

Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) Newsletter, February 2015

Our Vision: The Athabasca watershed is ecologically healthy, diverse and dynamic.

AWC Annual General Meeting 2014

The 2014 AGM was held on Friday, June 27, 2014, 5:30 pm - 10:00 pm at the Cougar Creek Golf Course, Stony Plain, AB.

Bev Yee, Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD), gave the keynote address and complimented us for the *AWC Interactive Atlas*. She commented on the need for a strong *Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC)* and the need to increase focus on outreach within the Watershed as we move forward with the *Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP)*.

It was agreed that the 2015 Annual General Meeting will be held in Athabasca in collaboration with Athabasca University if they're amenable. This has now been confirmed and discussions and arrangements are underway.

Since the AGM one Director from the Government sector withdrew and two Directors were appointed by the Board in the Government sector: Garry Horton, MD of Lesser Slave River, and Bob Yontz, Association of Summer Villages of Alberta. The current list of Directors, Committees, and ESRD Advisors is included as an appendix.

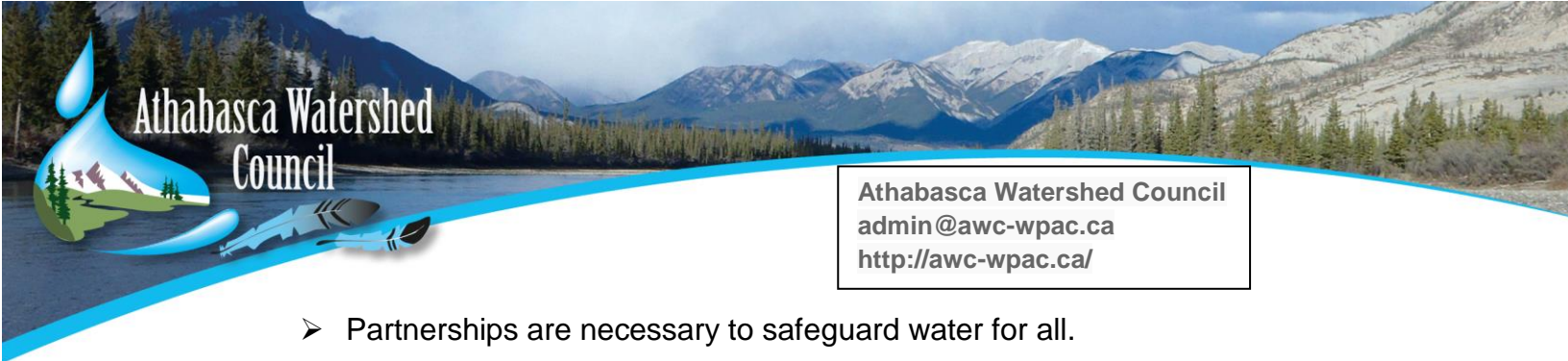
Board and Committee Meeting Highlights

July 17, 2014: Board of Directors Meeting, Spruce Grove

The new Board of Directors met for orientation of new board members, addressing of regular business, committee appointments, staffing matters and concerns regarding perceptions of inadequate representation for oil and gas, forestry and municipalities. Broad stakeholder representation is a principle of WPACs and Water for Life.

Joe Prusak (ESRD) gave a keynote presentation on WPAC Principles, Priorities & Strategic Planning, including:

- 2003: Government of Alberta adopts Water for Life Strategy.
- All stakeholders are to help in the management of water.



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- Partnerships are necessary to safeguard water for all.
- Watershed Planning Councils were developed to create watershed management plans.
- Healthy, safe drinking water, reliable water supply, preservation of ecosystems.
- Knowledge & Research, Partnerships, Water Conservation Plans.
- Water Plans in the past were just number plans, which are not enough.
- AWC must develop an Integrated Watershed Management Plan
- Watershed Management Plans are recommendations to the Government.
- The Athabasca Basin is a huge geographical area, with many diverse groups/needs.

The board sent letters to municipalities, forestry and oil and gas organizations, companies and municipalities, inviting nominations for positions on the board. Two interim municipal directors have been appointed (Garry Horton, MD of Lesser Slave River, and Bob Yontz, Association of Summer Villages of Alberta), and efforts are ongoing to invite participation from forestry and oil and gas companies.

July 18, 2014: Technical and Communications Committee Meetings, Spruce Grove

The committees met together to review Terms of Reference and strategic planning for the term. Since July these committees have met separately several times by teleconference to work on various committee tasks.

September 25-26, 2014: Board Meeting, Spruce Grove

Guests: Susan and Janice, Facilitators from the Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre.

Robert Savage (ESRD) explained the role of the WPAC Peer Advisory Panel

- The AWC is to focus on governance to rebuild balance and trust with the stakeholders in order to move forward
- Peer Advisory Panel – structured specifically to address concerns about balanced representation and governance on the AWC Board; short term basis currently, but can be continued longer.



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- All WPACs struggle with balanced representation – ebb and flow
- There is a diverse dynamic with each WPAC and each does things differently.
- WPACs are inclusive, building-partnerships with collaboration for stronger stewardship of the water
- Peer Panel is comprised of Executive Directors from other WPACs to provide advice to AWC Board regarding the challenges they have faced and steps taken to overcome these challenges.

Work Plan and Budget

- \$200,200 has been received with approximately \$50,000 in outstanding liabilities
- funding must officially last until March 31, 2015, and unofficially until at least the AGM, May 23, 2015
- the priority to keep AWC healthy and functional, well positioned to partner with AB Government on regional plans.

The bookkeeper and the general manager positions were terminated in October due to changes in the financial priorities of the AWC.

November 14, 2014: Peer Group Meeting Spruce Grove Provincial Building

Peer Group called this meeting specifically to discuss AWC governance.

Main Themes:

- Representation (Sector seats, next AGM)
- Leadership (Board of Directors)
- Communication (Rules emphasis)
- Evaluation (Rules emphasis)
- Relationships (Rules emphasis)
- Process (Governance Documents)

November 27-28, 2014: Board Meeting, Spruce Grove

- Unused office space will be sublet to reduce financial liability.
- The research coordinator will be assigned to summarize TEK and SOW reports.
- The Tech Committee, chaired by Kai, will supervise the research coordinator.
- The Tech Committee will provide a recommendation for release of SOW3.



- The Communications Committee will prepare a newsletter.
- Ad hoc committees were established to address outstanding Board tasks.

January 30, 2015: Board Meeting Spruce Grove

- Entire office space in Hinton will be sublet to reduce financial liability
- At such a time as we hire more staff we will rent a more central office location
- Sow III approved by the board for public release
- Sow IV approved by the board for public release
- Next board meeting February 27-28, main focus, strategic planning

Participation in Multi Stakeholder Forums

Board Directors, of their own accord, have attended workshops concerning the future of the Athabasca Watershed.

Warren Walker and Tim Polzin attended a workshop on the biodiversity monitoring framework to be introduced under *Lower Athabasca Regional Planning*. The session was very interesting and informative. There were representatives from AIPac, Millar Western, SunGro, and the Municipality of Two Hills as well as government representatives from ESRD and ABMI. AEMERA, the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency, was introduced. This agency will replace JOSM (Joint Oil Sands Monitoring) in 2015.

Tim Polzin and Brian Deheer attended the *Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN)* workshop *Stewards in Motion* in Lac la Biche in November, a program of the *Land Stewardship Centre*. Attendees learned about a newly developed environmental stewardship framework that can be used to incorporate stewardship and resource management principals into the land use planning and development process. They found this workshop very informative, thought-provoking and useful.

Tom also attended the *Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) Session on Biodiversity*. Many years of industrial activity on the landscape has created an abundance of linear features and two solutions are proposed in the *Landscape Management Plan*:

:

- restoration of older legacy linear features like seismic lines—site preparation, tree planting and coarse woody debris management are all applications that can be used to manage access and restore vegetation on these lines
- use of *Integrated Landscape Management (ILM)* strategies and the *ILM Toolkit* designed to help industries to mitigate their impacts; for example, multi-use corridors could be used versus developing separate corridors for pipelines and other utilities. This will result in better coordination of industrial activities and minimizing the extent and duration of the land disturbance footprint.



Donna Mendelsohn has participated in several *Joint Oil Sands Monitoring (JOSM)* forums, both as a stakeholder and as a member of the *JOSM Water Component Advisory Committee*. These forums are very interesting, some outstanding and leading-edge monitoring work is occurring. However, the huge challenge with JOSM and the new *Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency* into which JOSM is transitioning, is that the monitoring experts and basin residents hope to achieve a truly comprehensive and world class monitoring and reporting system, while industry and government strive to keep costs to a minimum. Therefore JOSM-AEMERA forums generally focus on discussions around how to accomplish the most and best work with the limited funding available.

Communications, Education and Community Engagement

One main goal of the AWC is to increase citizen awareness of our watershed and participation in stewardship activities. This regularly recurring section will present news and achievements of AWC stewardship groups and related organizations.

Stewardship (from <http://landstewardship.org/>):

“Our collective responsibility to retain the quality and abundance of our air, land, water and biodiversity, and to manage this natural capital in a way that conserves all of its values, be they environmental, economic, social or cultural.”

Land Stewardship Centre (LSC) - Newest Organizational Member of AWC

The AWC extends a warm welcome to the *Land Stewardship Centre (LSC)* as our newest organizational member. LSC has named their Outreach Coordinator, Alexandra Frederickson, as their official representative to the AWC, and we look forward to a strong and beneficial partnership with Alexandra and her organization. LSC engages with the stewardship community through *Stewards in Motion* events, mentioned elsewhere in this issue, and supports watershed stewardship groups through the *Watershed Stewardship Grant* program. LSC also offers a wide variety of additional tools and resources to support stewardship groups. Please explore the LSC web site at <http://www.landstewardship.org> for further information.

Central Athabasca Stewardship Society

The *Central Athabasca Stewardship Society (CASS)* works with a number of organizations, including the University of Alberta, Land Stewardship Center, Indigenous Environmental Network, Western Mining Action Network, Alberta Environmental Network, Alberta Ecotrust, Keepers of the Athabasca, and Living Lakes Canada to maintain community based monitoring in the upper Athabasca River Basin.



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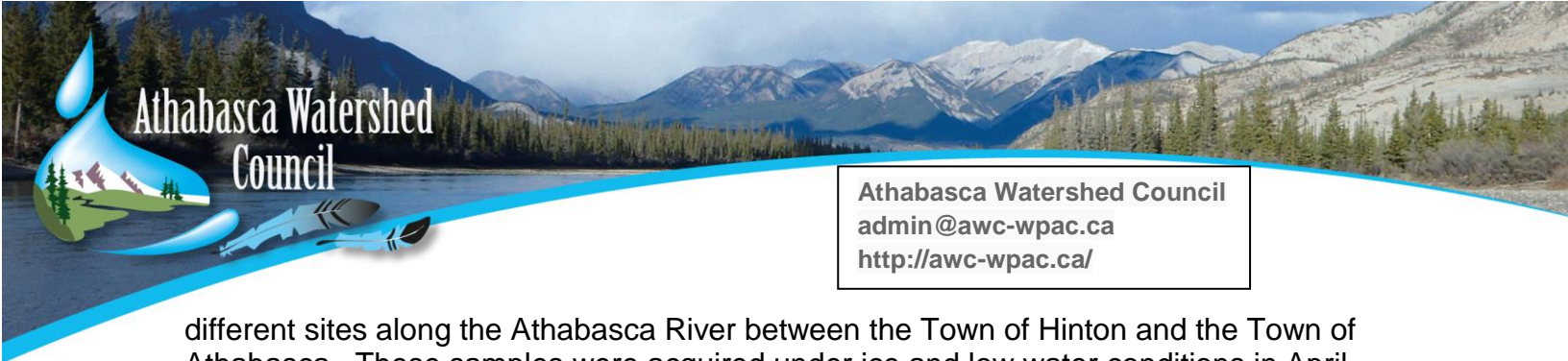


CASS Athabasca Basin 2014 - Sediment and Benthic Invertebrate Monitoring

This work initially began as two separate projects, with the first being a *Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN)* program introduced by Living Lakes Canada and the Keepers of the Athabasca. Members completed online CABIN training and field certification provided by Environment Canada and the University of New Brunswick.

These members are now qualified to sample benthic invertebrates in rivers and streams according to CABIN protocols, and enter resulting data into the online CABIN database maintained by Environment Canada. To date four CABIN monitoring sites have been established by CASS members, two on the Athabasca River and one each on the McLeod and Freeman Rivers. Benthic invertebrate sampling under CABIN protocols is most commonly carried out under low water conditions in late fall, which in our case means October.

The second monitoring project began in response to the Obed coal slurry spill of Halloween 2013, and what is viewed as a minimal monitoring response by industry and government. Several of the groups named above provided funding, expertise or logistical or analytical support in helping CASS members to sample sediment at 8



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different sites along the Athabasca River between the Town of Hinton and the Town of Athabasca. These samples were acquired under ice and low water conditions in April.

Because volunteers and funding are always in limited supply, CASS from now on will be working to coordinate and combine these monitoring efforts as much as possible. Not all benthic invertebrate sampling sites will offer nearby sediment sampling opportunities and vice versa, however where we can find both in close proximity, we will be able to save time and expense.

By far the greatest expense in this work is the cost of sample analysis by certified taxonomists and laboratories. Results thus far have shown us that additional monitoring is needed. We will need multiple years of results before we will be able to see trends.

To keep our actions grounded in the bigger picture and relevant to the wider range of activities in the Athabasca Basin and across Alberta, CASS is a member of the Athabasca Watershed Council and the Alberta Environmental Network, and regularly participates in various consultations across the province, including forums sponsored by the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency.

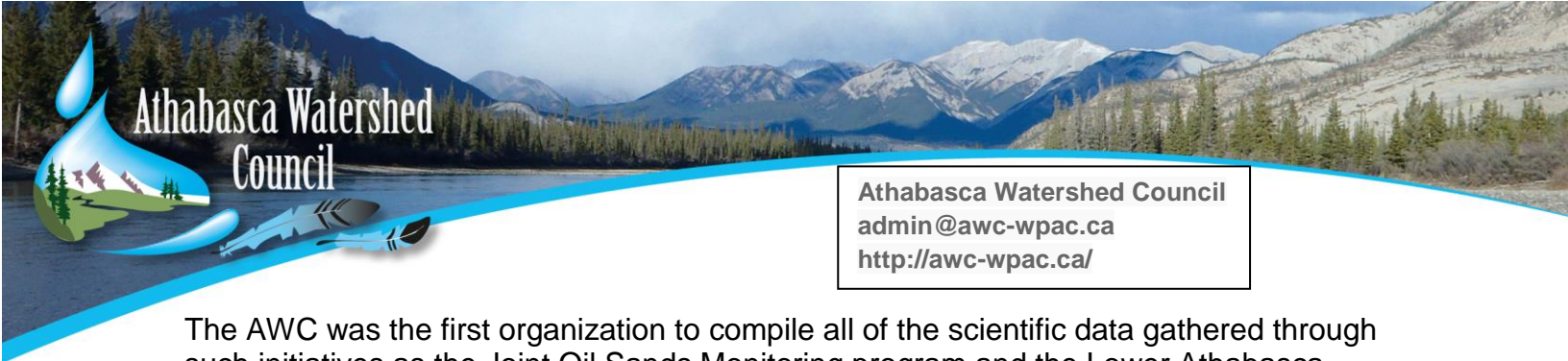
Respectfully Submitted
Brita Kuelken, President

Summary of AWC Accomplishments 2009-2014

The AWC is a multi-stakeholder, non-profit organization which provides solid scientific information and local knowledge through our staff and board members who currently range from Jasper, Alberta to Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Watershed Science & State of the Athabasca Watershed

- Traditional Knowledge Overview (2011)
- Stewardship Information Forum (2011)
- Municipal Information Forum (2011)
- Athabasca State of the Watershed Report: Phase 1 (2010 – 2011)
- Athabasca State of the Watershed Report: Phase 2 (2011 – 2012)
- Athabasca State of the Watershed Report: Phase 3 (2012 – 2013) Water Quantity & Basic River Water Quality
- Basin Wide Public information Forums (2013)
- Athabasca State of the Watershed Report: Phase 4 (2013 – 2014) Organic Compounds in Surface Water and Sediments, and Trace Metals in Sediments



The AWC was the first organization to compile all of the scientific data gathered through such initiatives as the Joint Oil Sands Monitoring program and the Lower Athabasca Regional plan, and to publicly share this compiled data through the AWC Interactive Atlas (<http://awcatlas.athabascau.ca/>).

Moving Forward

The AWC Board, in consultation with our WPAC Peer Advisory Panel and government advisors, is working hard to improve governance and build relationships both within the board and within our watershed. The result will be a smoother functioning board and broader stakeholder representation by our next AGM, scheduled for May 23, 2015 in Athabasca. We are discussing with Athabasca University the possibility of their collaboration in hosting the AGM.

After the next AGM the AWC will focus on outreach to raise awareness of watershed health and the process of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP), which requires inclusivity of all watershed citizens. The AWC will then determine the highest priorities for each sub-watershed of the basin and develop recommendations for improved management.

AWC Annual General Meeting 2015: Saturday, May 23, in Athabasca

The 2015 AGM will be held in collaboration with Athabasca University with main sessions in the Governing Council Chambers in the AU Central building in Athabasca. More details will follow on our website and in a pre-AGM distribution about mid-April.

AWC Website (<http://awc-wpac.ca/>)

The AWC board of directors is in the process of updating our website and we hope to negotiate a new service agreement for help in site maintenance. The site is temporarily in maintenance mode and we apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.



AWC Board and Committee Members (2015-01-01)

Name/Sector	Email & Phone	Committees
Doug Badger (Secretary) Director Aboriginal Sector	dbbadger@telus.net cell: 780-523-1893	Executive Communications
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Brian Deheer Director "Other" Sector	bjdeheer@hotmail.com day: 780-623-4754	Communications
Paula Evans General Member	evans866@telus.net day: 780-675-9467	Communications
Bill Grieve (Treasurer) Director NGO Sector	bill@canadianrisks.com day: 780-499-1016	Executive Communications
Garry Horton Director Government Sector	garry.horton@md124.ca day: 780-829-2245	
Dean Lindsey Director Aboriginal Sector	djustin1959@yahoo.ca day: 780-775-3757	Communications
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Lorraine Johnston-MacKay (Past President) Director	drystone@telus.net day: 780-740-1008	Executive



Name/Sector	Email & Phone	Committees
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Note: "Communications" is the "Communications, Education and Community Engagement Committee (CCEC)".