

Board of Directors Meeting

Nov. 21, 2024 Spruce Grove, Meeting Minutes - Approved

Meeting Summary: The AWC Board of Directors met in Spruce Grove on November 21, 2024, taking a few moments to recognize their 15th anniversary (established Nov. 2009). In addition to approving previous (Sept. 19, 2024) meeting minutes and 2024-25 Q2 Financial and Activities Report, the board heard updates from staff about several projects and activities. Board members also shared sector updates, and discussed the AWC's strategic goals and several potential future projects. The next board meeting will be Feb. 18, 2025 (virtual).



SEAT	DIRECTOR	ALTERNATE	Quorum
AEP Representative	Abdi Siad Omar	Curtis Brock	√
Provincial/Federal Government	Dean Litzenberger		√
Municipal (Upper Basin)	vacant		
Municipal (Middle Basin)	Robb Minns, Walter Preugschas		√
Municipal (Lower Basin)	Colette Borgun		√
Forestry	Dan Moore		√
Oil & Gas	Janice Linehan		√
Ag or Industry	vacant		
Agriculture	vacant		
Mining/Utilities	Amanda Buchanan		√
Indigenous	Cleo Reese		√
Indigenous			
Indigenous	vacant		
Environment			
Environment	Julie Hink		√
Stewardship	Kendra Gilbert		√
Stewardship			
Research and Academia			
Member-at-Large			
Member-at-Large	Ida Edwards		√
Past President	vacant		
Quorum = >50% filled seats (16) = >8			11
Staff:		Guests:	
Petra Rowell, Executive Director		Nathan Ballard, AEPA	
Ashley Johnson, Education & Outreach Coordinator			
Margaret Cross, Communications Support			
Sarah Shortt, Watershed Science Manager			
Mitchel Wincentaylo, Headwaters Project Coordinator			
Ethan Zapach, Watershed Technician			
Shayla Watson, Watershed Technician			
Crystal Kersey, ART Program Intern			

9:30 – 10:00 Coffee and Visiting

1. Welcome

Call to order; Health and Safety; Quorum: Dan Moore called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Health and Safety logistics for the Alberta Environment Spruce Grove boardroom were reviewed. Petra indicated quorum was met.

Treaty Land Acknowledgement: Petra and Shayla delivered the Treaty Land Acknowledgement, noting that while we are meeting on Treaty 6, we work across the Athabasca watershed, which includes portions of Treaties 6, 8 and 10.

Round Table Introductions (new staff and board members): The board welcomed Councillor Colette Borgun, the new representative for Lac La Biche County. They also welcomed Mitchel Wincentaylo, the new Headwaters Project Coordinator.

2. Administration

Review Meeting Objectives & approve Meeting Agenda: Dan briefly reviewed meeting objectives:

- Celebrate where we've been!
- Hear staff and program updates
- Hear partner updates (EPA and round table sector updates)
- Think strategically about where we want to go

He then asked if there were any additions to the agenda. There were none. The agenda was approved by consensus as presented. Dan reviewed the consensus process that the AWC board employs for the benefit of our new Directors and staff. Decisions are made by consensus, to the extent possible. Dissenting voices must identify themselves and provide an alternative option to reach consensus.

Review Action Items and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes: Petra reviewed the September 19, 2024 board meeting minutes (which was a short meeting before participants went on the fieldtrips associated with the ALMS conference that we were co-hosting). Dan then asked for any additions or corrections; there were none. The Sept 2024 Board Mtg Minutes were approved by consensus.

3. Reports and Updates

- a. Dan provided an update on the 2023 Canoe Brigade legacy fund: Matt Weber was commissioned to build a voyageur canoe that was donated to Fort Assiniboine. Additionally, Woodlands County provided remaining Bi-centennial funds for the purchase of a trailer, paddles, etc. Dan and Petra took part in the official 'christening' and media event in Fort Assiniboine on Oct. 7. This canoe will be available for rent for future events.
- b. Petra shared the 15 Year AWC Anniversary Report and the 15 Things we are Grateful For presentation that was used at the September ALMS banquet. It included a picture from the first meeting, November 28th, 2009! We're thankful for many things, including our board of directors, staff, funders, and supporters and everyone who has been involved in our journey over the past 15 years.
- c. Petra sent out the 2024-25 Q2 Activities and Financial Report with the meeting agenda and asked if anyone had any questions. Funding is in line with where we should be at the end of the

second quarter. She also let the board know staff are working on standardizing our metrics so that we can better report on things like in-kind support, engagement, etc. Her report was approved by consensus as presented.

- d. Staff provided updates on their activities through the fall and heading into winter, through the framework of our 5 strategic goals. Through discussion, board members made several suggestions including:
 - a. Adding greater emphasis to the connection between healthy watersheds and human health and wellness in our communications and engagement activities;
 - b. Sharing our drinking water well blog and video with AB health inspectors, Ag Societies, municipal web sites, etc.
 - c. Producing more educational materials on the importance of beavers, beaver co-existence tools, what natural lake level fluctuations look like, etc.

Lunch Break – after lunch, meeting attendees took a few minutes to celebrate the AWC’s 15 year anniversary with President Dan Moore serving up cake!

4. Sector Updates and New Business:

EPA Update: Abdi and Nathan reported on a number of GOA/Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) water initiatives as follows:

- The EPA Minister has been given the mandate to increase water availability, especially as the population and economy grows. They encourage everyone to participate in EPA’s [Water Availability Engagement Initiative](#).
- Flood and drought risk mapping work continues. The province will be producing over 20 [flood mapping studies](#). Petra asked if there has been any discussion of developing tools that municipalities can use for flood mitigation and planning (similar to the drought planning workbook). There are no current plans for a new tool, but Abdi did highlight some of the other [online flood mitigation tools](#) that the GoA offers.
- Petra asked if water use data will be made public; currently water use data is only reported by major users to the government and is not accessible to the public. WPACs can request data through their EPA contacts.
- Climate change modeling and mapping is being updated.
- A new Water & Circular Economy Division has been established with Kate Rich as ADM, with a section on Water Availability and Partnerships (Jaclyn Schmidt Director). The Lands Division / Lands Planning team (Air and Watershed Resource Management-Athabasca) continue to do their work (Abdi, Curtis and Nathan).
- Surface Water Management: The [Auditor General’s report](#) found some weaknesses that the department will be developing implementation strategies to correct.
- The transboundary bilateral agreements between Alberta and the [NWT](#) and AB and [SK](#) (in progress) continue to be implemented/developed via the development of several appendices.

The initial focus was on water quantity, but this has been expanded to include water quality and other aspects of the agreements.

- The Drought Emergency Oversight Committee oversaw [drought stages](#) and convened stakeholders to discuss management. As of November 6th, the Athabasca is back in drought stage 1! Higher snowpacks are expected in the mountains this winter.
- [Lower Athabasca](#) River trends for several water quality parameters were investigated and found to be from further upstream; [Upper Athabasca River](#) parameter increases included dissolved uranium, sulphate, and potassium (K). Trends in potassium (low risk) can be explained by change of flow and potentially geology. SWQMF annual and management response reports (see previous [Lower](#) reports) should be coming out before the end of the fiscal year.
- Nathan indicated that the GOA is doing some internal work to merge data sets from Lower Athabasca ambient and oil sands monitoring programs. Several board members indicated they would like to see a combined data set be accessible to the public.
- There were questions about lake monitoring, specific to Baptiste Lake; Abdi and Nathan indicated they would be happy to discuss offline; as well, the local fish and wildlife staff could be contacted for lake specific info.
- The GoA re-initiated a monitoring site that was suspended in 1996 in between Hinton and Whitecourt; Dan mentioned that there are data available from the pulp industry (ANC) near that site. See <https://environment.extranet.gov.ab.ca/apps/WaterQuality/dataportal/>
- Groundwater modelling will be updated to improve predictions in the South Athabasca Oil Sands, and Petra asked if work will be done near Edson (an area reliant on groundwater for drinking water). Curtis stated that groundwater work plan discussions are underway.
- Kendra asked what AEPA is doing to combat misinformation and dis-information; Curtis replied that the GoA does have responses for various topics. (Petra also noted that the AWC tries to stay on top of information tools and sharing these with our audiences.)
- The GoA is also looking at [nature strategies](#) including nature-based solutions through an online public engagement.
- The [LARP 10 year review](#) is ongoing. (AWC submitted our advice over a year ago.)
- Petra asked about progress on the [Minister's Advisory Committee](#) on Oil Sands Mine Water and other initiatives around tailings management. The committee is still in the information gathering stage, and are meeting with Indigenous communities and taking in very technical information. Federally, [committees](#) are doing an alternatives assessment, a policy review, ecological risk assessments, and toxicology reports, with a discussion paper to come out within the next few months.

Round Table Sector Updates: Directors were asked to share news of any water initiatives or any learnings from the flood, drought and fires of the past two summers. Comments were as follows:

- The fires and drought in the north (particularly the Peace country) has raised awareness in the forestry sector, with more thinking going into planning, protecting communities, size of fire breaks, post-fire harvest, etc. Appreciate that the AWC played a role in disseminating information during the drought and fires.

- Although it wasn't needed in the end, the oil sands companies were prepared to use a water sharing agreement if the drought persisted. Lots of discussion about better communications, preparedness, fire guards, emergency response, etc.
- Municipalities also noted that there is much more discussion now about how to improve communications between water users, water conservation practices and green infrastructure. Appreciated attending the drought workshops put on by the AWC. Specific to the Athabasca area, the Aspen Regional Water Commission is extending its distribution lines to the west to the summer villages on Baptiste and Island Lakes. The Town of Athabasca is also expanding its distribution system and also trying to address some issues with erosion on Muskeg and Tawatinaw creeks. In Lac La Biche, work on the LLB WMP is guided by an Implementation Committee, co-chaired by the County and AWC Board member Brian Deheer. Colette is also on the committee. Several AWC staff and board members were pleased to attend an information session for the LLB WMP on Nov. 28. The event was well attended with about 80 participants.
- The coal sector found the past 2 summers more typical; had a very large swings between being too dry and having large precipitation events prior to this period. This has made them more strategic about water storage / management during such extremes.
- The 2024 drought also affected many Indigenous communities. The Fort McMurray area was okay but communities downstream, who rely on goods being shipped by boats, were impacted by low river levels and reduced shipping. These communities are also concerned about oil sands tailings management, the Kearn Lake spill, and proposed Carbon Capture, Use and Storage proposals.
- BAILS (Baptiste and Island Lakes Society) is taking a renewed look at their lake management plan and thinking about how to tie human well-being to nature and how this can get more folks involved in lake stewardship. Julie, Healthy Waters LLB, noted the "Keep our Lakes Blue" campaign is a program that engages lake property owners. Both would like to see more lake stewardship engagement through tools like videos, photo calendar contests, galas, school programs, attending public events like farmers markets etc.

Strategic Planning Session:

After hearing staff updates on activities, Petra asked the board several questions about our strategic goals and work for the upcoming year as follows:

1. *Are we achieving our 5 Strategic Goals?*
While there was generally agreement that we are doing the right things, Dan challenged everyone to consider whether any goals were missing.
2. *What does the next 15 years look like for the AWC?*
Continue to grow the work we are currently doing. There is interest in reviving the Heritage River designation application process. Designation could be a boost to promoting local tourism. Petra would like to get the CECE Committee and municipalities working on it.
3. *What does your sector want to get out of your participation on the AWC?*
Different for different sectors; Petra to have more discussions with each sector, individually.

4. *Thinking about our advisory role, how should the Board respond to major federal, provincial, municipal, industry and NGO water initiatives?*
 - a. Disseminate government and other engagement notices to all of our audiences (sectors, communities, individuals, etc.) in the Athabasca watershed and encourage their engagement.
 - b. Advocate for WFL goals, clean water, healthy rivers
 - c. Where beneficial, share our own work with others (water quality and benthic data, riparian assessment data, etc.)
 - d. Provide clarity on water /watershed health and how they are managed
 - e. Provide clarity on issues to dispel polarization and build consensus
 - f. Identify data gaps and advocate for capacity to fill them
 - g. Engage our members more including more one-on-one; listen and learn from others
 - h. We are not in the business of weighing in on development decisions or taking positions on issues.

5. *How do you/ your sector want to be involved in EPA's Water Availability Engagement?*

Sectors are filling out the surveys; but don't have a problem with AWC also submitting a survey. AWC response largely focused on information gaps – things we need to know in order to understand our water supply before we can explore how to increase availability.

6. *Do we want to move forward with the Alberta WaterSmart proposal?*

Petra briefly outlined a major water quantity modelling and engagement project. Has a very large price tag but the work is very timely given the discussions about water availability. Petra and Dan will continue to explore how the project would be funded and will keep the board apprised.

5. Next Steps / Meetings

- Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 Board Meeting (virtual a.m.)
- Tuesday – Wednesday, Feb. 25-26, 2025 [Boreal Water Conference](#) (Grande Prairie)
- Tuesday, March 11 [Water Quality in the Pembina](#) webinar
- Friday, March 21 [World Water Day](#) webinar

Dan adjourned the meeting at 3:35pm.