

Headwaters Working Group

Feb. 11, 2025 Meeting Notes - Draft

Attendees:

Attendee	Affiliation	Attendee	Affiliation
Amanda Buchanan	Coalspur Mines	Mike Hunka	AB Energy Regulator
Ameilia Murphy	Coalspur Mines	Mitch Wincentaylo	Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC)
Angela Ten	Freshwater Conservation Canada (FCC)	Ngaio Baril	Foothills Stream Crossing Partnership (FSCP)
Chelsea Currie	AB Invasive Species Council (AISC)	Olivia Lymburner	Otipemisiwak Métis Govt.
Claire Allore	fRi	Petra Rowell	Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC)
Derek Compton	Dept. Fisheries & Oceans (DFO)	Reece Blake	Otipemisiwak Métis Govt.
Jason Shpeley	Dept. Fisheries & Oceans (DFO)	Todd Wilson	Yellowhead County
Kaylee Welsh	Otipemisiwak Métis Govt.	Tracy Friedel	Lac Ste. Anne Metis
Ken Monk	Northern Fly Fishers (FCC)	Trent McLaughlin	Town of Hinton
Melissa Marquis	Yellowhead County		

1. Call to Order

- As meeting chair and AWC Headwaters Working Group Project Coordinator, Mitchel Wincentaylo opened the meeting, providing a land acknowledgement and inviting a round of introductions. He then reviewed the agenda for the meeting – the first organizational meeting of the Athabasca Headwaters Working Group.

2. AWC Overview

- Mitch provided an overview of who the Athabasca Watershed Council is (one of 11 Watershed Planning & Advisory Councils), their mandate (achieving the Water for Life goals in the Athabasca watershed), and their approach (establishing sub-basin working groups of local stakeholders and rights holders to address local issues).
- Mitch also spoke to some of the AWC's projects, relevant to the headwaters, such as riparian assessment and restoration, water quality and benthic invertebrate monitoring, youth and public education and outreach.
- After viewing a map of the Athabasca headwaters area, the group briefly discussed the areas of interest, generally, the Upper Athabasca and McLeod sub-basins. However, it was noted that the geographic area of interest might be different, depending on the issue being addressed. Also noted that its important to know who else is doing what, throughout the basin. We don't want to duplicate effort, but instead leverage capacity and resources via improved coordination.

3. Headwaters Working Group Terms of Reference (TOR)

- Mitch noted that the Working Group TOR was circulated prior to the meeting. He then reviewed its contents and invited feedback.
- In reviewing membership, Mitch noted that some sectors indicated interest but weren't available to meet today. He will continue to reach out to any missing sectors. It was suggested that he engage Alberta Conservation Association.
- It was noted that the TOR might evolve over time as the group gets established and decides how and what it wants to work on. For now, the Working Group approved the draft TOR as presented.

4. Potential Projects for Workplan

- Mitch invited a discussion about priority topics/projects/areas needing work in the Athabasca headwaters. Some points included the following:
 - i. There's been some work to map recreational trails but more could be done to find and map more areas, and to build an accessible database that can be used by land and water managers. Non-owned crossings needing restoration could be identified for future off-setting projects. Areas of interest are generally in the Hinton – Cadomin corridor (down Highway 40 including Gregg River, Tri-Creeks area, Mackenzie Creek, Cadomin area, McLeod River, etc.).
 - ii. Unlike the southern east slopes, we don't have as many recreation/OHV groups in the north. Need communications that reach individuals recreating in the headwaters: need to create a stewardship ethic around our Crown lands. Yellowhead County has the 'sasquatch' marketing campaign.
 - iii. Recreation is also an issue for invasive species and several groups have communications materials and campaigns to stop the spread. AISC have Clean, Drain, Dry communication materials and would love to come out to more events in the Hinton, Edson area.
 - iv. Would be nice to see better, more explanatory, signage in well used recreation areas (e.g. OHV staging areas).
 - v. We might think about initiatives for aquatic species that are trending towards becoming at risk (e.g., Arctic Grayling, Mountain Whitefish), to complement existing work going on for current species at risk.
 - vi. Could use a database of eDNA projects/data so that we are maximizing their use and not duplicating efforts
 - vii. There were some efforts in the past to get lake stewardship and landowner riparian projects going, could re-invigorate these around Chip Lake, Lobstick River, Shiningbank Lake, etc.

5. DFO Presentation

- Jason Shpeley, gave a presentation on DFO's work to prioritize work in the East Slopes and to develop tools (i.e., the Restoration Action Dashboard) to help communicate priority areas, where projects have been carried out, etc. DFO has been engaging stakeholders and Rights holders on this work and continue to look for feedback.
- It was noted that AB Transportation and others might be doing similar work to prioritize and/or map restoration sites. Some issues with sharing data.

6. Go Forward

In summarizing the discussion so far, there are several areas of work that could be started. Mitch will consider these and bring back a workplan to the Working Group next meeting. Potential areas of work include:

1. Continue to identify organizations doing work in the headwaters, inviting them to be a part of this Working Group. Continue to act as a 'conduit' for sharing and communications between all the different groups.
2. Develop and implement a communications plan, identifying audiences, existing communication tools and ways to connect audiences and tools. A part of this work could be around improving educational signage at well used recreational sites. Promoting citizen science programs might also be a part of this work. (Noted in the chat – the need for a Recreational Engagement Officer).
3. Engage landowners in the Chip Lake and other areas to promote riparian and wetland conservation (via the AWC Healthy Shorelines Initiative).
4. Work with other interested parties to investigate recreational trail mapping and database development.
5. Track e-DNA initiatives and promote collaboration between various initiatives.

7. Next Steps

In bringing the meeting to a close, Mitch asked the group how often they would like to meet and if they prefer virtual versus in-person. Suggestions were to aim for quarterly meetings where members could share updates on the projects they are working on. Mitch will send out a doodle poll for the next meeting and will invite members to suggest agenda topics.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00.