

2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT



Our Watershed, Our Responsibility

ABOUT THE ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL

Established in 2009, the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) is a not-for-profit society and charitable organization guided by our vision, mission, and values:

Vision

The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, supporting resilient communities and a sustainable economy.

Mission

To demonstrate leadership and facilitate informed decision-making in the Athabasca watershed by bringing stakeholders and Indigenous peoples together to achieve our shared vision.

Values

- Water and ecological health: a blessing and a gift, essential for the environment, economy, society and the spirit.
- Inclusivity and consensus decision-making: building integrity and trust by respecting all points of view including the cultures, knowledge and communities of Indigenous peoples.
- Accountability: being responsible, timely, transparent and purpose driven but also allowing for creativity, innovation, and organizational risk taking.

We will achieve our vision by collaborating with others to implement an adaptive approach to watershed management. Today, the AWC represents over 200 members and works with individuals and organizations from academia, industry, conservation, environmental and stewardship groups, Indigenous and rural communities, various levels of government and others to build knowledge and capacity, implement adaptive watershed management, and inform other land and resource management in the Athabasca watershed.



TREATY LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Athabasca Watershed Council acknowledges that the Athabasca watershed includes portions of Treaty 6, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 territories, as well as many First Nation and Métis communities. We respect the rights, histories, languages, and cultures of all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant watershed. We make this acknowledgment as an act of Truth and Reconciliation, and in recognition of the Indigenous peoples who came before us and who continue to steward the land. With this acknowledgement we pay our respect to the land, and the Indigenous Ancestors, Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have helped and will help ensure the health of the river for generations to come.

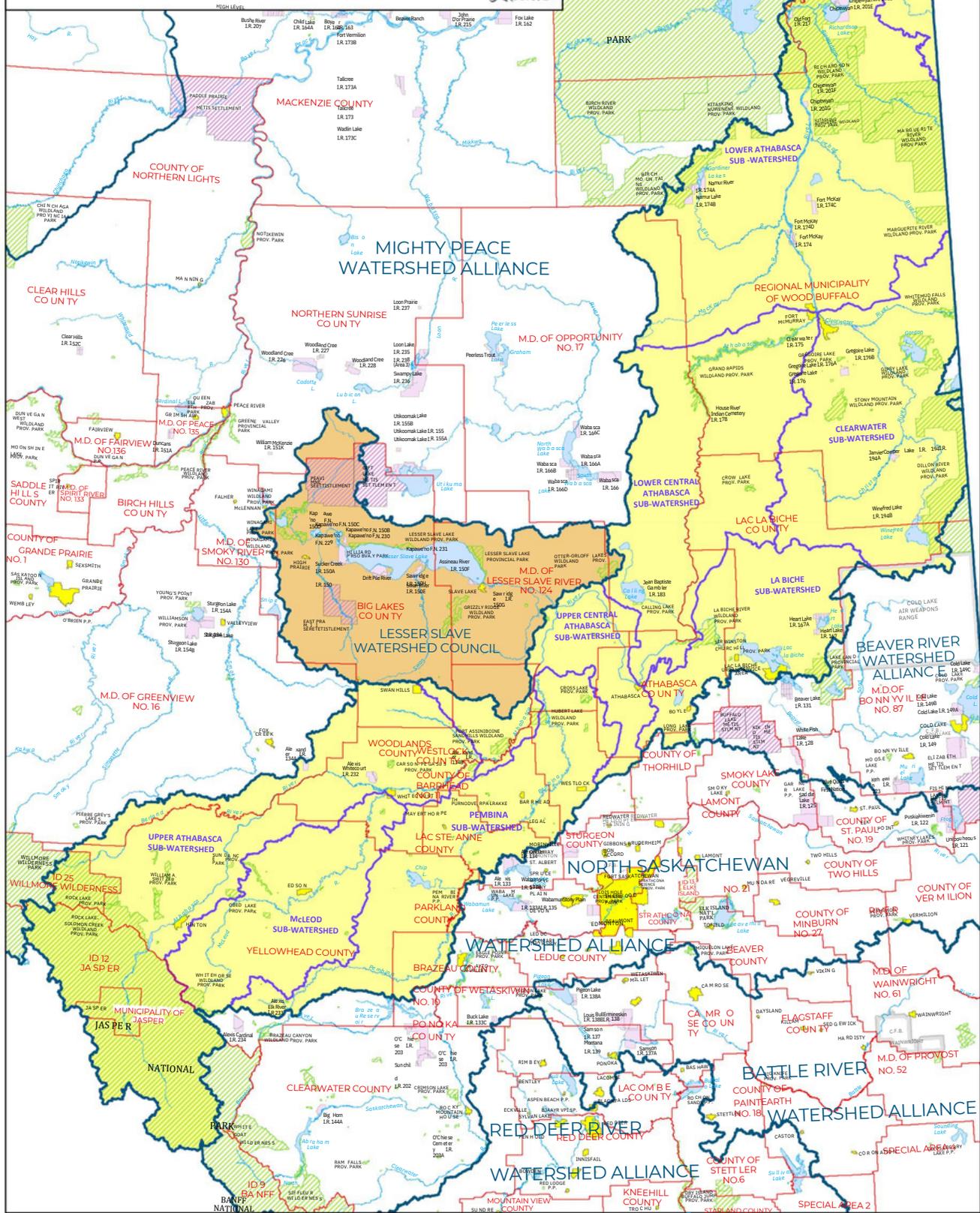


ATHABASCA WATERSHED COUNCIL REGIONAL BASE MAP



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

Note: Information as depicted is subject to change, therefore the Government of Alberta assumes no responsibility for discrepancies at time of use.
Produced by Provincial Geospatial Centre, Environment and Protected Areas, March 14, 2023
Base Map data provided by the Government of Alberta under the Open Government Licence Alberta
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ABOUT THE ATHABASCA WATERSHED

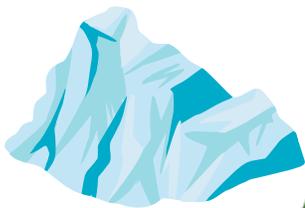
The Athabasca watershed is made up of ten sub-watersheds including the McLeod, Pembina, La Biche, Lesser Slave, and Clearwater tributaries; the Upper, Upper-Central, Lower-Central and Lower reaches, and, finally, Lake Athabasca.



There are four different eco-regions in the watershed: Rocky Mountain, Foothills, Boreal and Canadian Shield.



There are about 180 000 residents in the watershed, and about 112 urban, rural and indigenous communities.



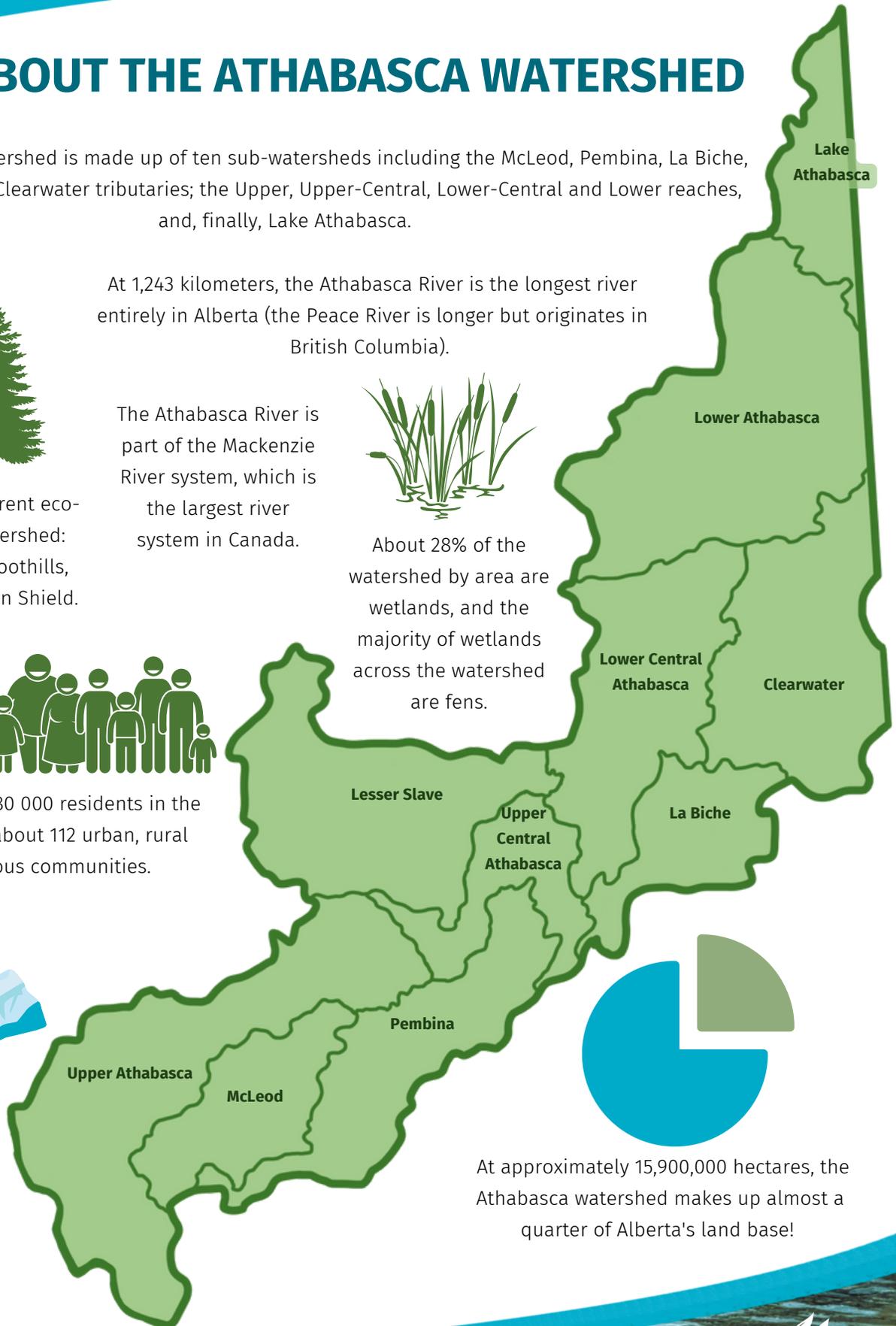
The Athabasca River begins at the Columbia Icefields in Jasper National Park.

At 1,243 kilometers, the Athabasca River is the longest river entirely in Alberta (the Peace River is longer but originates in British Columbia).

The Athabasca River is part of the Mackenzie River system, which is the largest river system in Canada.



About 28% of the watershed by area are wetlands, and the majority of wetlands across the watershed are fens.



At approximately 15,900,000 hectares, the Athabasca watershed makes up almost a quarter of Alberta's land base!



YEAR AT A GLANCE

The fiscal year 2022-23 was the Athabasca Watershed Council's 14th year of operations. The board, its committees, project teams and staff were busy throughout the year, and traveled across a large portion of the basin. Many existing projects and programs were expanded. As well, new projects, such as the Tawatinaw Watershed Working Group were started this year. Overall, the AWC continued to build capacity and leverage resources by collaborating with others throughout the Athabasca watershed.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Supported 14 riparian and wetland projects under the Healthy Shorelines Initiative with 261 acres of land conserved and/or restored.
- Convened and met quarterly with a Tawatinaw Watershed Working Group.
- Sampled benthic invertebrates in six sites in the McLeod sub-basin as part of the East Slopes Bio-monitoring Collaborative. Also started investigating watercourse crossing and stream temperature projects in the Athabasca headwaters.
- Collaborated with the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance and Lesser Slave Watershed Council to host *Water Management in Alberta's Boreal*, a two-day conference attended by 115 individuals.
- Leveraged our staff capacity by utilizing interns and summer students who helped out with events and investigated topics like climate change, drinking water and ponds and dams in the Athabasca.
- Held the AGM in June and met quarterly with the Board of Directors, who represent about 16 different sectors, organizations or Indigenous communities.
- Hosted or participated in over 137 meetings or events with staff, volunteers, stakeholders and other Water for Life partners including a World Water Day webinar and Inside Education's Generate/Navigate forum.
- Received core operational funds from Alberta Environment and Protected Areas and several additional grant and corporate funds
- Received approximately \$140,000 of in-kind support from our Board of Directors and Alternates, interns, AEPA staff, stakeholder working group volunteers, and event speakers.





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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the Athabasca Watershed Council's 2022-23 Annual Report detailing our past year - the council's 14th year of operations! What a fantastic and busy year it has been. Board members continued to meet quarterly, and we were finally able to have our first in-person board meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The Executive Committee continued to meet regularly and provide advice to the Executive Director.



Our work continues to be supported by our dedicated staff. Sarah MacDonald celebrated her third year with the watershed council. She has work all across the watershed, with highlights including the Pembina Technical Advisory Committee, and joining the ALUS Partnership Advisory Committee for the Athabasca area. Our Education and Outreach Coordinator, Ashley Johnson, continues to grow existing communication tools like the website and social media, while also working on bringing more outreach programs for high-school students into our watershed. Last summer, we welcomed Aneilia Ayotte on as our Science Education Coordinator for a four month term to help support our busy staff, and we wish her all the best as she continues her schooling at King's University.

In Petra Rowell's second year as our Executive Director, she continued to work on streamlining and improving AWC processes. She also oversaw two interns through the University of Alberta's Adaptation and Resiliency Training Program: Caity Seifert, who joined us in October 2022 to continue work started on the Community Drinking Water Resiliency Project, and Jason Day, who started in January 2023 on a project looking at the impact of climate change on water body temperature and how municipal tools can be used to reduce such impacts. Petra also supervised another SAIT Capstone student, Hugh Melville, whose project characterized ponds and dams, and their management, in the Athabasca watershed.

I'm pleased to see all of the incredible growth that the AWC has gone through in the past year. Our growth wouldn't be possible without our many supporters. I would like to thank our Board of Directors, for providing stable and steady guidance on AWC projects and operations; our volunteers on committees and working groups for overseeing projects on the ground; our funders who make it all possible; finally, staff, who demonstrate their commitment every day. I'm looking forward to our 15th year of operations, which is sure to be busier than ever!

Sincerely,
Dan Moore



BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF

on March 31, 2023



Our most heartfelt gratitude to all our directors, alternates and staff, who make the AWC's work possible! We also thank our outgoing Directors and Alternates including Marv Fyten, Robert Holmberg, Brigette Lemieux and Morris Nesdole.

Government

Abdi Siad-Omar | Alberta Environment and Parks (Alternate Curtis Brock)
Rob Minns | Athabasca County (Municipal – Middle Basin) (Alternate Gary Cromwell)
Lorin Tkachuk | Lac La Biche County (Municipal – Lower Basin)

Industry

Dan Moore, President | Alberta Forest Products Association/Alberta Newsprint Company (Forestry) (Alternate Jennifer Knievel)
Janice Linehan | Suncor Energy Inc. (Oil and Gas)
Kennedy Deregt-Taschuk | West Central Forage Association (Agriculture)

Indigenous

Cleo Reece, Treasurer | Individual (Alternate Chantel Quintal)
Alyssa-Mae Laviolette | Individual (Indigenous)

NGO's, Stewardship, Academia

Julie Hink | Healthy Waters Lac La Biche (Health and Environment)
Brian Deheer | Individual Member (Health and Environment)
Kendra Gilbert, Vice-President | Baptiste and Island Lakes Stewardship Society (Stewardship)
Paula Evans, Secretary-Treasurer | Crooked Creek Conservancy Society (Stewardship) (Alternate Alia Schamehorn)
Scott Ketcheson | Athabasca River Basin Research Institute (Research and Academia)

Members-at-large

Laura Pekkola | Individual (Member-at-Large) (Alternate Paul Belanger)

Staff

Petra Rowell, Executive Director
Sarah MacDonald, Watershed Science Coordinator
Ashley Johnson, Education and Outreach Coordinator
Caity Seifert, University of Alberta Adaptation and Resiliency Training Program Intern
Jason Day, University of Alberta Adaptation and Resiliency Training Program Intern
Hugh Melville, SAIT Integrated Water Management Program (Capstone project)
Aneilia Ayotte, Science Education Coordinator (4-month Summer Term)



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

The AWC maintains a rolling three year strategic plan that includes five goals as outlined below:

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).

Goal 2

The AWC actively engages others in mobilizing resources and commitments to achieve shared outcomes (Convenor and Collaborator).

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).

Goal 4

The 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).

Goal 5

The 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.

Each year we undertake a number of projects and actions to support the achievement of the strategy's five goals. The next two sections provide an overview of these activities for 2022-23.



2022-23 COMMUNICATIONS, EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

Working towards strategic goals one and two, the Communications, Education and Community Engagement (CECE) committee continue to work using the CECE strategy, which provides advice to the Education and Outreach Coordinator and other staff. The committee continued to meet and/or email with staff throughout the year to discuss various aspects of strategy implementation.

Communications:

- Continued to produce weekly social media posts, growing our following on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This included participating in a WPAC social media campaign that reached over 7000 people!



522
followers



554
page likes



664
followers

- Continued to post on the Athabasca River Outflow Blog.
- Resurrected the AWC LinkedIn page.
- Named the monthly e-newsletter the Athabasca Current, and gave it titled sections which will be consistent each month.

Education:

- Continuously added new content to the website. Check out the 'Monitoring and Research' and 'Watershed Education' pages.
- Successfully applied for the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation grant and received \$3500 to bring the educational program X-Stream Science to highschool students across the watershed.
- Our mobile watershed exhibit was hosted by the Bold Center in Lac La Biche for one month, and was taken to multiple events such as the Lac La Biche Agricultural Appreciation Dinner and the Grassland Agricultural Tradeshow.
- Participated in Pond Days at Fort Assiniboine, Lac La Biche, Thunder Lake, Lac La Nonne, and Chip Lake.
- Contracted Margaret Cross to assist in producing website content.
- Hosted a Canada Day open house at our office in Athabasca.

AWC Website Quick Facts

In 2022-23, the most viewed blog post was 'Whirling Disease: What it is and how to keep it out of the Athabasca Watershed', with 540 views. 81% of visitors to our website were new; 19% of visitors were returning. The total number of sessions in the year was 7,653 and the total number of pageviews was 14,290.

- Continually promoting the Alberta-Wide 'Caring for Our Watersheds' contest in the Athabasca watershed.

Community and Sector Engagement:

- Corresponded with other WPAC Education and Outreach coordinators regularly and collaborated on a World Water Day webinar event that was attended by over 100 participants.
- Attended Parks Day on July 16th in Jasper at the invitation of Friends of Jasper National Park.
- Ashley attended an Inside Education Teacher Training Day in Lac La Biche with AWC directors Brian Deheer and Laura Pekkola.
- Petra gave a guest lecture to second year University of Alberta students on integrated watershed management.
- AWC director Laura Pekkola continues supporting a WPAC project team creating a watershed 101 video series.
- Petra attended the AGMs of the Summer Village of Nakamun Park and the Baptiste and Island Lake Stewardship group.
- Met with other WPAC managers quarterly to discuss common challenges and together with the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, took the lead in developing the annual WPAC Compendium.
- Dan, Sarah and Petra are involved in the planning of the Fort Assiniboine Bicentennial Canoe Brigade, which will take place in July 2023.

Brian Deheer at Inside Education's Teacher Training in Lac La Biche.



Ashley at Parks Day in Jasper.





Petra speaking at Water Management in Alberta's Boreal



Ashley and Laura at Inside Education's Generate / Navigate



Sarah at the Alice B. Donahue Library



Sarah at Pond Days near Fort Assiniboine



May 2022 WPAC E/O meeting

2022-23 SCIENCE PROJECTS

To achieve goals 3 and 4 of our strategic plan, the AWC maintains a Technical Committee that oversees AWC science initiatives. Last year, our Integrated Watershed Management Plan was approved, and we continue to work towards its goals.

Upper Athabasca:

- As a partner in the East Slopes Biomonitoring project, collected benthic invertebrate samples from sites in the Upper Athabasca.
- Ashley completed the field portion of her CABIN training to better assist in the field.
- Collaborating with the Canadian Wildlife Federation, convened a stakeholder group to develop a plan for waterbody crossing mitigation in the Berland-Wildhay Watershed north west of Hinton.



Mid Athabasca:

- 12 organizations have joined the Pembina River Watershed Technical Advisory Committee; the committee is working with CPP Environmental on a 2-year water quality monitoring study after receiving \$80,000 from Pembina Pipelines.
- Sarah has joined the ALUS Partnership Advisory committee for the Athabasca Area.
- Convened a Tawatinaw Watershed Working Group in collaboration with the Crooked Creek Conservancy Society.
- Continued to support lake initiatives such as the Lac La Biche, Lac La Nonne, Baptiste and Island lake stewardship groups.

Lower Athabasca:

- The NSERC application organized by William Zhang, University of Alberta was successful and this 5-year \$950k project to develop an under-ice water quality model for northern rivers had its first kick off meeting with project partners AWC, UofA, NSWA, EPCOR and AEPA.

Basin Wide:

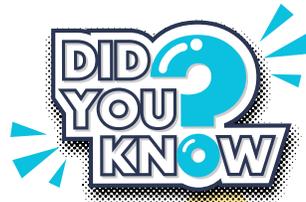
- Our intern Jason Day has been working on a project looking at the impacts of warming waters within the Athabasca Watershed and the role municipal policy can play in mitigating and adapting to these impacts.
- SAIT capstone student Hugh Melville completed a project looking at ponds and dams across the Athabasca watershed. Some water bodies are regulated by AER, and some by AEPA, so Hugh consolidated the data into one report.
- Caity Seifert's project consisted of preparing a document that highlights the expected climate change influences on the water sources in the Athabasca Watershed, compiling a list of tools and resources that can be used to find locally relevant information to aid in community planning, and reaching out to water utility managers to help identify and characterize the public water sources across the watershed. She completed an infographic on 'Drinking Water Sources of Athabasca Watershed Communities' which has been included on the next page.

Drinking Water Sources of Athabasca Watershed Communities

31 unique sources of water are being treated and distributed to 75 communities across the Athabasca watershed. This is approximately 150,000 people.

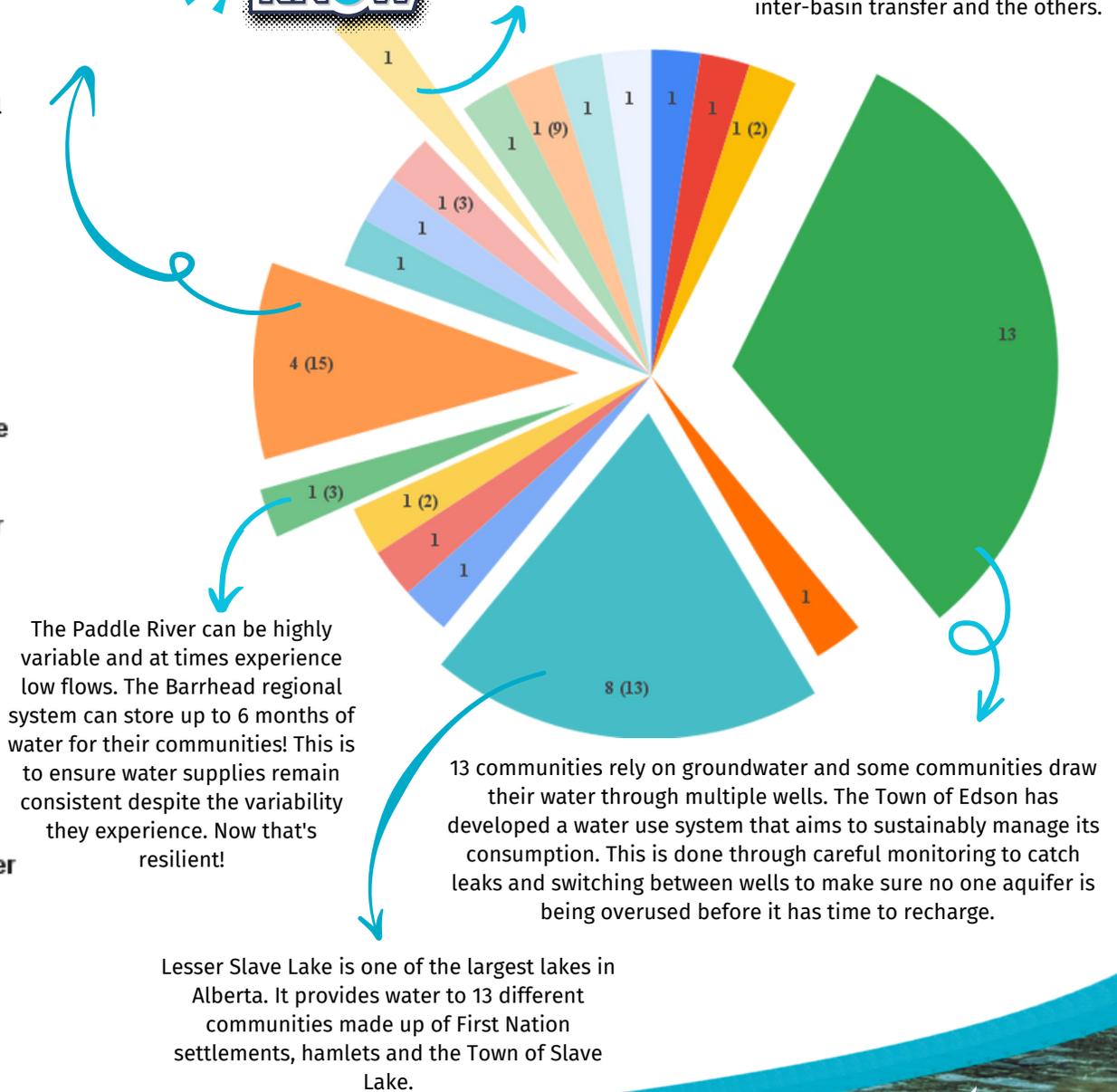
15 communities rely on the Athabasca River for a source of drinking water, providing water to over 90,000 people! Only 4 treatment systems are drawing from the river, the remaining communities are connected by regional lines. These communities are spread across the entire length of the Athabasca.

The Athabasca Watershed has the most recently approved inter-basin transfer. The hamlet of Entwistle and the Summer Village of Nakamun Park now receive their drinking water from the North Saskatchewan through a regional line. This is only the 7th inter-basin transfer ever approved in the province. The North Saskatchewan watershed also has an inter-basin transfer from Athabasca via the Westlock Regional line. Visit the AWC-WPAC website to read more about this inter-basin transfer and the others.



n (N) = number of water treatment systems (total number of communities)

- Chrisitna River
- Christina Lake
- Lake Athabasca
- Groundwater
- East Prairie River
- Lesser Slave Lake
- South Heart River
- West Prairie River
- Ells River
- Paddle River
- Athabasca River
- Calling Lake
- Heart lake
- Lac La Biche
- Interbasin Transfer
- McLeod River
- Pembina River
- Freeman Lake
- Supply Creek



The Paddle River can be highly variable and at times experience low flows. The Barrhead regional system can store up to 6 months of water for their communities! This is to ensure water supplies remain consistent despite the variability they experience. Now that's resilient!

13 communities rely on groundwater and some communities draw their water through multiple wells. The Town of Edson has developed a water use system that aims to sustainably manage its consumption. This is done through careful monitoring to catch leaks and switching between wells to make sure no one aquifer is being overused before it has time to recharge.

Lesser Slave Lake is one of the largest lakes in Alberta. It provides water to 13 different communities made up of First Nation settlements, hamlets and the Town of Slave Lake.



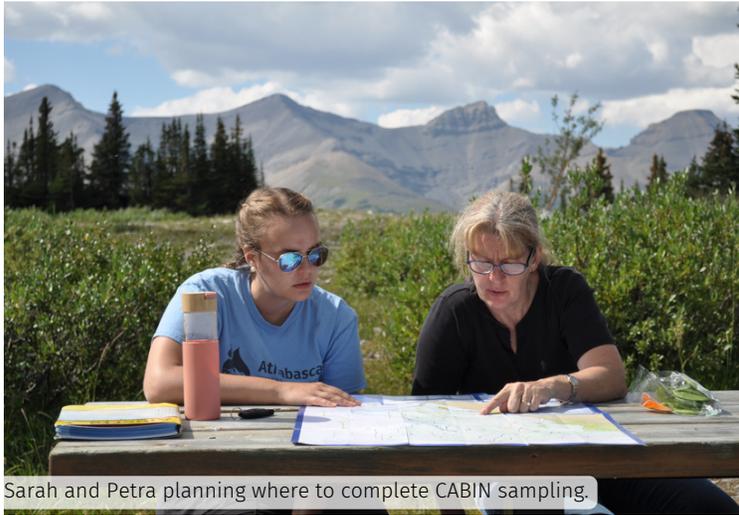
Kennedy Deregt-Taschuk and Sarah at WCFA's research plot near Sangudo.



Sarah and Lisa Card at a planting to extend an eco-buffer near the Pembina River.



Ashley helping with a tree planting near French Creek



Sarah and Petra planning where to complete CABIN sampling.



Paula filling out a CABIN site sampling data sheet



A saskatoon bush planted at a restoration site near French Creek



Sarah kicknetting to collect a CABIN sample

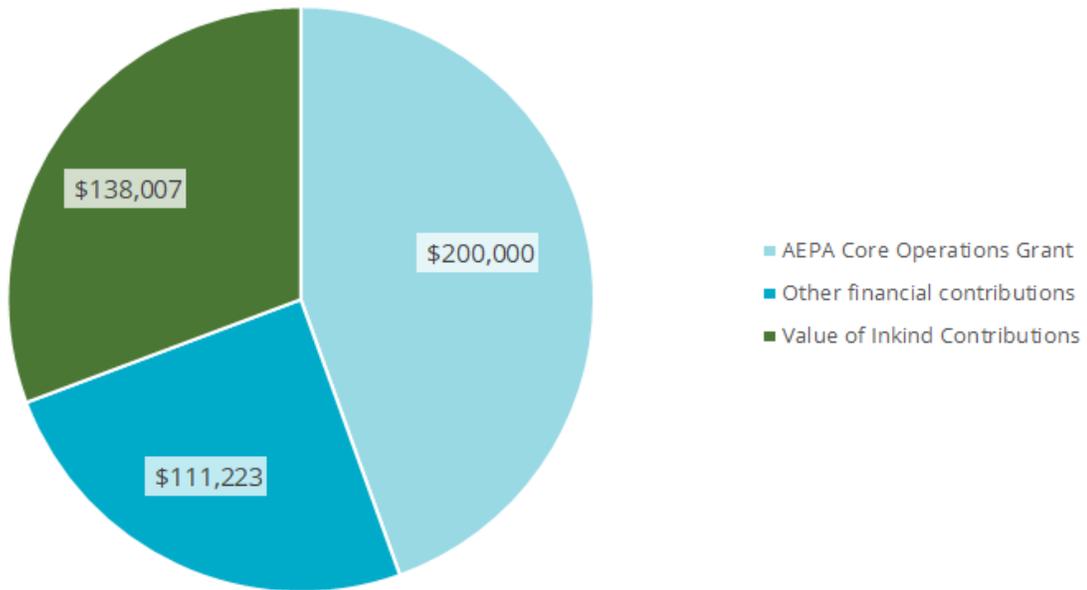


Aneilia and Sarah helping install a pond leveller on Bear Creek

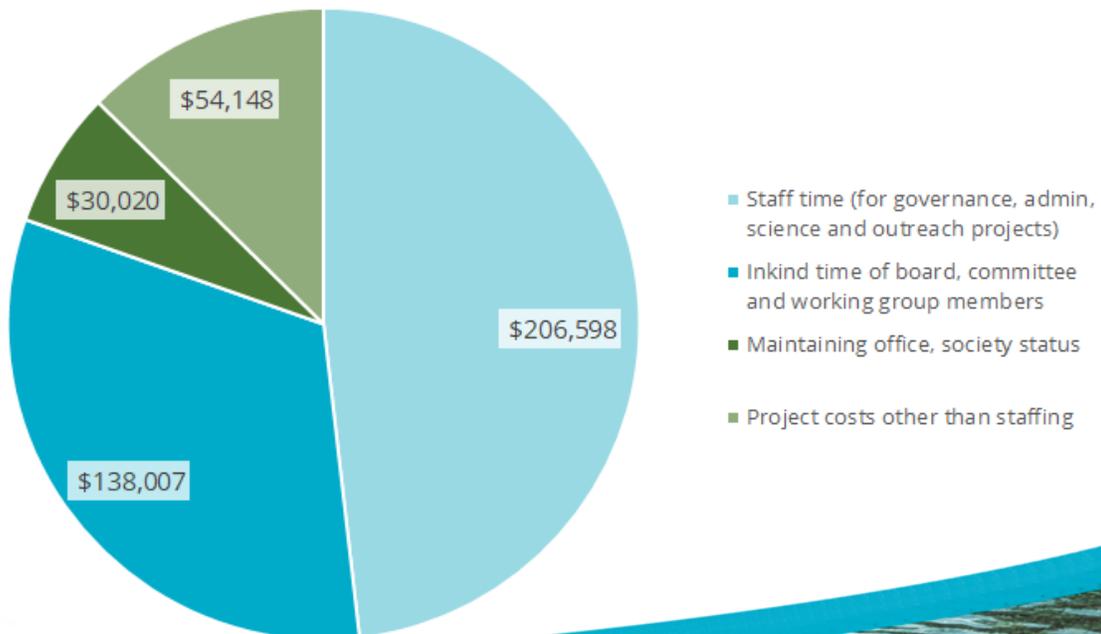
To achieve goal 5 of our strategic plan, the AWC board of directors works to maintain good governance and an efficient administration. This includes maintaining staff, an office in the Town of Athabasca, and an operating budget. A summary of 2022-23 revenues and expenses are provided below. For a detailed financial statement, please contact the office.

FINANCIALS

2022-23 Revenues



2022-23 Expenses



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover art: Shoreline from Above by Ashley Johnson. This report was edited by Ashley Johnson, Education and Outreach Coordinator. Thank you to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas for updating and circulating the map of the Athabasca watershed included at the front of this report. Unless otherwise stated, photos and graphics were provided by Athabasca Watershed Council Staff/Volunteers, or inserted from Canva Pro.

In-Kind Support

The Athabasca Watershed Council receives in-kind support from volunteers and partner organizations. We would like to acknowledge those organizations who support board member participation including Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Newsprint Company, Athabasca County, Athabasca University, Baptiste and Island Lakes Stewardship Society, Crooked Creek Conservancy Society of Athabasca, Healthy Waters Lac La Biche, Lac La Biche County, Suncor, West Central Forage Association and West Fraser.

Thank you to our volunteers, including:

- Field support – Paula Evans
- Alberta Water Council board and teams – Brian Deheer, Dan Moore
- AB WPACs video project – Laura Pekkola and Brian Deheer
- Education and Outreach Support – Laura Pekkola, Brian Deheer, Connor McBeth, Margaret Cross and Nancy Parker

Collaborations

The Athabasca Watershed Council would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all of our generous collaborators from the past year, including:

- Alberta Water Council
- Alberta Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs), including collaboration on a World Water Day event, with speakers Glynnis Hood and Tim Romanow.
- Eastern Slopes Aquatic Monitoring Collaborative
- Lisa Card, with Highway 2 Conservation
- Members of the Tawatinaw Watershed and Wildhay Berland Connectivity working groups.
- Pembina River Watershed Technical Advisory Committee

Financial Support

The Athabasca Watershed Council's work is possible with financial support from:

- Alberta Environment and Protected Areas
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
- Pembina Pipelines
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

Thank you for supporting the Athabasca Watershed Council.

Alberta



LOOKING FORWARD TO 2023-24

With 2022-23 now complete, we look forward to continuing our learnings and partnerships, as well as building new ones as we move into the future. Our 15 year anniversary will take place in 2023-24, and might be our busiest year yet! Looking forward to seeing you out in the watershed soon.

We will be continuing a number of projects, including the Berland-Wildhay Watershed Connectivity Remediation Planning Project, the Athabasca Watershed Shorelines Initiative, the Upper Athabasca River Watershed Biomonitoring Project, the Community Drinking Water Resiliency Project, and our Watershed Education Initiatives. If you have any projects in mind for the AWC, feel free to reach out to us.

LINKS OF INTEREST

Our blog: <https://awc-wpac.ca/athabasca-outflow-blog/>

- Water in Alberta's Boreal—Never a Dry Subject blog post: <https://awc-wpac.ca/2023/04/water-in-albertas-boreal-never-a-dry-subject/>
- AWC Field Season Project Updates blog post: <https://awc-wpac.ca/2022/11/awc-field-season-project-updates/>
- Whirling Disease: What it is and how to keep it out of the Athabasca Watershed blog post: <https://awc-wpac.ca/2019/05/whirling-disease/>

Our projects: <https://awc-wpac.ca/projects/>

- Athabasca Watershed Shorelines Initiative: <https://awc-wpac.ca/athabasca-watershed-shorelines-initiative/>
- Upper Athabasca River Watershed Biomonitoring Project: <https://awc-wpac.ca/projects/upper-athabasca-biomonitoring/>
- Berland-Wildhay Watershed Connectivity Remediation Planning Project: <https://awc-wpac.ca/berland-wildhay-watershed-connectivity-remediation-planning/>
- Watershed Education: <https://awc-wpac.ca/watershed-education/>
- Community Drinking Water Resiliency Project: <https://awc-wpac.ca/projects/community-drinking-water-resiliency-project/>

Where we've been featured in the news: <https://awc-wpac.ca/news/>

CONTACT US



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