b>33</b>
Strategies and Actions .....	33
Plan Implementation, Reporting and Review .....	35
In Closing.....	36
Appendix 1. Links and Documents .....	37
List of Athabasca Watershed Council Documents Relevant to the IWMP Project .....	37
Other Documents & Initiatives Relevant to the Athabasca Watershed .....	37

## List of Acronyms

AEP	Alberta Environment and Parks
AER	Alberta Energy Regulator
ASVA	Association of Summer Villages of Alberta
AWC	Athabasca Watershed Council
BMP	Beneficial Management Practices
GOA	Government of Alberta
IWMP	Integrated Watershed Management Plan
km	kilometers
PAD	Peace Athabasca Delta
SOW	State of the Watershed
TSAG	First Nations Technical Services Advisory Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WPAC	Watershed Planning and Advisory Council

## Introduction

In 2003, the Government of Alberta (GOA) released the [Water for Life strategy](#), laying out the province's approach to water management including adopting a collaborative, watershed approach. The strategy includes three goals and three key directions as follows:

### Water for Life Goals:

- Safe, Secure Drinking Water Supplies
- Healthy Aquatic Ecosystems
- Reliable, Quality Water Supplies for a Sustainable Economy

### Water for Life Key Directions:

- Knowledge and Research
- Partnerships
- Water Conservation

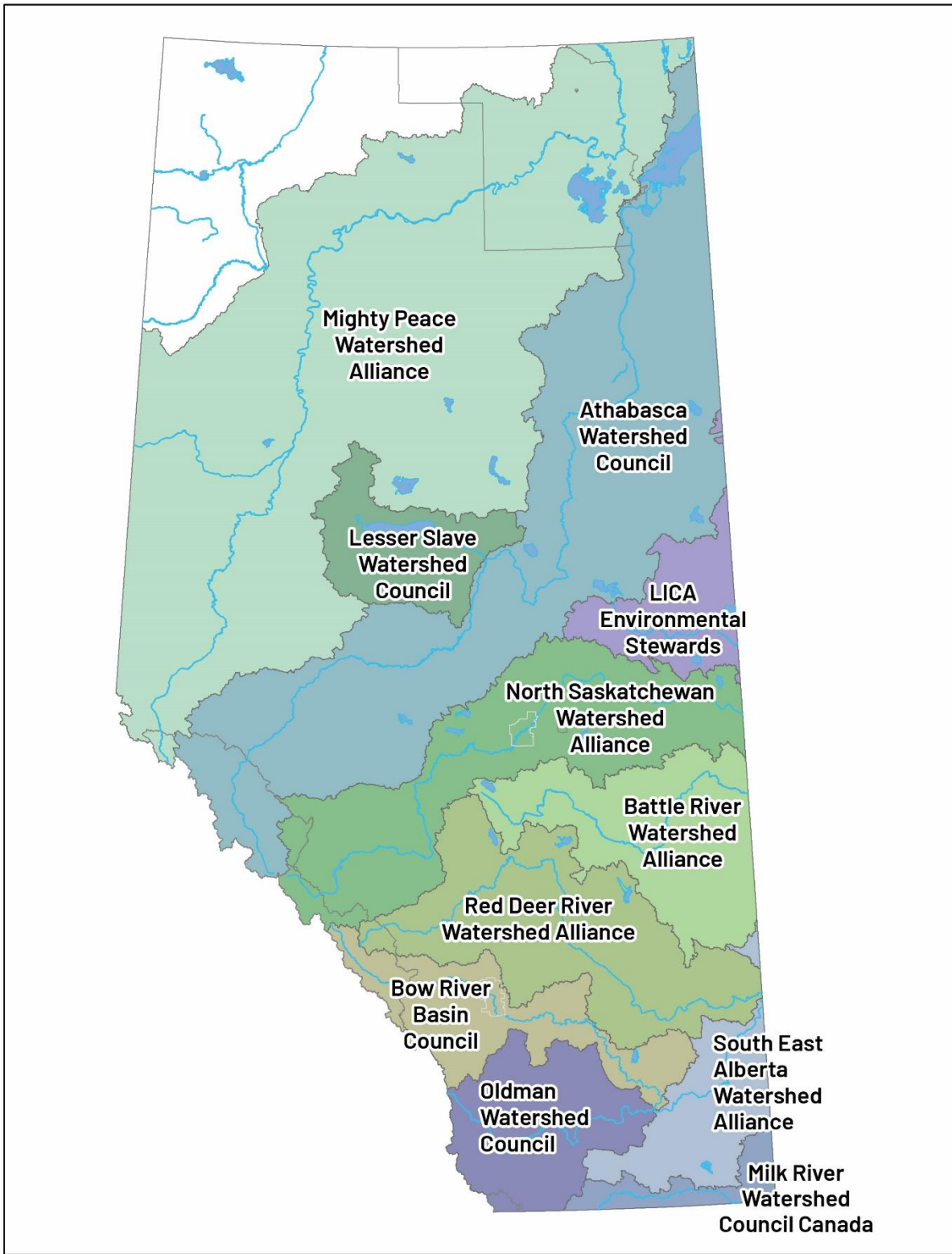
In 2009, the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) was formed to work towards achieving the *Water for Life* goals in the Athabasca watershed. The AWC, a multi-sector, not-for-profit organization, is one of 11 Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPAC) created by the GOA to give those living, working, and playing in each watershed an opportunity to participate in water and watershed management (Figure 1). In 2019, the AWC became a registered Canadian charity and celebrated ten years of operations and achievements.

Although it may look different in each watershed, all of Alberta's 11 WPACs work with the GOA, other government, industry, non-government organizations, Indigenous communities and other partners to implement an adaptive and iterative cycle of watershed management (Figure 2). To date, the AWC has completed a series of [State of the Watershed Reports](#) for the Athabasca watershed. It has also, through education and outreach activities, encouraged those who live, work, and play in the Athabasca watershed, to take a stewardship approach to protecting the watershed and managing the issues that affect it.



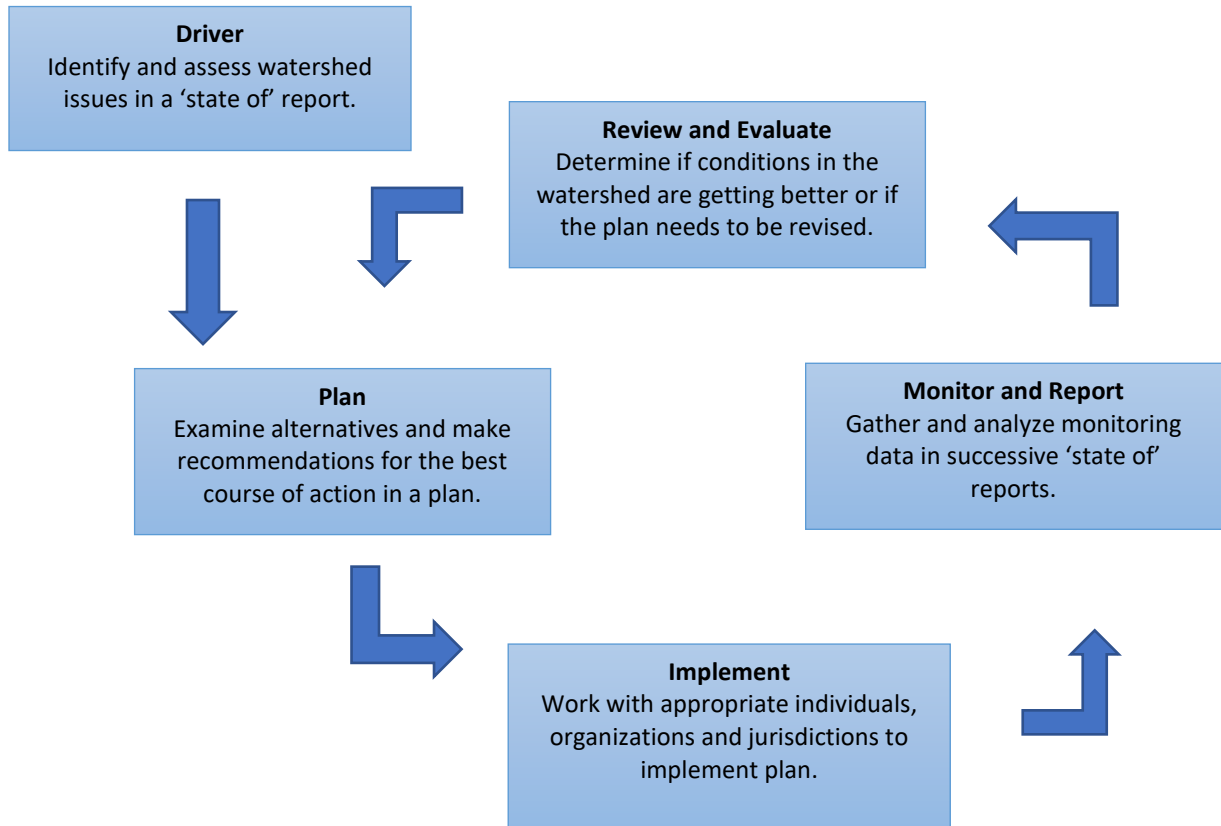
Photo: A family of Common Loons by R.G. Holmberg, Athabasca River Basin Image Bank, Athabasca University.





**Figure 1: The 11 Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPAC) in Alberta. For planning purposes, the Athabasca watershed includes those portions of the Athabasca River and Lake Athabasca watersheds that occur within Alberta.**





**Figure 2. An Adaptive Management Approach to Water and Watershed Management**

## The Athabasca River

The Athabasca River, about 1240 kilometres (km) long, is the longest undammed river in Alberta.<sup>1</sup> Its headwaters are formed by the melting snow and ice of the Columbia Glacier in Alberta’s Rocky Mountains. That portion of the Athabasca River within Jasper National Park, about 168 kilometers (km), was dedicated a Heritage River in 1989 in recognition of its natural and cultural value and importance for recreation. See Table 1 for more statistics about the Athabasca River.

Length	1231 km
Maximum Elevation	1520 m
Minimum Elevation	205 m
Annual Discharge	24,000,000 dam <sup>3</sup>
Mean Discharge	783 m <sup>3</sup> /s
Mean Water Temperature	8.2 °C
Number of fish species	37

<sup>1</sup> Note that the Peace River, at 1,923 km is longer than the Athabasca River, but it is dammed at its headwaters in northeastern British Columbia.

After flowing north through the park, the Athabasca River turns to the northeast, moving through the forested foothills into the Towns of Hinton and Whitecourt. Along its way, the river is joined by several major tributaries including the Berland, McLeod, Pembina, and Lesser Slave rivers. It then turns south and flows by the Town of Athabasca before again heading north (known as the Big Bend reach), gathering flows from the Lac La Biche and Calling rivers as it travels through the Boreal Forest. Further along, the Clearwater River comes from the east, meeting the Athabasca River at Fort McMurray.

Downstream of Fort McMurray, the Athabasca River is joined by several smaller streams (i.e., McKay, Steepbank, Firebag and Richardson rivers) as it flows through the oilsands areas. It then briefly flows alongside the southeast corner of Wood Buffalo National Park as it enters the Peace Athabasca Delta (PAD). The PAD is the largest boreal delta in the world, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the most important waterfowl nesting and staging areas in North America. The Athabasca River finally turns and flows into Lake Athabasca in Alberta's Canadian Shield Ecoregion. For the most part, Lake Athabasca waters flow, via the Rivière des Rochers and Chenal des Quatre Fourches, into the Peace/Slave River system, a sub-watershed of the Mackenzie River system that drains to Great Slave Lake, the Mackenzie River, and finally, the Arctic Ocean. Note, however, if spring waters are high, flows in these channels can be reversed, with Peace River waters flowing into Lake Athabasca.

## The Athabasca Watershed

Note that for the purposes of this document, when we mention the Athabasca watershed, we are including both the Athabasca River watershed as well as that portion of the Lake Athabasca watershed that occurs in Alberta. Together, this drainage area accounts for about 24% of Alberta's land base.

A **Watershed** (also known as a *catchment area* or *river basin*) is an area of land that catches precipitation (rain, hail, snow) and drains into a common body of water, such as a river, tributary, lake, or wetland.

The Athabasca watershed can be further divided into ten sub-watersheds (Figure 3). These are smaller watersheds that eventually flow into the Athabasca River (McLeod, Pembina, La Biche, Lesser Slave and Clearwater rivers); riverside land corridors that drain into specific points along the Athabasca River mainstem (Upper Athabasca, Central Athabasca-Upper, Central Athabasca-Lower and Lower Athabasca); and finally, Lake Athabasca itself. Each of these ten sub-watersheds has different characteristics such as population, land uses and specific water issues. Information on the size and common land uses in each sub-watershed is presented in Table 2.

Note that the Lesser Slave sub-watershed has its own designated WPAC, the Lesser Slave Watershed Council (LSWC), which has produced a 'state of the watershed' report and water/watershed management plans for this sub-basin of the Athabasca watershed. Although the work of the LSWC is not included in this plan, their activities are complementary to and support AWC efforts and in the future, Councils may collaborate on issues, where it is beneficial to do so.

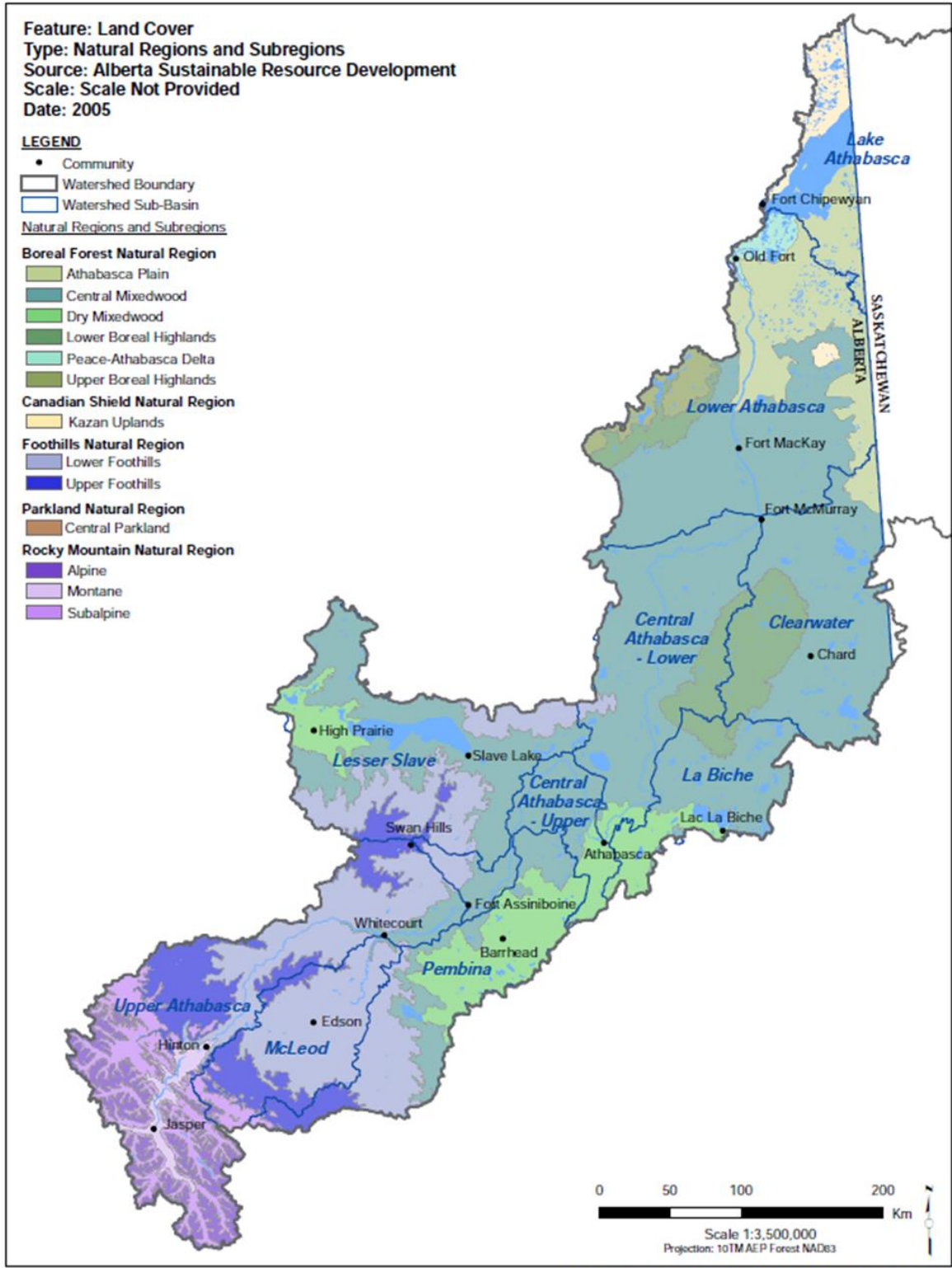


Figure 3. Map of Natural Regions in the Athabasca watershed's 10 sub-basins.

Given its plentiful natural resources, the Athabasca watershed has long been of interest to researchers from government, industries, and academia. As such, it has been the subject of several large research initiatives such as the [Northern River Basins Study](#) completed in 1996. The broad objectives of this program were to identify and quantify the multiple and diverse stressors acting on the Athabasca, Peace and Slave Rivers and to assess the ecological consequences of exposure to those stressors. This work was followed by the [Northern Rivers Ecosystem Initiative](#) and many other monitoring and research initiatives since, such as today's [Oil Sands Monitoring Program](#). Throughout these studies, much has been learned about the Athabasca watershed. [Information about the watershed is also found in several provincial, municipal and resource planning documents, such as the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and its accompanying water management frameworks.](#) While it is a challenge to consolidate this vast amount of information, several links and references are provided in Appendix 1 for those interested in more information.

**Table 2. The Athabasca watershed can be further divided into 10 sub-watersheds.**

<b>Sub Watershed Name</b>	<b>Total Area Km<sup>2</sup> (% of watershed)</b>	<b>% Contribution to Total Flow</b>	<b>Common Land Uses</b>
<i>Upper Athabasca</i>	25,195 (18)	> 58%	Forestry, Gas Extraction, Recreation and Tourism, Indigenous Traditional Use
<i>McLeod</i>	9,658 (7)	~ 7%	Forestry, Agriculture, Coal and Aggregate Mining, Gas Extraction
<i>Pembina</i>	14,324 (10)	~ 5%	Forestry, Agriculture, Gas Extraction
<i>Central Athabasca (Upper Watershed)</i>	6,138 (4)		Agriculture, Forestry, Gas Extraction, Aggregate Mining
<i>Central Athabasca (Lower Watershed)</i>	16,412 (12)		Forestry, In-Situ Oil Extraction, Oil and Gas Extraction
<i>Lesser Slave</i>	20,084 (14)	~ 6%	Forestry, Agriculture, Recreation and Tourism
<i>Clearwater</i>	16,893 (12)	18.5%	Forestry, Oil Extraction
<i>Lower Athabasca</i>	27,077 (19)		Forestry, Oil Extraction, Indigenous Traditional Use
<i>Lake Athabasca</i>	6,562 (5)	-	Indigenous Traditional Use

## An Indigenous Perspective

In the fall of 2008, prior to formation of the AWC, Alberta Environment held a series of Focus Group sessions with stakeholder sectors and Aboriginal communities in order to get their input on forming a Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the Athabasca watershed. Meeting with a small group of Indigenous participants in Fort McMurray on October 30, 2008, organizers heard several important messages:

- Many Indigenous communities and individuals have concerns about their local drinking water and the health of local lakes and streams.
- While there is value in collaborating and sharing information with others, it is important that Treaty Rights are recognized first. *‘The Treaties name the Athabasca River and others in the region as the guarantee of Aboriginal rights – those who signed the Treaties were promised the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing, “so long as the rivers flow”.’*
- To First Nations and Métis, water is life. WPACs must seek to understand this holistic view of water and how it is connected to life and spirit.
- Indigenous communities and individuals can inform WPACs about their traditional lifestyles. However, they bring more to the table than just Traditional Knowledge. They are the eyes and ears on the landscape and can provide information on how such landscapes are changing over time.

### ***Importance of the Athabasca Watershed to the Mountain Métis***

*“The Mountain Métis are an Indigenous community located in Grande Cache, with community members also residing in Hinton, Brule, Marlboro, Edson, and Grande Prairie. Our community historically homesteaded the upper Athabasca Valley for over a century until their forced eviction by the Federal Government in order to create Jasper National Park in 1910.*

*Since the early 1800s, the Athabasca watershed has been culturally significant to the Mountain Métis. The Athabasca provides sustenance and life for all living things. With the construction of the Grand Pacific Railway and the increase in resource extraction, industry has significantly impacted our traditional lands. Our Elders express “the environment is interconnected and [you] cannot limit the footprint of the Project to one small area.” “Whatever happens downstream affects upstream.”*

*Water is life, and it is our duty as Indigenous stewards of the land to protect and conserve water quality and quantity. For more information about the Mountain Métis, see <https://mountainmetis.com/>. “*

Building on this conversation, AWC formation included three Indigenous seats on its Board of Directors, and in May 2011, as part of its state of the watershed knowledge gathering exercise, the AWC commissioned the report *“Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed”* (Parlee 2011). This report provided a respectful look at what it meant by ‘Traditional Knowledge’, in particular in relation to aquatic ecosystems; some of the sources of publicly available Traditional Knowledge; and finally, what Traditional Knowledge tells us about potential indicators and metrics that could be used to assess future changes in the biological and physical health of the Athabasca watershed. More recent

studies like the [Athabasca River Basin Initiative](#) (WaterSmart 2018) help to ensure Indigenous values, like navigational flows, are incorporated into watershed models, plans and ultimately, water use decisions.

Having only just begun its journey, today, the AWC continues its work to better understand Indigenous knowledge and perspectives about the Athabasca watershed. Working together, we can continue to move forward to ensure all water and watershed values are respected and protected, both for current and future generations to come.

<b>A Healthy Athabasca Watershed is Valued for Many Reasons such as:</b>
<p><b>Social and Cultural Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A source of drinking water</li> <li>• A place for recreational activities (boating, fishing, swimming, etc.)</li> <li>• Quiet enjoyment of Treaty rights; a place for spiritual and inspirational enjoyment</li> <li>• Subsistence and recreational hunting, fishing, berry picking, etc.</li> <li>• Water for forest fire suppression (<a href="#">community safety</a>)</li> <li>• A method of <a href="#">public</a> transportation (ice roads, river travel)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Community wastewater</a> Management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economic Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A source of water for economic activities such as irrigation and livestock watering, pulp and paper production, oil and gas development, coal, aggregate and peat mining, etc.)</li> <li>• A landscape that supports tourism, guiding and outfitting and other recreational activities that in turn support local economies</li> <li>• A means of natural water storage (wetlands, etc.) and conveyance to downstream users</li> <li>• <a href="#">Water for forest regeneration</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Commercial / Industrial Wastewater Management</a></li> <li>• A means of <a href="#">commercial</a> transportation (<a href="#">winter ice</a> roads)</li> <li>• A means of local food (without which there would be a higher economic and social cost)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental/Ecological Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality source water</li> <li>• Sustainable surface and groundwater flows</li> <li>• <a href="#">Healthy fish populations</a> and other biodiversity as well as a resilience to invasive species</li> <li>• Healthy forests and productive soils</li> <li>• Mitigation of flood and drought conditions; moderation of local weather and resiliency to climate change</li> </ul>



## IWMP Purpose

*What is an IWMP?* Integrated watershed management planning is a comprehensive process to identify and protect shared values associated with water and watersheds. The Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) is a strategic document, providing direction and a roadmap for future AWC and partner activities.

*Who is it for?* As well as guiding the AWC and its partners in their work, the IWMP provides information and guidance for decision-making authorities including the province, municipalities, Indigenous leaders, non-government organizations, natural resource managers, industries, water users, and residents in the Athabasca watershed. However, the GOA remains accountable for *Water for Life* implementation, as per its mandate of managing water and watersheds throughout the province.

In particular, the IWMP can provide advice to local and provincial governments as they develop and renew policies and land use plans and as they make regulatory decisions. The plan also seeks to align land and water managers, such that management actions, where possible and when taken together, improve watershed health. It also informs stewardship and conservation groups and individuals where there are opportunities to collaborate to make improvements to the Athabasca watershed.

*How was information gathered?* The AWC has been engaging others and collecting information about the Athabasca watershed since the society formed in 2009. It has also commissioned several reports on various aspects of watershed health (Appendix 1). Using education and outreach activities, the AWC has encouraged all who live, work, and recreate in the watershed to contribute their input on what is working, what

Some of the issues that may be affecting the Athabasca watershed include (but are not limited to) the following:

- At times, safe secure drinking water supplies may not be available to all.
- Drinking water treatment facilities are costly for small municipalities to maintain.
- Some aquifer levels show declines in some years, or have issues with iron, sodium, etc.
- Non-point pollution (run-off) may affect water quality and may increase with increasing growth and development.
- The state of wetland and riparian areas in the Athabasca watershed is not well known.
- There are several species at risk in the Athabasca watershed.
- Water supplies may be at risk with increasing population growth and development, seasonal low flows, climate change, etc.
- Monitoring and benchmarking effort is different in different parts of the watershed and for different watershed elements.
- It is unclear how cumulative effects of growth and development, and climate variability/change will affect water quality and quantity in the future.
- Some lake groups are struggling with managing nutrient rich lakes or variable lake levels.

is not working, and solutions to issues that may directly affect them within the Athabasca watershed. Additionally, there are many relevant policies, legislation, frameworks, management agreements and monitoring initiatives carried out by governments/regulators, industry, non-government organizations and Indigenous communities throughout the Athabasca watershed that inform the work of the AWC.

*What's included in the IWMP?* From their work over the past decade, the AWC identified eight goals to guide the development of the Athabasca IWMP. These goals reflect the values important to those who live and work in Athabasca watershed. They also build on past AWC projects and activities. These goals also reflect areas where further work (via strategies and actions) is required to address outstanding issues and ensure shared watershed values are maintained, for current and future generations. While the Athabasca watershed is very large and complex, an effort has been made to keep strategies and actions SMART; that is, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

## IWMP Goals

Goals include, in no order of priority, the following:

1. Everyone in the Athabasca watershed has access to safe, secure drinking water supplies.
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 are known and inform community preparedness.
8. Sub-basin and lake assessment, planning and stewardship initiatives are supported.

Each goal is described in more detail in the following sections.



**Goal 1.** Everyone in the Athabasca watershed has access to safe, secure drinking water supplies.

Having a secure supply of good quality drinking water is critical to all, as it determines where we will live, work and recreate. Hence, safe, secure drinking water supplies is an important *Water for Life* goal.

The people in the Athabasca watershed receive their drinking water from both private and public drinking water systems that draw from surface and groundwater sources. Both public and private systems need to be maintained to ensure they continue to provide safe, secure drinking water to the people in the Athabasca watershed. To achieve this goal, the AWC has identified the following strategies and actions:

To protect our drinking water supply, we need to protect source waters. **Source water** is untreated, raw water from surface or groundwater sources used for drinking water or other uses.

**Source water protection planning** is a risk management process designed to maintain or improve the conditions of water through proactive, collaborative identification, validation, assessment, and management of risk.

Strategies and Actions

**1.1 Strategy:** *Improve understanding of the state of drinking water quality and quantity, for both private and public ground and surface water systems, in the Athabasca watershed. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, municipalities, utilities, industry, water coalitions, Technical Services Advisory Group (TSAG) Circuit Rider program and Indigenous communities*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>1.1.1</b> Collect and analyze municipal, provincial, federal and other data and/or conduct a survey of regulated (provincial and Indigenous) and private drinking water systems in the Athabasca watershed to better understand the status of current systems (i.e., number of systems, location, source, treatment methods, infrastructure costs, staffing, etc.).</p>	<p><b>1.1.1</b> A state of drinking water in the Athabasca watershed report is publicly available.</p>
<p><b>1.1.2</b> From the review/survey above, identify issues that may cause boil water advisories and drinking water quality guidelines exceedances (e.g., <i>E. coli</i>, turbidity, etc.). Build understanding on how these issues can best be mitigated.</p>	<p><b>1.1.2</b> Information about the issues that may cause boil water advisories, with associated mitigation practices, is publicly available (e.g., factsheets posted on the AWC website) and circulated to municipalities and other partners.</p>

**1.2 Strategy:** Collaborate to ensure all (urban and rural) residents have access to potable water for drinking and domestic use. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, municipalities, Indigenous communities.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>1.2.1</b> Promote regional drinking water and wastewater networks, consortiums and collaborations that are affordable and practical.</p>	<p><b>1.2.1</b> Information on regional drinking water and wastewater networks and consortiums are available on the AWC website.</p>

**1.3 Strategy:** Collaborate to improve the understanding of groundwater as a source of drinking water in the Athabasca watershed. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Alberta Geological Survey, academia.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>1.3.1</b> Collaborate with the GOA to synthesize and present the information known about groundwater as a source of drinking water in the Athabasca watershed, and if appropriate, identify and communicate priorities for additional monitoring or study.</p>	<p><b>1.3.1</b> The state of groundwater as a source of drinking water is known and shared publicly.</p>
<p><b>1.3.2</b> Encourage research (i.e., via study/modelling) on the size, location, condition, and risks to source groundwater in areas of human activity.</p>	<p><b>1.3.2</b> Research on the size, location, condition, and risk to source groundwater in areas of high use is shared via the AWC website.</p>
<p><b>1.3.3</b> Promote private drinking water well system maintenance and testing throughout the Athabasca watershed by co-hosting the GOA’s Working Well Program in areas of high well water use.</p>	<p><b>1.3.3</b> <u>Well owners are more knowledgeable about well maintenance and carry out regular testing.</u></p>

**1.4 Strategy:** Encourage the protection of source drinking water through source water protection planning and education and the promotion of beneficial management practices. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, municipalities, Indigenous communities, TSAG, industries and academia.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>1.4.1</b> Collaborate with municipalities and Indigenous communities to identify and delineate source waters and to identify risks to these source waters.</p>	<p><b>1.4.1</b> Risks to delineated source drinking water areas are identified and this information is available on the AWC website.</p>
<p><b>1.4.2</b> Identify/promote resources available to Indigenous communities and municipalities to develop source water protection plans.</p>	<p><b>1.4.2</b> Increase in the number of source water protection plans in the Athabasca watershed.</p>

## Goal 2. Aquatic ecosystems are healthy and biologically diverse.

Just as it is important for people and the economy, water in the Athabasca watershed is an integral component of aquatic ecosystems. An aquatic ecosystem is a body of water in which living and non-living elements interact. This includes the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of rivers, lakes, riparian areas, wetlands, and the plants, animals and other organisms associated with them. The GOA 2001 Framework for Water Management Planning includes a *Strategy for the Protection of the Aquatic Environment*.

In the Athabasca watershed, aquatic ecosystems include the mainstem and its tributary streams, as well as the lakes, wetlands, riparian lands, and diverse biota that inhabit these areas. This watershed also includes some very unique aquatic ecosystems including Athabasca Falls, Miette Hot Springs, Grand Rapids<sup>2</sup>, McClelland Lake Patterned Fen<sup>3</sup> and the Peace-Athabasca Delta (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), to name a few.

Given the size of the Athabasca watershed, it is challenging to assess and report on all of its aquatic ecosystems. Information about aquatic ecosystem health in smaller tributaries, non-recreational lakes, and riparian areas and wetlands across the watershed, is limited. However, a growing number of monitoring initiatives by government, industries, Indigenous communities, conservation and stewardship groups is helping to fill the gaps. To achieve the goal of healthy and biologically diverse aquatic ecosystems, the AWC has identified several strategies and actions that focus on four key areas of aquatic ecosystem health: water and sediment quality; riparian and wetland health, and biodiversity are discussed below. The fourth element, instream flow needs, is discussed under goal #3.

### **Did you know?**

Miette Hot Springs, located in Jasper National Park, features the hottest mineral springs in the Canadian Rockies. Water flows from the mountain at 54°C (129°F). Spring waters have a high concentration of minerals including sulfate, calcium, bicarbonate, magnesium and sodium. Miette's three spring outlets gush at about 1540 litres (about 5 bathtubs full) per minute.

## Strategies and Actions

**2.1 Strategy:** *Improve understanding of water and sediment quality in waterbodies throughout the watershed. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Oil Sands Monitoring Program*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<b>2.1.1</b> Provide the public with information that compares actual water and sediment quality data (from academic studies and monitoring agencies)	<b>2.1.1</b> The state of what is known about water and sediment quality for the protection of aquatic life is made public and periodically re-assessed and updated.

<sup>2</sup> For a bird's eye view of Grand Rapids, see this [YouTube video](#).

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the McClelland Fen, see this Alberta Wilderness Association [webpage](#).

<p>with federal, provincial, and regional guidelines for the protection of aquatic life.</p> <p><b>2.1.2</b> Examine how the GOA’s Strategy for the Protection of the Aquatic Environment can inform water, land and resource management planning and activities that may affect the aquatic environment in the Athabasca watershed.</p> <p><b>2.1.3</b> Continue to work through the AWC Technical Committee and other collaborations with agriculture, industries, municipalities and Indigenous communities to understand existing information on water and sediment; to identify any gaps or opportunities for future work and/or research; and to define concrete actions that minimize impacts on aquatic ecosystems.</p>	<p><b>2.1.2</b> Water, land and resource management planners are aware of the Strategy for the Protection of the Aquatic Environment and how it informs their work.</p> <p><b>2.1.3</b> The AWC Technical Committee meets regularly and collaborates on finding and promoting solutions to impacts to aquatic ecosystems such as improved codes of practice, uptake of beneficial practices, restoration and conservation efforts, etc.</p>
---	---

**2.2 Strategy:** *Understand the state of wetlands and riparian areas in the Athabasca watershed and collaborate with others to conserve, and where required, restore these areas. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Municipalities, Indigenous communities, conservation organizations and stewardship groups*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>2.2.1</b> <a href="#">Review existing inventories</a> and/ or assess the state of wetlands and riparian areas in the Athabasca watershed and share information publicly.</p> <p><b>2.2.2</b> Collaborate with partners and landowners to <a href="#">implement mitigation and monitoring plans and to conserve and restore wetlands and riparian lands.</a></p>	<p><b>2.2.1</b> The state of wetlands and riparian areas is known; riparian data are shared with the riparian web portal project.</p> <p><b>2.2.2</b> The amount of restored or conserved riparian areas and wetlands.</p>

**2.3 Strategy:** *Collaborate with partners to improve knowledge and understanding of aquatic biodiversity, including invasive aquatic species, in the Athabasca watershed. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, Alberta Invasive Species Council, citizen science initiatives*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>2.3.1</b> Increase awareness of aquatic biodiversity (particularly aquatic species at risk) in the Athabasca watershed by providing public information (e.g., fact sheets, webpage stores, etc.).</p> <p><b>2.3.2</b> Build awareness of invasive aquatic species by providing links to existing information (e.g., Invasive Species Council of Alberta), using social media, signage, etc.</p> <p><b>2.3.3</b> Improve knowledge about the distribution of native and invasive aquatic species by encouraging residents to participate in relevant citizen science initiatives that map species occurrences in the Athabasca watershed.</p> <p><b>2.3.4</b> Collaborate with partners to improve knowledge about benthic invertebrates in the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>2.3.1</b> Information on biodiversity and citizen science programs in the Athabasca watershed is available on the AWC website, newsletters, and social media.</p> <p><b>2.3.2</b> Information on aquatic invasive species is available via the AWC website, newsletters, and social media.</p> <p><b>2.3.3</b> Links to relevant citizen science initiatives are identified on the website. Distribution/occurrence of species is improved in the Athabasca watershed.</p> <p><b>2.3.4</b> A 'state of' what is known about benthic invertebrates' report is completed and periodically updated as more is learned.</p>

### Goal 3. River flows and lake levels meet social, cultural, economic and environmental needs

Water quantity is an important consideration in the Athabasca watershed. Water managers often talk about instream flow needs – the amount of water flowing through a river or in a lake (measured as lake level) needed to sustain healthy fish and other components of the aquatic ecosystem. Additionally, instream flows and lake levels may also be important for other reasons such as maintaining Indigenous and recreational river transportation, forest fire suppression, water storage and conveyance for downstream users, wastewater dilution and transport, overbank flooding and supplying water to other waterbodies. Indigenous communities have noted several occasions where instream flow needs were not sufficient for traditional activities in some areas and at some times of the year. Recent years have seen flooding become an issue in several communities.

Flow of the Athabasca River mainstem and a number of its tributaries is monitored as part of the GOA Long-Term River Network.<sup>4</sup> water quantity is a major focus of OSM, current monitoring that is being conducted via OSM hydrometric program.

However, many lakes and smaller streams are not monitored. Although individual withdrawals must be permitted, the impacts of cumulative water withdrawals, particularly during low flow or other sensitive periods on these waterbodies may not be well understood. Hence, to achieve this goal, the AWC has identified the following strategies and actions.

#### Strategies and Actions

#### ***Did you know?***

The GOA has a long-standing system for [water allocation](#) that goes back decades. Currently, this system is administered by the [Alberta Energy Regulator](#) (AER) for the oil and gas sector, and by [Alberta Environment and Parks](#) (AEP) for all other users.

Before diverting and using surface water and groundwater in Alberta, a Term or Temporary Diversion licence must be obtained under the province's *Water Act*. A licence provides authority for the diversion. It also identifies the source of water supply, location of the diversion site, allocation of water allowed from the source(s) and the conditions under which the diversion and its use must take place. Regulators are also informed by the [Surface Water Allocation Directive](#).

Individual water allocations can be viewed on the GOA [Authorization Viewer](#). Licence data can also be viewed spatially using the [Alberta Water Tool](#). Note that most water licences are required to report their actual water use via the [Water Use](#)

---

<sup>4</sup> To see a map of monitoring stations, see [Alberta River Basins](#).

**3.1 Strategy:** Improve understanding of water quantity (including instream flow needs for aquatic ecosystem health) and allocation pressures on the Athabasca River, its major tributaries, and smaller streams and lakes. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Industries, Indigenous Partners, Researchers, etc.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>3.1.1</b> Improve understanding of water quantity in the Athabasca watershed, in particular, <a href="#">understand how allocations are managed via the Lower Athabasca Surface Water Quantity Management Framework, as well as</a> the state of allocations versus flows/levels in major tributaries, smaller streams and lakes that have significant allocations or that may be sensitive during certain periods or for specific reasons (e.g., species at risk habitat).</p>	<p><b>3.1.1</b> Information on the state of what is known about water quantity and water allocations is available for a public audience. (Note: significant work has been done on this via the Alberta WaterSmart Athabasca River Basin Initiative.)</p>
<p><b>3.1.2</b> <a href="#">Work with other interests (e.g., Wood Buffalo National Park) to improve shared</a> understanding of the status of instream flow needs for aquatic ecosystem health in the basin by synthesizing the information available.</p>	<p><b>3.1.2</b> Information on how water quantity and instream flow needs are monitored and managed in the Athabasca River and its tributaries is available via the AWC website, newsletters, and social media.</p>
<p><b>3.1.3</b> Where required, provide information and advice to the GOA, industries and researchers on information gaps and priorities for flow/level monitoring initiatives, <a href="#">and the establishment of instream flows needs/water conservation objectives</a> throughout the basin.</p>	<p><b>3.1.3</b> Information and advice is provided to the GOA on the priorities for flow/level monitoring initiatives, <a href="#">IFN studies and the setting of WCOs</a> throughout the watershed.</p>
<p><b>3.1.4</b> Raise awareness of and encourage and support stakeholders (industries and municipalities), Indigenous communities, non-government organizations and residents to participate in public engagement initiatives such as development <a href="#">and review</a> of the <a href="#">Athabasca Water Management Frameworks</a>.</p>	<p><b>3.1.4</b> AWC members are aware of water management engagement initiatives.</p>

**3.2 Strategy:** Collaborate with partners to improve understanding of water supply and demand in the Athabasca watershed now and in the future. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Municipalities Indigenous Partners, Alberta Energy Regulator (AER), Industries, Utilities, academia

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>3.2.1</b> Understand current sector water use (allocation, consumptive use and returns) in the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>3.2.1</b> Information on sector water use is available through social media and website.</p>
<p><b>3.2.2</b> Encourage research, modeling, scenario-building and communication tools that improve our understanding of future water use / demand compared to water availability under a climate change regime in the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>3.2.2</b> An evaluation, synthesis and gap analysis of current research studies, modelling and other reports is conducted on the future water supply and demand in the Athabasca watershed.</p>

**3.3 Strategy:** Promote innovation, such as water conservation, efficiency, and productivity planning and water re-use, in managing water demand. Potential AWC Partners: academia, GOA, municipalities, industries, utilities.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>3.3.1</b> Increase awareness of the Alberta Water Council’s water conservation, efficiency, and productivity (CEP) planning initiative, and encourage individual water allocation licensees in the Athabasca watershed to develop such plans.</p>	<p><b>3.3.1</b> Information is available via the AWC Website on the Alberta Water Council’s water conservation, efficiency and productivity planning initiative and plans are developed by water allocation licensees in the Athabasca watershed and shared on the AWC website.</p>
<p><b>3.3.2</b> Support research/innovation in industry and municipal water reuse, CEP, etc. by highlighting major water using sectors that are making concrete, measurable, and demonstrative improvements in water use.</p>	<p><b>3.3.2</b> Research and innovation information is available via the AWC Website, newsletters, and social media.</p>
<p><b>3.3.3</b> Collaborate with municipalities to encourage and promote domestic water conservation.</p>	<p><b>3.3.3</b> Communities with water conservation programs (e.g., water meters, low flush toilet rebates etc.) are highlighted via the AWC website, newsletters, and social media.</p>



Goal 4. Natural land cover is conserved, and cumulative land use pressures are mitigated.

‘Land cover’ is a term used to describe the natural vegetation or land type, such as forest or grassland, of an area. The Athabasca watershed includes four natural regions (Rocky Mountain, Foothills, Boreal Forest and Canadian Shield), each with a variety of land covers including glaciers and snowpack; coniferous, deciduous and mixed wood forests; lakes, wetlands and other waterbodies; shrub and grassland, bedrock, etc. These land covers have their own intrinsic value but are also important for the ecological goods and services they provide (e.g., water purification and retention). ‘Land use’ describes how people are using the land. The Athabasca watershed has seen a variety of land uses over time such as trapping, logging, crop and livestock production, transportation, recreation and energy development.

**Did you know?**

To protect unique areas of natural land cover, the Athabasca watershed includes a number of protected areas. In fact, the river flows through a number of parks including Jasper National Park, five wildland provincial parks (Fort Assiniboine Sandhills, Hubert Lake, La Biche River, Grand Rapids, Richardson River Dunes) and Wood Buffalo National Park. Additionally, there are a number of protected areas adjacent to tributaries (e.g., Pembina River Provincial Park) and lakes (e.g., Cross Lake Provincial Park, Calling Lake Provincial Park) throughout the watershed.

Like other parts of Alberta, the Athabasca watershed experiences periods of increased population growth and economic development. With an increase in land use activities comes a variety of infrastructure and a corresponding loss of natural land cover. If not managed wisely, this growth can result in the loss of natural areas, forests/shelterbelts, wetlands, small streams, associated biodiversity and wildlife habitat, as well as places to recreate in nature, or to enjoy Treaty and Traditional Rights.

Additionally, the removal of natural vegetation can increase runoff from snow melt and rain which increase soil erosion and the transportation of contaminants. If impermeable surfaces replace ground cover, soil infiltration and shallow groundwater may also be affected. To achieve the goal of conserving natural land cover and mitigating the effects of increasing land use on water quality, quantity and aquatic ecosystem health, the AWC has identified a number of strategies and actions:

Strategies and Actions

**4.1 Strategy:** Encourage recreational users to limit their impact on natural landscapes.

*Potential AWC Partners: Recreational groups, stewardship groups, hunters and trappers, NGOs.*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>4.1.1</b> Promote programs such as <a href="#">Know Before You Go</a> and <a href="#">Leave No Trace</a> with recreational user groups within the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>4.1.1</b> Programs promoting limited footprint are identified on the AWC website.</p>

**4.2 Strategy:** Encourage agriculture, industries and municipalities to reduce their cumulative ‘footprint’, in particular, their impacts on aquatic ecosystem health. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Utilities, Resource Managers, Non-Government Organizations, Municipalities, Agriculture, Industries and Academia.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>4.2.1</b> Encourage partners to reduce their footprint, including the density and impacts of linear developments (roads, seismic lines, power lines, pipelines, etc.) on aquatic ecosystems through the use of integrated planning, beneficial management practices (BMP), collaborative road maintenance plans, elimination of hanging culverts, minimization of stream crossings, progressive reclamation, etc.</p>	<p><b>4.2.1</b> Density and impacts of linear developments on aquatic ecosystems are reduced.</p>
<p><b>4.2.2</b> Support implementation of Agricultural Beneficial Management Practices to protect source waters (e.g., livestock exclusion fencing for riparian lands, setbacks for manure application near rural groundwater wells) and support shared cost programs to achieve these solutions (e.g., ALUS Canada, Environmental Farm Plan, Ducks Unlimited Canada and Green Acreages programs).</p>	<p><b>4.2.2</b> Agricultural BMPs resources are identified and listed on the AWC website. BMP cost sharing programs and resources are listed on the AWC website and promoted using social media.</p>
<p><b>4.2.3 Action:</b> Encourage municipalities to use tools such as the environmental reserves and shoreline setbacks, to protect waterbodies and riparian areas within their land use planning jurisdiction and to use green infrastructure solutions (e.g., riparian plantings, willow beds, buffer strips, constructed wetlands, wet ponds, dry ponds, oil/grit separators, vegetative swales, etc.) and low impact development where feasible to address urban source drinking water and stormwater management issues.</p>	<p><b>4.2.3</b> An increase in the number of municipalities using tools such as environmental reserves and shoreline setbacks; Urban green infrastructure and low impact development solutions are identified and listed on the AWC website and promoted using social media.</p>

## Goal 5. Traditional Knowledge informs decision-making and planning.

Humans have been using the lands and waters of the Athabasca watershed for thousands of years and many Indigenous groups, like the Dane-zaa, Sekani, Secwepemc (Shuswap), Kootenay, Salish, Nakoda/Stoney, Woodland Cree, Chipewyan (Denesoline) and Métis hunted and fished along the river before European colonization.<sup>5,6</sup> Today, the Athabasca watershed is comprised of Treaty #6, Treaty #8, and Treaty #10 territories. Additionally, the Athabasca watershed includes parts of Regions 1 and 4 of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Throughout the Athabasca watershed, shorelines and waterbodies are culturally and spiritually significant to individuals and communities. For example, the Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the most valuable habitats for aquatic waterfowl in North America and Indigenous people have a strong and spiritual relationship to this area. The population and health of waterfowl, fish, muskrat, and beaver are important traditional indicators of watershed health in this area.

The Athabasca River itself is also historically significant to Indigenous people. Those who signed the Treaties were promised the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing, 'so long as the river flows.' Today, in addition to traditional activities, Indigenous communities are also undertaking monitoring and research initiatives to better understand the state of the watershed and how it is changing over time.

To achieve the goal that Traditional Knowledge helps to inform decision making and planning, the AWC has identified a number of strategies and actions:

### Strategies and Actions

**5.1 Strategy:** *Building on the AWC's Traditional Knowledge Report, continue to pursue opportunities to identify, prioritize, and fill gaps in Traditional and local knowledge, particularly as it relates to historical water quality, quantity and aquatic ecosystem health of the Athabasca watershed. Potential AWC Partners: Indigenous partners including First Nations, Métis Settlements, Metis Locals, Alberta Native*

---

<sup>5</sup> See [Alberta's Lower Athabasca Basin: Archaeology and Palaeoenvironments](#) edited by Brian Ronaghan, May 2017, University of Alberta Press.

<sup>6</sup> See the AWC [Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed](#) by Brenda Parlee.

#### *Fort McMurray First Nation and the State of Gregoire Lake*

Gregoire Lake is an important waterbody to the Fort McMurray #468 First Nation (FMFN) who reside along its southern shores.

Because of concerns about lake water quality and quantity, FMFN's Industry and Government Relations Corporation produced a [State of the Gregoire Lake Watershed report](#). This initial Phase 1 study provides a preliminary technical assessment of lake health, providing a number of recommendations that will eventually inform a Watershed Management Plan for Gregoire Lake.

*Friendship Centres, Indigenous Wisdom Advisory Panel (Office of the Chief Scientist), Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) Indigenous Relations staff, Mackenzie River Basin Board.*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>5.1.1</b> Reinstate the AWC Indigenous Committee and/or host Indigenous Forums in the Athabasca watershed to gain an Indigenous perspective on water quality, quantity and aquatic health of the Athabasca watershed to be included in AWC state of reports.</p>	<p><b>5.1.1</b> An Indigenous Committee is established, or an Indigenous Forum(s) is hosted in the Athabasca watershed and Traditional knowledge / Indigenous perspective is included in state of reports for the Athabasca watershed.</p>
<p><b>5.1.2</b> Look for opportunities to improve Indigenous participation and input on the AWC board, its committees and its projects.</p>	<p><b>5.1.2</b> All 3 AWC Indigenous seats are filled and all AWC committees have a mechanism to gather Indigenous input.</p>

**5.2 Strategy:** *Pursue opportunities to support Indigenous communities with water and watershed stewardship, monitoring, source water protection and other initiatives. Potential AWC Partners: Indigenous Partners including individual First Nations and Metis Settlements/Local, Fort McMurray First Nations, AEP, ECCC, Parks Canada, Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance.*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>5.2.1</b> Identify and promote Indigenous stewardship, capacity, monitoring, source water protection and other water and watershed initiatives throughout the Athabasca watershed and the Peace-Athabasca Delta (e.g., Source Water Protection Plan for Gregoire Lake).</p>	<p><b>5.2.1</b> Information is available via the AWC website, newsletters, and social media on Indigenous water and watershed programs throughout the Athabasca watershed.</p>
<p><b>5.2.2</b> Promote initiatives that contribute towards recommendations and actions outlined in the <a href="#">Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan</a>.</p>	<p><b>5.2.2</b> Information about the Wood Buffalo Action Plan is posted on the AWC website.</p>

## Goal 6. Policies and plans are aligned for watershed health.

As governments move forward with setting policy direction and developing regional and municipal plans, it is important that watershed values are incorporated into these activities, such that water is managed consistently between jurisdictions. In Alberta, there is no one entity solely responsible for water/watershed management. Instead, the authority and responsibility, including the integration of land and water outcomes, rests with a number of jurisdictions and institutions. To achieve the goal that policies and plans are aligned to support watershed health, the AWC has identified several strategies and actions:

### Strategies and Actions

**6.1 Strategy:** *Ensure the Athabasca watershed IWMP is supported by federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous jurisdictions and a watershed perspective is incorporated into appropriate statutory policies and plans which are aligned across jurisdictions for watershed health. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, Municipalities, Indigenous partners*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>6.1.1</b> Encourage federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous governments to accept the Athabasca IWMP as information and advice to inform their planning and decision-making.</p> <p><b>6.1.2</b> Provide a watershed perspective to provincial, regional and municipal statutory planning and review processes (e.g., Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, water management frameworks and municipal development plans).</p> <p><b>6.1.3</b> Provide opportunities to bring partners together to compare, align, and fill gaps in policies and plans and to showcase/share innovative approaches to policy and plan development.</p>	<p><b>6.1.1</b> The Athabasca IWMP is accepted as information by federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments.</p> <p><b>6.1.2</b> The AWC provides a watershed perspective to other planning processes and ensures its partners are aware of such processes.</p> <p><b>6.1.3</b> A forum for partners is held to align, compare, and help identify potential gaps in policies and plans to showcase/share innovative approaches policy and plan development.</p>

**6.2 Strategy:** *Ensure policies and plans are informed by good information about watershed health. Potential AWC Partners: GOA, NGOs, Industries.*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>6.2.1</b> Evaluate water quality, quantity and aquatic ecosystem health information and monitoring needs</p>	<p><b>6.2.1</b> Information and monitoring needs are known and communicated to AWC partners.</p>

from the headwaters to the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Lake Athabasca.

**6.2.2** Work with partners to share existing and commission new reports to identify and fill priority information gaps and to ensure a comprehensive long-term, water monitoring program for the Athabasca watershed with publicly accessible data and research findings shared with decision-makers. Ensure all AWC documents are publicly accessible via the Athabasca River Basin Repository (Athabasca University Library).

**6.2.3** Build stakeholder knowledge about the watershed by promoting existing education programs (e.g., Water Literacy, Respect Our Lakes) and providing opportunities (e.g., forum, workshops) for stakeholders to share, compare, align and fill gaps in watershed knowledge that will inform policies and plans.

**6.2.4** Improve the Athabasca State of the Watershed (SOW) reporting framework (criteria and indicators) and include up-to-date information on tributaries, lakes, wetlands, and culturally significant indicators in future state of the watershed reports.

**6.2.2** Data gaps are filled, and a comprehensive monitoring program is implemented for the Athabasca watershed with data and research findings shared with the public and decision makers.

**6.2.3** Existing education programs are shared via the AWC Website, newsletters and social media and new opportunities, such as forums or workshops are developed.

**6.2.4** A reporting framework for the state of the watershed is established.



**Photo:**  
**Muskeg**  
**Creek by**  
**Marsha**  
**Hayward**

Goal 7. The impacts of climate change are known and inform community preparedness.

The impact of climate variability and climate change is a concern across Alberta as it is in the Athabasca watershed. To evaluate changes in water quantity throughout the Athabasca watershed, the [AWC SOW Phase III](#) looked at several components of surface water for each tertiary watershed including precipitation, evapotranspiration, discharge, and change in surface water storage over 200-year timeframe. Though outdated, this 2014 analysis supports a body of research that shows natural variability, as well as directional climate change, is occurring in the Athabasca watershed. Climatic events such as floods and droughts, can have a severe impact on local communities. To improve our understanding of the future effects of climate change, the AWC has identified several strategies and actions:

Strategies and Actions

**7.1 Strategy:** *Raise awareness and improve understanding of climate variability and change in the Athabasca watershed. Potential AWC Partners: AEP, academia, Industries, Indigenous Partners, Lesser Slave Watershed Council, Municipalities.*

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>7.1.1</b> Share existing information about climate variability and change in the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>7.1.1</b> Information about climate variability and change in the Athabasca watershed is available on the AWC website, newsletters, and social media.</p>
<p><b>7.1.2</b> Encourage <u>new and existing</u> research and monitoring in the Athabasca watershed, to understand the cumulative effects of growth and development and climate change.</p>	<p><b>7.1.2</b> Research and monitoring on cumulative effects and climate variability/change is conducted with results shared on the AWC website.</p>
<p><b>7.1.3</b> Collaborate with partners to <u>share information on and</u> help mitigate the impacts of climate variability (e.g., flood, drought forest fires, etc.) through flood and drought planning, FireSmart programs, etc.</p>	<p><b>7.1.3</b> Communities/industries are resilient to the impacts of climate change.</p>

Goal 8. Sub-basin and lake assessment, planning and stewardship initiatives are supported.

Many residents and visitors to the Athabasca watershed are aware of water and watershed issues. Additionally, a growing number of watershed stewardship groups bring the attitudes, skills and knowledge to take stewardship actions to protect the water resource. Since the AWC formed in 2009, the AWC has provided educational events and materials aimed at stewardship groups. To continue to support stewardship initiatives, particularly around on-the-ground stewardship actions as well as sub-basin and lake assessment and management planning, the AWC will collaborate with partners to address the strategies and actions identified below:

### Strategies and Actions

**8.1 Strategy:** Increase public awareness of water issues and watershed management in the Athabasca watershed and help build knowledge, awareness, and skills for individuals to undertake stewardship activities. Potential AWC Partners: AEP, AWC, Stewardship Groups.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>8.1.1</b> Use the AEP water literacy survey tool to create a baseline and test future improvement of water literacy in the Athabasca watershed.</p>	<p><b>8.1.1</b> The AEP water literacy survey tool has been used to create a baseline of water literacy in the Athabasca watershed.</p>
<p><b>8.1.2</b> Develop a Communications and Engagement plan that guides education and outreach activities and aligns with other watershed educators.</p>	<p><b>8.1.2</b> A Communication and Engagement Plan is completed and implemented.</p>
<p><b>8.1.3</b> Collaborate with the Alberta Water Council and other WPACs on water/watershed education initiatives.</p>	<p><b>8.1.3</b> AWC collaborates with other WPACs on projects in Alberta.</p>
<p><b>8.1.4</b> Collaborate with Athabasca University to promote the Athabasca River Basin Research Institute.</p>	<p><b>8.1.4</b> Information is available on the <a href="#">Athabasca River Basin Research Institute</a> website; partners are made aware of the site via social media, website, and newsletter.</p>



**8.2 Strategy:** Collaborate with partners to provide watershed science and outreach activities to students in the Athabasca watershed to increase watershed literacy that compliments the provincial curriculum. Potential AWC Partners: Stewardship Groups, Municipalities, Indigenous communities, NGOs.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>8.2.1</b> Facilitate school presentations, field trip opportunities, community events, and day camps to increase watershed literacy in the Athabasca watershed that support the learning outcomes of the Alberta curriculum.</p>	<p><b>8.2.1</b> The number of science and outreach activities for students in the Athabasca watershed has increased.</p>

**8.3 Strategy:** Support sub-watershed and lake assessment, planning and stewardship initiatives such that they have the support, tools, and resources they need to be successful. Potential AWC Partners: Stewardship groups, Municipalities, Indigenous communities.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>8.3.1</b> Be a conduit for information about stewardship initiatives in the basin via website, social media, newsletters, etc.</p> <p><b>8.3.2</b> Participate in and encourage municipalities, industries, and Indigenous communities to be involved with development and implementation of local stewardship group initiatives including state of reporting and watershed management planning.</p>	<p><b>8.3.1</b> Information about stewardship initiatives is available on the AWC website, social media, newsletters, etc.</p> <p><b>8.3.2</b> AWC, municipalities, industries, and Indigenous partners support local stewardship group initiatives, which are established in each sub-watershed.</p>

## Plan Implementation, Reporting and Review

Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy emphasizes that integrated watershed management planning is a shared responsibility. Collaboration is key, with the participation of stakeholders and community representatives from within the watershed required for successful plan implementation. Although the IWMP will rely heavily on the 11 sectors (Alberta Environment and Parks, Indigenous, Municipal, Members-at-Large, Forestry, Oil and Gas, Agricultural Producer, Mining/Utilities, Non-government Organizations, Stewardship Groups, and Academia) represented on its board, it will also need to engage many other sectors, organizations, and communities for the plan to be successful.

Additionally, to remain relevant and timely, an adaptive management approach is required. Hence the Athabasca IWMP should be considered a 'living' document and its implementation should be reviewed and reported on annually (within the AWC annual reporting process). The document should undergo a thorough review every three years to ensure goals and strategies are still relevant. As new issues arise, or as new information is developed, the plan may need to be updated.

Watershed management is complex and there are many activities that can be undertaken to protect watershed health. Resourcing and capacity issues must also be considered and often constrain plan implementation. Hence it is important that:

- a) a sound multi-stakeholder, collaborative implementation structure is put in place.
- b) priorities are carefully weighed and matched with capacity; and
- c) performance measures are used to ensure priority actions are effective within a specific timeline.

A sound governance structure will include the establishment of an Athabasca IWMP Implementation Committee (IC), made up of the AWC Technical Committee expanded to include key partners identified in the plan. Roles and responsibilities of the IC will be spelled out in its Terms of Reference. The IC will also work closely with the AWC Finance and Fundraising Committee to look at how to resource actions.

The IC will work closely with the AWC Communications, Education and Community Engagement Committee (CECE) to flesh out an education and outreach plan and begin implementing this aspect of the IWMP. This work should focus on giving people living, working and recreating in the Athabasca watershed basic knowledge (i.e., water literacy) about the watershed itself, as well as about the eight goals of the IWMP. It should also link people to the tools and resources needed to be good stewards of the watershed. This work will also focus on building the AWC's capacity for being a conduit for the exchange of technical and other information between governments and other stakeholders affecting the watershed (e.g., agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, etc.).

Successful watershed management planning relies heavily on using the best available information in a dynamic and iterative process. With the previous AWC state of reports focusing on the period 2007 – 2011, this information is now somewhat dated. Hence, the Implementation Committee will continue to

use a Technical Committee, whose first task will be to design and implement an iterative “state of” reporting process. This may include confirming the suite of performance measures to be reported and determining the format and timing of future state of reports. A phased process, focusing on the state of each of the eight IWMP goals, would be a potential approach.

Finally, a key role of the Implementation Committee will be to report on IWMP progress annually. Reporting can include successes and challenges in implementing the plan, as well as actual improvements to the watershed’s ecological integrity. Additionally, the IC should revisit the plan from time to time (e.g., every 5 years) to ensure it is still relevant to prevailing issues or adjusted as new issues arise.

## In Closing

The AWC and its partners have built interest and awareness across many sectors in the past decade, improving our understanding of the values important to everyone living, working and recreating in the Athabasca watershed, as well as the issues affecting those values. As we move forward with the next phase of watershed management, the AWC will more than ever need all its partners to participate in the forthcoming work to implement the IWMP.

The success of IWMP implementation will be dependent on the partnerships and collaborations generated to undertake strategies and actions.

Sustained efforts by all jurisdictions within the watershed are required. Fortunately, the potential for beneficial partnerships in the Athabasca watershed is endless. Working together, the AWC and its partners can ensure the *Water for Life* strategy is achieved throughout the watershed.



## Appendix 1. Links and Documents

### List of Athabasca Watershed Council Documents Relevant to the IWMP Project

- AWC Website: <http://www.awc-wpac.ca/>
- AWC Engagement Documents:
  - o [\*Athabasca Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Development Process: Stakeholder and Aboriginal Community Focus Group Summary \(Dec 2008\)\*](#). Prepared by Alberta Environment.
  - o [\*Stakeholder Perceptions About the Health of the Athabasca Watershed: Results of a Preliminary On-line Survey\*](#). Prepared as Part of Phase 2 of the Athabasca State of the Watershed Report by Fiera Biological Consulting, March 2012.
  - o [\*Final Report on the Four Public Participation Sessions\*](#). Prepared by Human Environment Group, December 2012.
- SOW Technical Reports and Summary:
  - o [\*Athabasca Watershed Council State of the Watershed Report: Phase 1\*](#). Prepared by Hatfield Consultants. March 2011
    - [\*Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed\*](#). Prepared by Brenda Parlee, University of Alberta, May 2011.
  - o [\*Athabasca State of the Watershed Report Phase 2\*](#). Prepared by FIERA Biological Consulting, March 2012.
    - [\*Northern River Basin Study Management Recommendations\*](#), Fiera Biological Consulting, March 2012.
  - o [\*State of the Watershed Report Phase 3: Water Quantity and Basic Water Quality in the Athabasca Watershed\*](#). Prepared by Fiera Biological Consulting (April 2013)
  - o [\*Athabasca State of the Watershed Assessment Phase 4: Organic Compounds in Surface Water and Sediments and Trace Metals in Sediment\*](#). Prepared by Hatfield Consultants, March 2014.
  - o [\*Athabasca SOW Summary\*](#)
- [Info Sheets](#)
- [AWC Annual reports](#) 2009-10 through 2017-18. (NB: no report for 2013-14)
- AWC [Three Year Strategic Plan: 2020-2023](#)

### Other Documents & Initiatives Relevant to the Athabasca Watershed

#### National Initiatives

- [Canadian Heritage Rivers](#)
- [Center for Watershed Protection](#)
- [Living Lakes Canada](#)

## Federal Government

### Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)\*

- [Canadian Agricultural Partnership in Alberta](#)

Environment Canada [www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca);

- [Oil sands monitoring](#)
- [Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines](#)

Fisheries and Oceans Canada / Fish Habitat Management: <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/index-eng.htm>

Health Canada: [Drinking Water](#)

Parks Canada ([Wood Buffalo National Park](#), [Jasper National Park](#))

- WBNP UNESCO Heritage Site reports - <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/156893>

## Transboundary

- [BC Transboundary Waters](#)
- Mackenzie River Basin Board – [Alberta – NWT Transboundary Waters Bilateral Agreement](#)
- [NWT Water Stewardship](#)
- Saskatchewan Water Security Agency ([Lake Athabasca monitoring](#), [state of](#))

## Provincial Government and Agencies

- Policies/strategies: [Water for Life Strategy](#), [Land Use Framework](#), [Wetland Policy](#)
- Legislation: *Water Act, EPEA, Public Lands Act, MGA* (See [Queen's Printer](#))
- Regulators: [AER](#)
  - [AER Compliance Dashboard](#)
  - [AER One Stop Public Map Viewer](#)
  - [AER Water Use Report](#)
- [Alberta Environment](#) – multiple webpages, reports
  - [Alberta Water Well](#) database
  - [Alberta Working Well](#) program
  - Fish and Wildlife Internet Mapping Tool  
[https://maps.alberta.ca/FWIMT\\_Pub/Viewer/?TermsOfUseRequired=true&Viewer=FWIMT\\_Pub](https://maps.alberta.ca/FWIMT_Pub/Viewer/?TermsOfUseRequired=true&Viewer=FWIMT_Pub)
  - [Water for Life strategy](#)
  - [WPAC webpage](#)
  - [winter synoptic water quality study](#)
- [Alberta Agriculture](#)
- [Alberta Health](#)
  - [Boil Water advisories](#)

- [AEPHIN](#) website
- [Alberta Innovates – Water Innovation Program](#)
- Alberta Municipal Affairs [www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca](http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca)
  - [Alberta’s Economic Dashboard](#)
- Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB)
  - Confined Feeding Operations see <https://cfo.nrcb.ca/>

#### Provincial Organizations/Initiatives

- [Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute](#)
- [Alberta Conservation Association](#)
- [Alberta Environmental Farm Plan](#)
- [Alberta Fish and Game Association](#)
- [Alberta Invasive Species Council](#)
- [Alberta Stewardship Network / Land Stewardship Centre](#)
- [Alberta Water Council \(Publications\)](#)
- [Alberta Water Portal](#)
- [Alberta WaterSmart](#)
  - [Athabasca River Basin initiative](#)
- [Alberta Water Tool](#)
- [Association of Summer Villages of Alberta](#)
- [Cows and Fish](#) (Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society)
- [Nature Alberta](#)

#### Surrounding Regions

- Lesser Slave Watershed Council <http://lesserslavewatershedcouncil.ca/>
- Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance <https://www.mightypeacewatershedalliance.org/>
- North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance <https://www.nswa.ab.ca/>
- Beaver River Watershed Alliance <https://www.beaverwatershedalliance.org/>
- [Northern Alberta Water and Wastewater Needs report](#) produced by the Northern Alberta Development Council <https://nadc.ca/Docs/Water-Needs-Survey.pdf>
- [Northern River Basins Study / Northern Rivers Ecosystem Initiative](#)
- [RAC Advice to the GOA on the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#)

#### Athabasca Watershed

- [Alberta’s Lower Athabasca Basin: Archaeology and Palaeoenvironments](#) edited by Brian Ronaghan, May 2017, University of Alberta Press.  
<http://www.aupress.ca/index.php/books/120207>

- Alberta WaterSmart [The Sustainable Water Management in the Athabasca River Basin Initiative](#)
- Athabasca River Basin Research Institute website online [searchable repository](#)
- [Keepers of the Athabasca](#)
- [Lac La Biche watershed management plan](#)
- [Lower Athabasca Regional Plan](#)
- [Science Outreach – Athabasca](#)
- [Upper Athabasca Regional Plan](#)
- WWF “Securing Environmental flows in the Athabasca River”:  
[http://d2akrl9rvxl3z3.cloudfront.net/downloads/wwf\\_canada\\_athabasca\\_report.pdf](http://d2akrl9rvxl3z3.cloudfront.net/downloads/wwf_canada_athabasca_report.pdf)

### Municipal

- [ALDIP](#)
- [Alberta Urban Municipalities Association](#)
  - [Watershed Management](#)
  - [Source Water Protection](#)
- Community Conserve [Municipal Management of Water Bodies](#)
- [Northern Alberta Development Council](#)
  - Northern Alberta Water and Wastewater Needs Assessment Summary Report  
<https://nadc.ca/Docs/Water-Needs-Survey.pdf>
  - Water North Coalition <https://nadc.ca/our-business/partnerships/water-north-coalition/>
- [Rural Municipalities of Alberta](#) (Districts 3, 4 and 5)

### Indigenous

- [Athabasca Tribal Corporation](#)
- [Bigstone Cree Nation](#)
- CEMA [Traditional Ecological Knowledge](#) database (ARBRI/AU)
- [Centre for Indigenous Peoples.](#)
- [Circuit Rider Training Program](#)
- [Grand Council of Treaty 8 First Nations](#)
- [Guardians community-based monitoring project](#)
- [Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council](#)
- [Northern Contaminants Project](#)
- [Northern River Basins Study Traditional Knowledge Study](#)
- [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

### Industry Best Practices

- [Wetland BMP Knowledge Exchange](#)

#### Lake Management

- [AEP – Lakes](#)
- [Alberta Lake Management Society](#)
- [ASVA Lake Stewardship Reference Guide](#)
- [Atlas of Alberta Lakes](#)
- [Protect our Lakes and Shorelines](#) (Lac La Biche County)
- [Respect our Lakes](#) program (AEP)

#### Research and Monitoring

- [Alberta River Basins](#)
- [Athabasca River Basin Research Institute](#)
  - [Lake reports repository](#)
  - [River reports repository](#)
  - [Creek reports repository](#)
- [Boreal Research Institute](#) (NAIT)
- [CABIN](#)
- [Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance](#).
- [Environmental Monitoring and Science Program](#) (AEP)
- [Foothills Research Institute](#)
- [GOWN](#)
- [Guardians community-based monitoring project](#)
- [Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory / Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation](#)
- [Mackenzie DataStream](#)
- [Northern River Basins Study](#)
- [Oil Sands Monitoring Program](#)
  - [Federal webpage](#)
  - [COSIA webpage](#)
- [Peace Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program](#)
- [RAMP \(Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program\)](#)
- [Wood Buffalo Environmental Association](#)





**Athabasca**  
WATERSHED COUNCIL

# 3-Year Strategic Plan

2022-23 to 2024-25



*Engaging Athabascans, from the mountain headwaters to the Delta lowlands...*

Approved by the Board: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1.0 About the Athabasca Watershed Council

Established in 2009, the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) is a not-for-profit society and charitable organization guided by its vision, mission, and values. Additionally, the AWC is recognized by the Government of Alberta as a Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC) that works in partnership to achieve the goals of Alberta’s *Water for Life* strategy, in the Athabasca watershed.

### 1.1 Water for Life Goals

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

### 1.2 WPAC Roles mandated by the GOA

- Convenor and Collaborator
- Education and Literacy
- Policy and Planning
- Monitoring and Reporting

### 1.3 Vision

The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, socially responsible, and economically sustainable.

### 1.4 Mission

The Athabasca Watershed Council demonstrates leadership and facilitates informed decision-making in the Athabasca 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.

### 1.5 Values:

- We value integrity, trust, and transparency.
- We respect all points of view.
- Water is a blessing and gift and is essential for the environment, economy, society and the spirit.
- We respect the environment and people.
- We believe in consensus decision-making.
- We respect economic responsibilities.
- 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 communities, cultures, and knowledges of Indigenous peoples in the Athabasca watershed.
- We value inclusivity.
- We value creativity, innovation, and organizational risk taking.
- We are responsible and accountable to all members, partners, stakeholders, Indigenous peoples, and the general public.
- We are purpose driven.

## 2.0 Introduction

The Athabasca River is the second largest river in Alberta, arising in the Rocky Mountains, and draining into Lake Athabasca, Alberta's largest lake. When combined, the lands within Alberta that drain into the river and lake makes up nearly a quarter of the province. This area includes all or part of forty-five municipalities. Residents in this basin are employed by the numerous industries that operate here, including agriculture, forestry, mining, and energy. The Athabasca watershed includes portions of Treaty 6, 8 and 10 territories and many First Nation and Métis communities which view the watershed as important for a number of cultural and traditional uses.

To achieve *Water for Life* goals in the Athabasca watershed, the AWC has been mandated by the Government of Alberta to carry out the activities of a Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the area in Figure 1. To achieve this, in addition to its vision and mission, the AWC has also identified five goals in this strategic plan. Each goal is in turn supported by several desired outcomes and key activities. The implementation of activities and achievement of outcomes is dependent on AWC and partner capacity and resources.

This strategic plan has been developed, reviewed, and approved by the AWC's Board of Directors. It is an open-ended, 'rolling plan' and will be reviewed annually. The plan is also meant to be adaptive, in that the occurrence and timing of initiatives may vary to suit the needs and situations encountered by the organization and as opportunities arise in the watershed. The plan also incorporates goals of the AWC *Communications, Education and Community Engagement Strategy* and the *Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan*. An annual cycle of planning, reviewing and reporting (Figure 2) will ensure the AWC operates in a relevant and timely fashion. Goals, outcomes and activities are described in more detail in the sections below.



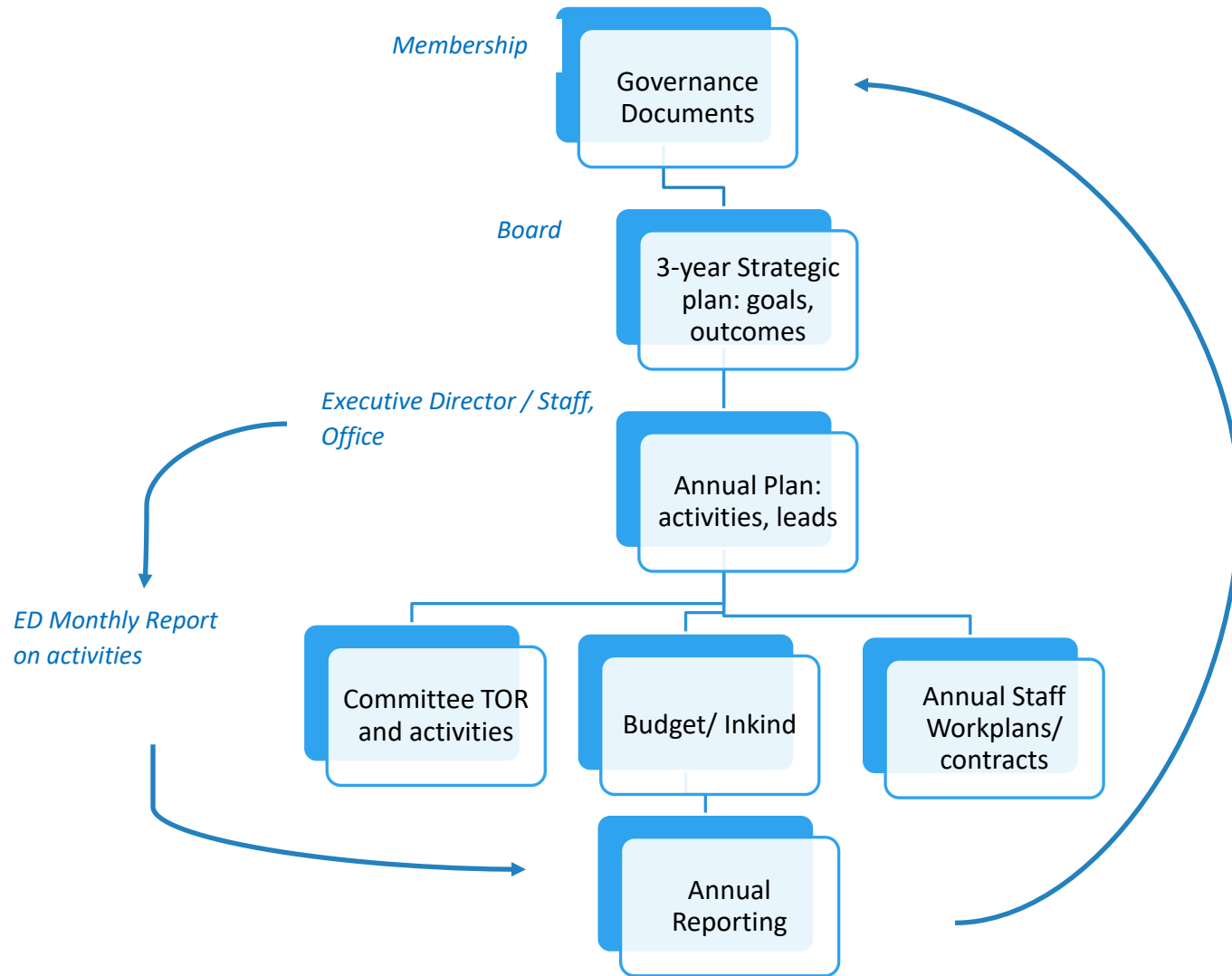


Figure 2. Diagram showing the Athabasca Watershed Council’s annual planning and reporting cycle.

2.1 Goal #1: The AWC provides easily accessible water-related information to stakeholders/sectors, the public and Indigenous peoples, leading to improved knowledge about the Athabasca watershed (Education & Literacy).

**Preamble:** In the past, the AWC, through the work of its Communications, Education and Community Engagement (CECE) Committee and the Education and Outreach Coordinator (EOC), has successfully used a variety of communication tools (e.g., website, newsletter, social media) to raise awareness about the Athabasca watershed and to share its own and other organizations’ water-related information with those with an interest in the basin. However, such efforts are limited by 1) our own network and understanding of what is going on around the basin (how well are we connected?), and 2) the size of our membership and viewership, which is small, but growing (how well are we connecting with others?). It is also challenging to gauge how aware or knowledgeable different audiences are about the Athabasca watershed, or what information/knowledge needs they have. To address these limitations, 1) the AWC needs an active CECE Committee working with the Education and Outreach Coordinator to implement an effective CECE strategy with key messages and performance measures; 2) we need to continue to use a variety of communication tools to reach a variety of audiences; and 3) we need to ensure we are translating credible, balanced data and information into educational and outreach tools that lead to improved knowledge.

Goal #1 Outcomes and Key Actions:	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Lead / Support
<p><b>Effective CECE Committee Planning and Oversight:</b></p> <p><i>1.1 The AWC, through its CECE Committee, has developed and is actively implementing a Communications, Education and Community Engagement strategy that establishes and maintains mutually respectful relationships with members, stakeholders/sectors (govt, industry and NGOs), Indigenous communities, the public and youth.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.1. Review the CECE plan and key messages annually (within the annual strategic planning process).</li> <li>1.1.2. Ensure the CECE Committee is populated, meets quarterly and maintains an up-to-date TOR.</li> <li>1.1.3. Report on CECE plan implementation and performance measures annually.</li> </ul>				CECE Committee / EOC
<p><b>Compelling Communications (1 way information out):</b></p> <p><i>1.2 The AWC is a trusted go-to source of water related news and information, using a variety of communication tools to reach members, stakeholders/sectors, Indigenous peoples, the general public and youth.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.2.1 Add content and resources to the AWC website regularly and use social media to promote.</li> <li>1.2.2 Produce the AWC e-newsletter monthly.</li> <li>1.2.3 Produce a monthly blog about AWC activities or other notes of interest.</li> <li>1.2.4 Highlight sub-basins, places of interest, important dates and relevant resources via weekly social media posts, using different platforms (LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, video, etc.) as capacity allows.</li> <li>1.2.5 Circulate the traveling watershed display to public venues throughout the watershed.</li> </ul>				EOC / other staff, CECE Committee





## 2.2 Goal #2: The AWC actively engages others in mobilizing resources and commitments to achieve shared outcomes (Convenor and Collaborator).

**Preamble:** In the past, the AWC, through the work of its Board and committees, Executive Director, and other staff, has engaged a variety of individuals and different sectors of society (e.g., municipal forums or presentations), with varying results, depending on the efforts of the day. Going forward, we need to think more about what we mean by ‘engagement’ and even more specifically, what ‘sectors’ of society we need to engage in order to be successful at achieving our goals in the Athabasca watershed. Additionally, to engage various sectors, we must build our own credibility and relevance to others.

Goal #2 Outcomes and Key Actions:	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Lead / Support
<p><b>A Strong and Diverse Membership</b>  <i>2.1 All municipalities, Indigenous communities, businesses and ENGOs located in the Athabasca watershed are organizational members of the AWC.</i></p> <p>2.1.1 Improve knowledge of potential members in the Athabasca by building and maintaining a better contact database management system.                      2.1.2 Recruit potential members by making more cold calls, sending annual letters, working with board members to make presentations to their affiliations, attending tradeshow and conferences, etc.</p>				ED/ staff, board
<p><b>Improved AWC Credibility and Relevance</b>  <i>2.2 The AWC is a credible and relevant leader, sharing information, facilitating well-attended networking and knowledge sharing events among a variety of members, partners, sectors, etc. from across the watershed.</i></p> <p>2.2.1 As an information hub, amplify and re-direct emails, engagement notices, report and news releases, etc. to the board (via direct emails), members (via the e-newsletter and other posts) and other appropriate partners as relevant.                      2.2.2 Improve information sharing, networking opportunities, and number and diversity of attendees at AWC events by incorporating guest speakers, fieldtrips, and other learning / networking opportunities.                      2.2.3 Improve engagement, and knowledge of sector specific issues and desired outcomes, by attending sector (Govt, industry, ENGO, Indigenous) forums, webinars, and events.</p>				ED / Other staff, Board members
<p><b>A Knowledgeable Board</b>  <i>2.3 The AWC board is knowledgeable about other watershed, provincial, national, and international initiatives relevant to the Athabasca watershed.</i></p> <p>2.3.1 Where appropriate, encourage board members to participate in regional (e.g., Water North Coalition), provincial, transboundary, national, and international initiatives relevant to the Athabasca watershed.</p>				ED / staff, Board Members

Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)

<p>2.3.2 Encourage board members to participate in other WFL partnerships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate on the Alberta Water Council board and its projects</li> <li>• Participate in the WPACs Alberta collaborative via quarterly managers’ meetings, Policy and Legislation and Education and Outreach committees, and the production of shared products.</li> <li>• Be aware of and where capacity exists, support sub-basin and lake stewardship initiatives (e.g., Healthy Waters Lac La Biche, Baptist and Island Lakes Stewardship Society).</li> </ul>				
---	--	--	--	--

2.3 Goal #3: The AWC is a credible, recognized authority on the condition of the Athabasca watershed; this information informs implementation of the Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan, whose goals are achieved via healthy and active relationships with Athabascans and others (Policy and Planning, Monitoring and Reporting).

**Preamble:** In the past, the AWC, through the work of its Technical Committee (TC) and Watershed Science Coordinator (WSC), built credibility as a recognized authority on the Athabasca watershed by developing basin-wide ‘state of’ and other technical reports via a multi-sector, consensus-based approach. This work continues today, but with a greater focus on supporting partnership initiatives at the sub-basin level such as the East Slopes (McLeod and Pembina) benthic sampling, Lac La Biche and other lake management planning, Pembina and Tawatinaw riparian stewardship projects, etc. The board also has a role to play in building credibility, educating itself about water issues throughout the basin, and providing balanced input to federal, provincial, municipal and resource policy and planning engagement processes. Although ‘recognition’ is a hard measure to gauge, the AWC is recognized by the GOA as the WPAC for the Athabasca watershed. In 2021, the AWC was asked to provide a comment on the Minister’s release of the Upper Athabasca surface water quality management framework - a good example of being recognized as a credible authority. Being asked to participate in regional and national initiatives by the University of Alberta, Living Lakes Canada and Canadian Wildlife Federation are also good examples of being recognized as a valued authority operating in the Athabasca watershed. Going forward, the AWC needs to 1) increase its efforts to be an unbiased source of credible information about the condition of the watershed, as well as the issues affecting it; 2) incorporate the IWMP goals into workplans that get implemented; 3) and continue to seek collaborations that will help us achieve WFL, IWMP and other strategic goals and fill data gaps.

Goal #3 Outcomes and Key Activities:	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Lead/Support
<p><b>Effective Technical Committee Planning and Oversight:</b></p> <p>3.1 The AWC Technical Committee provides effective oversight of AWC technical activities.</p> <p>3.1.1 Ensure the Technical Committee is populated, keeps a TOR up to date and meets quarterly to prioritize tasks and ensure they are included in the strategic and annual plan and budgets.</p> <p>3.1.2 Report on Technical committee activities annually (within the AWC annual reporting process).</p>				TC/WSC



<p><b>Credible State of the Watershed/ Condition Information</b></p> <p>3.2 The AWC is a credible source of information about the condition of the watershed and other technical information.</p> <p>3.2.1 Build knowledge about and/or report on the state of WFL goals in the Athabasca including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State of drinking water: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continue to be a member and attend meetings of the Water North Coalition</li> <li>○ Carry out the SAIT Capstone resilient drinking water communities project and follow up with less resilient rural and Indigenous communities by offering tools such as source water protection planning, drought planning, Working Well workshops, etc.</li> <li>○ Provide information on the state of source drinking water via the Athabasca Dispatch newsletter spring edition</li> </ul> </li> <li>• State of healthy aquatic ecosystems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Report on the state of various aspects of HAE (e.g., riparian assessments, lake reports)</li> <li>○ Promote citizen science programs that measure biodiversity, invasive species (e.g., NatureLynx)</li> <li>○ Explore the cost of repairing/updating the interactive atlas including re-visiting indicators and expanding to an online ‘dashboard’ or ‘report card’ system of real-time reporting</li> <li>○ Gain a better understanding of how current policy (Strategy for the Protection of Aquatic Ecosystems), planning and practices is affecting HAE of the Athabasca River.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• State of reliable supplies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support the NSERC Under Ice Water Model collaboration with the UofA, EPCOR, NSWA;</li> <li>○ Investigate an AB WaterSmart Phase II water supply initiative</li> <li>○ Understand how the Framework for Water Management Planning, LARP and other IFN tools apply to the Athabasca River.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Look for opportunities to highlight other aspects of the watershed including the state of partnerships, knowledge and research, water conservation, efficiency and productivity, integrated land-water management, climate change, cumulative effects etc.</li> </ul>				ED/other staff
				WSC, TC
	defer			ED / WSC, TC
	defer			ED
<p><b>An Approved IWMP Embedded in Workplans</b></p> <p>3.3 The Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) identifies shared social, cultural, economic, and environmental outcomes and has been completed and accepted by Stakeholders and Indigenous groups throughout the basin.</p> <p>3.3.1. Approve the IWMP, post it to the website, ensure actions are incorporated into the strategic plan, implemented and reported on annually.</p>				ED/WSC

Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)

<p>3.4 Sectors and communities work collaboratively to achieve shared watershed outcomes through implementation of the IWMP.</p> <p>3.4.1. Continue to raise awareness, buy-in and support for IWMP implementation with stakeholders and Indigenous groups through presentations, social media, etc.</p>				
<p><b>Collaborations to Fill Data Gaps</b></p> <p>3.5 Cultural wisdom, traditional and local knowledge and science inform water and watershed management in the Athabasca watershed and information gaps are filled..</p> <p>3.5.1 Undertake initiatives that identify Indigenous perspectives relevant to WFL goals in the Athabasca watershed (e.g., 2022 Capstone project).</p> <p>3.5.2 Improve understanding of water quality trends identified in the Upper and Lower Athabasca SWQMF (e.g., Tech Committee water quality meetings)</p> <p>3.5.3 Undertake projects that help improve understanding or management of a particular issue in a particular sub-basin or local watershed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headwaters: understand research on glaciers, climate change, etc. and how the National and Provincial parks are managing these areas. (e.g. Sept. board meeting Hinton)</li> <li>• East Slopes: participate in the East Slopes Biomonitoring project and build awareness about benthic invertebrates in the Athabasca via a webinar, etc.</li> <li>• Upper Athabasca: promote fish connectivity planning in the Wildhay-Berland and other watersheds</li> <li>• Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (Pembina and Tawatinaw w/s): convene sub-basin stakeholder groups and use riparian assessments, the riparian portal, drone footage and videos, webinars, state of reports, etc. to increase awareness of riparian health, flood and drought resiliency, and engage landowners in on the ground restoration and conservation projects</li> <li>• Lac La Biche, BAILS and other lake initiatives: support development and implementation of lake management plans and stewardship actions</li> <li>• Lower Athabasca: explore the role of AWC in being a source of credible information about land and water management in the oilsands area, Lake Athabasca, the Peace-Athabasca Delta, etc.</li> </ul>				WSC

**2.4 Goal #4: AWC promotes the alignment and integration of land and water statutory and non-statutory policies, plans and program across jurisdictions where needed to achieve ‘Water for Life’ goals and a healthy Athabasca River watershed (Policy and Planning).**

**Preamble:** WPACs, using a multi-sector, consensus lens, are uniquely situated to review federal, provincial, municipal, and resource land use policies and plans and provide input on how they may affect watershed health and the achievement of Water for Life goals. They can also provide land managers with information and resources to lessen the impacts of land development on waterbodies and watersheds. To date, the AWC Executive Director as well as some individual AWC board members have provided such input to some municipal planning documents (e.g. county and summer village Intermunicipal Development Plans) and some provincial engagement processes (e.g., Upper and Lower Athabasca regional and sub-basin plans and water management frameworks). However, the AWC board itself rarely provides a consensus viewpoint to such engagement processes. Going forward, the AWC board needs to explore this area in more depth, to gain better understanding of when it may be beneficial to use its collective voice, when to add its voice to other WFL partnerships and water voices, in order to better achieve its mandate and goals in the Athabasca watershed.

<b>Goal #4 Outcomes and key Activities:</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>Lead/Support</b>
<p><b>Aligned Policies, Plans and Practices</b></p> <p><i>4.1 AWC is a source of information to help stakeholders understand land and water governance in the Athabasca watershed, building a common understanding of relevant land and water policies, legislation, management plans and codes of practice/beneficial practices.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1.1 Provide more information on the website about policies, legislation, regional, municipal, resource plans, codes /beneficial practices, etc.</li> <li>4.1.2 Use social media to amplify federal, provincial, industry and municipal land use engagement processes and work with the AWC board to make consensus submissions where appropriate.</li> <li>4.1.3 Undertake projects that promote beneficial practices that enhance or protect watershed health (e.g., riparian plantings, waterbody crossing remediation).</li> </ul>				<p>EOC</p> <p>WSC</p>
<p><i>4.2 Areas where land and water policies, plans and programs are misaligned are identified and shared with appropriate agencies.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.2.1 Participate in joint policy and legislation initiatives through the Alberta Water Council and the WPAC collective.</li> <li>4.2.2 Undertake a policy and plan review to improve understanding of the state of land and water management in the Athabasca watershed (by sub-basin).</li> </ul>				<p>ED</p> <p>ED</p>

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

**Preamble:** Although the AWC is a small organization with limited capacity, it still must meet all the administrative, financial, human resource and governance requirements of a larger organization. In order to keep this portion of its business from consuming too much time (time better spent on science and outreach), we need to improve and streamline AWC policies, processes and practices, such that the AWC is an efficient, effective and transparent organization. This will help improve our reputation, which in turn will improve our sustainability as an organization worth investing in.

Goal #5 Outcomes and Key Activities:	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Lead / Support
<p><b>Streamlined Administration:</b></p> <p>5.1 <i>The AWC’s society and charitable status and GOA mandate as a WPAC are maintained.</i></p> <p>5.1.1 File all reports needed to maintain society, charitable, and WPAC status including CRA reports, provincial registries reports, annual AEP and other grant reports, etc.</p> <p>5.2 <i>An office is maintained and accessible to the public.</i></p> <p>5.2.1 Annually renew office lease, maintain property, liability and E&amp;O insurance.</p> <p>5.2.2. Fund an inventory of furniture, office supplies, computer hardware, software subscriptions, etc.</p> <p>5.3 <i>Administrative processes are consistent over time and staffing transitions are smooth.</i></p> <p>5.3.1 Improve filing and records management (digital and hard copy) including offsite backups, password management, email management, archiving and periodically celebrating corporate history.</p> <p>5.3.2 Complete an Administrators Guide that documents all processes.</p>				ED / staff
<p><b>Effective Financial Committee Oversight:</b></p> <p>5.4 <i>The AWC Finance Committee provides effective oversight of AWC financial policies and practices.</i></p> <p>5.4.1 Ensure the Finance Committee is populated, meets quarterly to review policies and prioritize tasks which are included in the strategic and annual plan and budgets; keeps a TOR up to date.</p> <p>5.4.2 Report on Financial committee activities annually (within the AWC annual reporting process).</p> <p><b>Generally Accepted Accounting Processes:</b></p> <p>5.5 <i>The AWC is fiscally responsible, follows standard accounting practices and a cycle of budgeting and financial reporting.</i></p>				ED / Finance committee

Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)

<p>5.5.1 Maintain an approved budget; process and track all revenues (including in-kind) and expenses against the budget; report to the board quarterly, ensure an ‘audit/financial review’ annually; etc.</p> <p><b>Sustainable Funding</b></p> <p>5.6 Continue to raise funds and increase capacity to support AWC projects and activities.</p> <p>5.6.1 Develop a fundraising plan</p> <p>5.6.2 Work with the WPAC collaborative on AEP 2023-24 agreements, apply for other grants and meet all tracking and reporting requirements; track and report in-kind support.</p> <p>5.6.3 Send out letters of request to municipalities, industries, members, etc.;</p> <p>5.6.4 Experiment with other fundraising ideas (gift box, raffles, etc.).</p>				
<p><b>Robust Human Resources:</b></p> <p>5.7 The AWC has the human resources and internal capacity needed to achieve its goals and staff/board turnover does not disrupt operations.</p> <p>5.7.1 Ensure appropriate safety and other OHS measures are in place and communicated to all.</p> <p>5.7.2 Keep current the Employee Handbook and related policies, procedures, job descriptions, etc.</p> <p>5.7.3 Ensure staff meet regularly, develop work plans, report on activities, and receive feedback.</p> <p>5.7.4 Work towards making the AWC more competitive in hiring and retaining staff.</p> <p>5.7.5 Increase staff capacity (e.g., new hires, interns, etc.)</p> <p>5.7.6 Find a better way to track memberships and other contacts; undertake a membership drive.</p> <p>5.7.7 Organize an annual AGM or other event for members.</p> <p>5.7.8 Recruit and retain a diversity of directors and committee members.</p> <p>5.7.9. Ensure the board improves its knowledge by meeting quarterly and having opportunities to hear presentations and participate in fieldtrips around the basin</p> <p>5.7.10 Ensure the Executive Committee is meeting regularly to guide day to day business and to conduct the ED’s annual performance review.</p>				ED / staff Executive, Board
<p><b>Strong, Effective Governance:</b></p> <p>5.8 The AWC is viewed as a credible and transparent organization.</p> <p>5.8.1 Ensure AWC bylaws, policies, and terms of reference are current and put into practice.</p> <p>5.8.2 Maintain a three-year strategic plan, annual workplan, budget and reporting process with performance indicators.</p>				ED/ Executive / Board

Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)

3.0 2022 – 23 Workplan Highlights ~ Year at a Glance:

Month	Admin/ Finances /HR	Governance	Communication	Education & Outreach	Science
January 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog - CECE mtg	- traveling library initiated - Capstone project initiated	- Berland project initiated - Tawatinaw riparian assessment initiated
February 2022	- weekly staff mtgs - Employee HB final	- Executive/Finance mtg - Board mtg / strategic plan approved	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog	Quarterly newsletter	- IWMP approved - Benthic invert webinar - Tech comm Water Quality discussion 1
March 2022	- weekly staff mtgs - membership drive	- Executive	- e-Newsletter / posts / blog	- World Water Day Groundwater webinar	- summer fieldwork planning - Tech comm water quality discussion 2
April 2022	- weekly staff mtgs - financial audit / grant reporting	- Executive	- e-Newsletter / posts / blog - annual report produced - CECE mtg	- move traveling library	- start riparian visits
May 2022	- weekly staff mtgs - Summer Students!	- Executive/Finance mtg	- e-Newsletter / posts / blog	Quarterly newsletter	- riparian site work
June 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive/ - AGM / Board meeting	- e-Newsletter /posts / blog		- riparian site work - Amber Valley field day
July 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive	- e-Newsletter / posts /blog - CECE mtg	- move traveling library	Tech comm mtg - riparian site work
August 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive/Finance meeting	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog	Quarterly newsletter	-benthic planning
September 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive - Board meeting	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog		- benthic sampling
October 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive	- CECE mtg - e-Newsletter/ posts / blog	- move traveling library	Tech comm mtg - benthic data processing
Nov 2022	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive/Finance meeting - Board meeting	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog	Quarterly newsletter	
Dec 2022	- weekly staff mtgs - performance reviews	- Executive	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog		
January 2023	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog - CECE mtg	- move traveling library	- Tech comm mtg
February 2023	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive /finance meeting - Board meeting	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog	Quarterly newsletter	
March 2023	- weekly staff mtgs	- Executive	- e-Newsletter/ posts / blog		

Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)

4.0 AWC 2022-23 Core Operating Budget

<b>REVENUE:</b>		
Donations	\$ 2,500	
Province of Alberta Grant	\$ 200,000	
Interest Revenue	\$ 200	
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 202,700</b>	
<b>EXPENSE:</b>		
Rent/Utilities / internet	\$ 6,000	
Telephone / Teleconference	\$ 3,000	
Website (domain, hosting, WordPress)	\$ 250	
Computers & Software	\$ 2,000	
Bank Fees / petty cash	\$ 150	
Board and Property Insurance	\$ 2,700	
Courier & Postage	\$ 250	
Advertising & Promotions	\$ 500	
Gifts of Appreciation	\$ 250	
Office Supplies	\$ 500	
Membership, fees	\$ 100	
Accounting Expense (Audit)	\$ 5,000	
GST expense (not recoverable)	\$ 2,500	
honorariums	\$ 2,000	
Travel	\$ 2,000	
Hosting	\$ 2,000	
Executive Director	\$ 70,000	
Technical Support	\$ 45,000	+ \$15k WRRP grant
Communications and Admin Support	\$ 35,000	+ \$10k WRRP grant
Summer Students, Interns, etc.	\$ 6,500	* if CSJ grant successful
Staff dev, training, etc.	\$ 1,500	
El Expense	\$ 4,000	

*Three-Year Strategic Plan (2022-23 to 2024-25)*

CPP Expense	\$ 8,500	
Staff Benefits Program	\$ 2,400	
WCB Expense	\$ 400	
	<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	
	<b>\$ 202,500</b>	
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 200</b>	



# Alberta WPACs



**Alberta WPACs  
Five Year Renewable  
Memorandum of Understanding  
January 2022**

## **Preamble**

Alberta's Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (Alberta WPACs) actively engage governments, industry, non-government organizations, Indigenous Peoples, and the public in education, watershed assessment, restoration, planning, monitoring, and in provincial watershed management, and conservation. Alberta WPACs are committed to pursuing the goals of **Alberta's Water For Life Strategy** and continue to work through knowledge and research, partnerships, provide advice on water and watershed management, and collaboration to address new challenges impacting Alberta's watersheds. Eleven Alberta WPACs are operating, and cover over 90% of Alberta's land and water base within their boundaries

The revised *Memorandum of Understanding* between all Alberta WPACs defines the benefits of working collaboratively, the relationship between the eleven individual WPACs, and renews the commitment to the overarching Alberta WPACs collaborative initiative. The original MOU was established in 2012.

Working collaboratively creates several significant benefits for WPACs. It will increase our visibility to the public, indigenous groups, and government agencies, help us align with funding priorities, strengthen other partnerships, and can lead to overall organizational effectiveness and efficiency.



## **Memorandum of Understanding – Statement of Purpose**

The eleven WPACs of Alberta agree to work together as a collaborative, hereafter referred to as **Alberta WPACs** (Alberta Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils) in order to:

1. Strengthen a working Alberta WPACs collaborative to efficiently address province-wide watershed management issues, as agreed upon through consensus by all Alberta WPACs;
2. Improve our collaborative partnership with Alberta Environment and Parks; and
3. Address critical issues of collective importance and collaboratively develop and express shared views on these key concerns.

To accomplish these three key directions, Alberta WPACs agree to:

- Explore opportunities to develop shared communications and marketing materials in support of the WPAC collective, as well as supporting awareness about watershed management and water literacy.
- Share knowledge and information on the WPAC management and administrative functions of mutual interest, including but not limited to: human resources; legal services; communications; corporate policies; watershed awareness and education materials; and Board development.
- Explore opportunities and develop collaborative initiatives on regional, provincial, and national projects of mutual interest.

## **Decision-Making Process**

Decisions will be made through approved collaborative processes, working in concert with WPAC Managers and Boards.

## Alberta WPACs



### **Roles and Responsibilities of the Individual Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils**

Each member WPAC of the eleven Alberta WPACs agrees to:

- Meet quarterly and attend the biennial WPAC Summit Conference, to further the goals and objectives of the Alberta WPACs initiative;
- Provide input to annual goals and initiatives for the Alberta WPACs collaborative initiative;
- Support and communicate the Alberta WPACs collaborative initiative in their watershed;
- Provide in-kind support (as required and available) for key Alberta WPACs initiatives as a part of core WPAC operations;
- Request in-kind contributions from key stakeholders and funders to support Alberta WPACs goals and initiatives;
- Support the initiatives of WPAC Committees to the best of their ability.

### **Voluntary Disassociation**

This Memorandum of Understanding is a nonbinding agreement that all parties have entered into, in good faith. Any party may disassociate from the Alberta WPACs collaborative initiative through written notice sent sixty (60) days prior to the disassociation.

Though some WPACs may not sign the MOU, they are still part of the Alberta WPAC collective and should participate in the fullest of their ability as possible.

### **Term and Amendment**

This revised MOU shall be in effect beginning April 1, 2022. This MOU represents the entire understanding of all parties with respect to the Alberta WPACs collaborative initiative. Any modification of this MOU must be in writing and signed by all parties.

## Alberta WPACs



---

Dan Moore, Chair  
Athabasca Watershed Council

---

Petra Rowell, Executive Director  
Athabasca Watershed Council

---

Ryley Anderson, Co-Chair  
Battle River Watershed Alliance

---

David Samm, General Manager  
Battle River Watershed Alliance

---

Alan Corbett, Co-Chair  
Battle River Watershed Alliance

---

Erwin Braun Chair  
Bow River Basin Council

---

Mike Murray, Executive Director  
Bow River Basin Council

## Alberta WPACs



---

Amanda Avery-Bibo, Chair  
Lakeland Industry and Community  
Association

---

Kristina Morris, Executive Director  
Lakeland Industry and Community  
Association

---

Todd Bailey, Chair  
Lesser Slave Watershed Council

---

Meghan Payne, Executive Director  
Lesser Slave Watershed Council

---

Rick Keillor, Chair  
Director  
Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

---

Rhonda Clarke-Gauthier, Executive  
Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

---

John A. Ross, Chair  
Milk River Watershed Council Canada

---

Tim Romanow, Executive Director  
Milk River Watershed Council Canada

## Alberta WPACs



---

Ken Crutchfield, Chair  
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

---

Leak Kongsrude, Executive Director  
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

---

Doug Kaupp, Chair  
Oldman Watershed Council

---

Shannon Frank, Executive Director  
Oldman Watershed Council

---

Kent Dyck, Chair  
Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

---

Josée Méthot, Executive Director  
Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

---

Ryan Davison, Chair  
South East Alberta Watershed Alliance

---

Marilou Montemayor, Executive Director  
South East Alberta Watershed Alliance



# Alberta WPAC Legislation and Policy Project

---

## Background

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) act as hubs of watershed management across Alberta, reaching thousands of partners from across Alberta. This document outlines an opportunity for provincial WPACs to coordinate shared efforts related to policy and legislation, in service of the goals of the *Water For Life Strategy* and the ongoing effectiveness of WPACs.

WPACs are a trusted partner of the provincial government and all *Water For Life* partners, and have a positive history of engaging multiple sectors. However, several challenges outlined in this document have limited our potential to work together on matters of policy and legislation, with the potential to undermine credibility as well as impact.

All levels of government, Indigenous Nations, and community stakeholders are asking WPACs for information and advice about a variety of topics, and we cannot keep up with the demand. For example, WPACs have been asked to provide input on the new Coal Policy, the Mineral Mining Strategy, and the upcoming Water for Life Action Plan. Not all WPACs have the capacity to provide information on current topics, and governments will sometimes only ask some WPACs for input on provincial topics. We aim to fill these gaps, maximize efficiencies, and speak as one unified voice by working collaboratively to collect questions from stakeholders, review scientific information, and share crucial information to advise stakeholders and partners, federally and provincially.

## Project Overview

Building and maintaining stronger relationships between WPACs, and with all levels of government, Indigenous communities, and stakeholders, is essential for the ongoing effectiveness of WPACs and to position WPACs as leaders in watershed management.

### Benefits for WPACs

- Reputation and public awareness
- Alignment with funding priorities
- Organizational effectiveness
- Policy understanding and engagement
- Strengthen partnerships

This project will support work across WPACs in areas related to watershed policy and legislation.

Multi-year funding for WPACs is the key long term goal of the project. To accomplish this, WPACs must be visible and relevant to funders and stakeholders, as trustworthy and credible leaders in community discussions. Building upon our current reputation and trust with stakeholders will increase our value with all levels of government. There is opportunity for governments to utilize the wealth of knowledge and expertise from within the WPAC membership, especially with our Boards of Directors, when they develop policy.

There are also important opportunities for WPACs. For example, the federal government is currently allocating hundreds of millions of dollars to the post-COVID recovery effort, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. If WPACs have not engaged and are not relevant at the federal level, we will not receive any of those funds. If we are not actively participating in discussions that are a priority for governments and stakeholders, we risk becoming irrelevant. We need to demonstrate our value by showing leadership on critical topics that influence watershed management and health.

### Building a process for collaboration

The goal of the first year of this project is to strengthen the ability for WPACs to collaborate successfully, by discussing expectations, and developing guiding principles and procedures on issues related to policy. Together we will develop a flexible process that WPACs can use to guide collaborative decision-making and information sharing. For example, one of our most recent collaborations was sending group feedback to the federal government's public engagement process regarding the formation of the Canada Water Agency.

The process we develop will build WPAC capacity, and our confidence in working collaboratively at the provincial scale, where we can have more impact on legislation and policy, and build recognition of Alberta WPACs at the federal level. As people gain trust and comfort with the new process, we will be able to expand and improve upon it. This is not lobbying, but focused on sharing neutral, unbiased information.

This project is an important opportunity to:

- Share knowledge from the diverse and well-informed stakeholders on WPAC boards,
- Help governments make decisions that will be supported by stakeholders, and
- Build momentum and relationships that will be valuable to decision makers and stakeholders.



## WPAC Boards make key decisions

The process will be coordinated by the newly formed WPAC Legislation and Policy Committee and the Legislation and Policy Manager. WPAC Boards will be included throughout the process to help shape the course of this initiative. Your support is foundational to this process.

### Key Objectives

- Secure long-term funding
- Raise awareness about WPACs
- Maintain relevancy and trust with funders
- Strengthen relationships with all stakeholders and decision-makers
- Understand and contribute to key policy issues

## What success looks like

Success will be measured through feedback from stakeholders, that the information WPACs provide is valuable, impactful, and applied. WPAC partners will report that they feel confident speaking about current topics, forming their own views, and sharing information with their networks. Stakeholders will write letters of support for WPACs. WPACs will be viewed as a reliable partner that is there when needed, active on topics of community discussion, and is able to depolarize challenging issues. Success will be fostering active collegial partnerships, including with the Government of the Alberta

## Funding

The first year of this project has a budget of \$86,000. It is funded by a \$30,000 grant from the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation and contributions from Alberta WPACs. Most of the funds are being used to hire a Legislation and Policy Manager for one year. Susanna Bruneau has been seconded for this role to the Oldman Watershed Council, who is spearheading the project. Susanna has over 10 years of experience with the Battle River Watershed Alliance where she specialized in policy and stewardship.

The ongoing work of the Legislation and Policy Manager will be dependent upon grants and continued support from all Alberta WPACs.

## Year One Project Timeline

Meeting with boards to introduce Susanna, start gathering feedback → January – March 2022

Development of collaborative decision-making process with boards and staff → February – May 2022

Approval of process document by all boards, selection of priority topic(s) to pilot the process with → May – June 2022

Pilot the new process with selected priority topic(s) → June – October 2022

Final report to Alberta Ecotrust Foundation → October 31, 2022

\*Ongoing throughout: Grant writing, liaising with all WPAC Boards and Managers, regular meetings with the Legislation and Policy Committee

## Questions for Board members

What are your initial thoughts regarding this project? Do you want any clarification?

Do you see yourself and your sector in support of this endeavour? If not, how can we gain your support?

What are some elements or key principles you would like to see as part of this process?