February 10th Meeting Notes

Meeting started @ 10:05 am

* **Agenda review**
* **Introductions**
* **Review of past events**:
  + 2 annual gatherings and 6 meetings since November 2022
  + Spring bio blitz, had meeting before and nature walk following, good format
    - Hoping to do another one soon
  + Purchased 5 water rangers kits to distribute locally for local monitoring
    - 4 locations monitored (Tawatinaw river, Tawatinaw lake, Helliwell lake, Colinton) 13 observations
  + Christmas bird count, 23 participants 21 species, 808 birds counted in total
* **Ongoing projects**:
  + Biodiversity lending library, purchasing of binoculars, ID guides, and other biodiversity tools to lend out to community members
  + Tawatinaw Bird, plant and mammal checklists (Jim, Jurgen and Caity are compiling lists)
  + Water rangers citizen science water quality monitoring of the Tawatinaw river
  + Historical video (Sarah and Ethan)
    - Question: will these videos be available online? Answer: yes
* Water rangers results
  + Observations available on Water Rangers websites
  + Tawatinaw River:
    - Dissolved oxygen levels not getting as low as previous years levels
    - High conductivity levels according to Water Rangers standards
      * Seems to be somewhat standard levels for northern Alberta water levels, could be elevated in this location due to road salts
      * May not be too concerning for fish health as it seems to be somewhat standard?
* **Upcoming projects**:
  + Wildlife cameras project
    - Purchased two trail cameras, looking for interested landowners for camera locations, recommendations for TWWG members to participate in and assist with data collection and uploading to the WildCAM or WildTrax projects portal
      * Could connect with ABMI, Lionel Leston
      * Ongoing research project, Darcey Fisher, with Kings University that Ida Edwards will connect us with
    - Caity will work on Terms of Reference for moving forward
    - Presentation from Lionel in the new year?
      * ABMI has surveyed the grid in Alberta, goal is to survey each grid, survey points kept private, could connect with them to find out how many survey points are within the watershed, could maybe determine what habitats/areas they need more information about, can potentially collaborate with ABMI to fill in data gaps?
    - Jurgen offered to host a nature walk
  + Spring 2024 stream crossing workshop
    - Need to confirm train station is available, but hoping that we will have a stream crossing workshop on April 27th
      * Start at train station, download app to do steam crossing assessments, then walk down to Tawatinaw river and practice doing assessments together
      * Afterwards, go out to assigned locations in pairs to assess various stream crossings
    - Question: is there coordination with GOA for these workshops? Answer: not directly working with the government, but they have shared stream crossing resources with us, goal is to have more people aware of/using the Stream/water Crossing program which can notify government of potential concerns/issues, help get funding for projects
      * Goal is to get the data to help advocate for action and funding
      * Will send links to community groups about these resources
  + Summer shoreline restoration
    - Tentatively two saturdays in June, will have dates in the next month
    - Partnership between AWC healthy shorelines, Town of Athabasca, County of Athabasca, and hopefully the TWWG
    - 3 sites along Tawatinaw river, goal is to do invasive weed pulls in these areas, AWC will fund purchase of native species to plant in these area, will follow up every 3 years to monitor plant levels
    - TWWG volunteers
    - Grant available through trans canada trails for taking care of land around the trail system, around $1500, can go to maintaining train line
      * Ida Edwards will send link
      * Councillor Tracy Holland has helped in past, is also part of Athabasca Landing Trail Steering Committee, which is part of Trans Canada Trails
    - Hoping to create signage, make people aware of issues and work being done
    - Excellent example of collaboration: Athabasca Watershed Council Healthy Shorelines Initiative, Town of Athabasca, County of Athabasca, Tawatinaw Watershed Working Group, Athabasca Trail Society
* **Priority projects for future:**
  + Build familiarity and connections between local and watershed health goals by establishing/repeating core outreach events such as:
    - Stream crossing assessment (april 2024)
    - Shoreline restoration (june 2024)
    - bioblitz/nature walk (september 2024)
    - Tawatinaw river annual gathering (november 2024)
    - Christmas bird count (december 2024)
  + Support on the ground projects
    - Watershed Stewardship Grant Application 2024/2025
      * Max $20,000,
      * Caity is working on application with Sarah and Petra
      * This grant will likely focus more on citizen science and community-based monitoring efforts
    - Objective 1: Build awareness and appreciation of area by organizing activities and citizen science projects to document biodiversity and sample water quality, want to increase the number of people engaged in stewardship actions in the Tawatinaw Watershed
      * Continue hosting outreach events and citizen science projects
      * New summer outreach day (Invasive species management day)
      * Continue sampling various points along the river with water ranger kits
      * Wildlife camera reporting
    - Objective 2: Promote riparian health and stream connectivity, want to achieve improved watershed health by getting producers to undertake stewardship action and get ATV users to think differently about creeks
      * Install water level gauge near Helliwell lake, flow metres and dissolved oxygen metre and signage at Tawatinaw river to enhance understanding of climate change risks
      * Comment: should we create bridges/official water crossing or bring awareness of existing bridges, work with ATV groups to create awareness
    - Objective 3: utilize current TWWG members to assist with projects or fund contracts that actively realize the first two goals
      * Hire a consultant to assess the failed habitat replacement project that was added in 2013? Original goal is to create fish spawning habitat for northern pike, slow river flow
        + Haven't assessed from a fish health/spawning perspective, have assessed from a watershed/riparian health perspective
        + Consultant will recommend the next steps to restore and identify who, if anyone, is responsible for the work
* **Moving forward:**
  + Apply for land stewardship grant for February 16th, if unsuccessful look for alternative fundraising/grant opportunities
  + Wrap up on WSG 2023 grant deliverables (May 31st deadline)
    - Lending library
    - bird plant and mammal checklists
    - stream crossing workshop
    - historical videos
      * If anyone wants to collaborate on these projects, reach out to Caity
  + Plan stream crossing workshop
  + Plan shoreline restoration days
* Questions:
  + Is there value in becoming a society, or is it better to remain as a working group within the watershed council?
    - Goal is for the TWWG to become a stewardship group, will be discussed at another meeting
  + Restoration materials, ie. willow plugs, is there anyone local that we can order them from?
    - Sarah has ordered the restoration materials
  + Sign up for Crooked Creek newsletter: <https://www.crookedcreek.land/> (specific newsletter link <https://mailchi.mp/dd695ad94f75/cccsa-newsletter> )
  + Dana, frogs and microplastics
    - ECCC project happening this summer: environment canada is covering the lab work, biologists are doing field collections of frogs, looking for money to help cover costs of shipping and tools etc. to help expand findings
    - Looking for people that would allow them to lethally sample frogs on their land
    - $5000-6000 range
    - Looking for letter of support from Tawatinaw working group
    - Could coordinate summer student with Athabasca Watershed Council
* Adjourned @ 12:10 pm