

## We have started - The Athabasca State of the Watershed Report

The Athabasca Watershed Council (Watershed Planning & Advisory Council for the Athabasca watershed) has initiated the development of an online **Athabasca State of the Watershed Report and interactive Atlas**.

### Why is a State of the Athabasca watershed important to me?

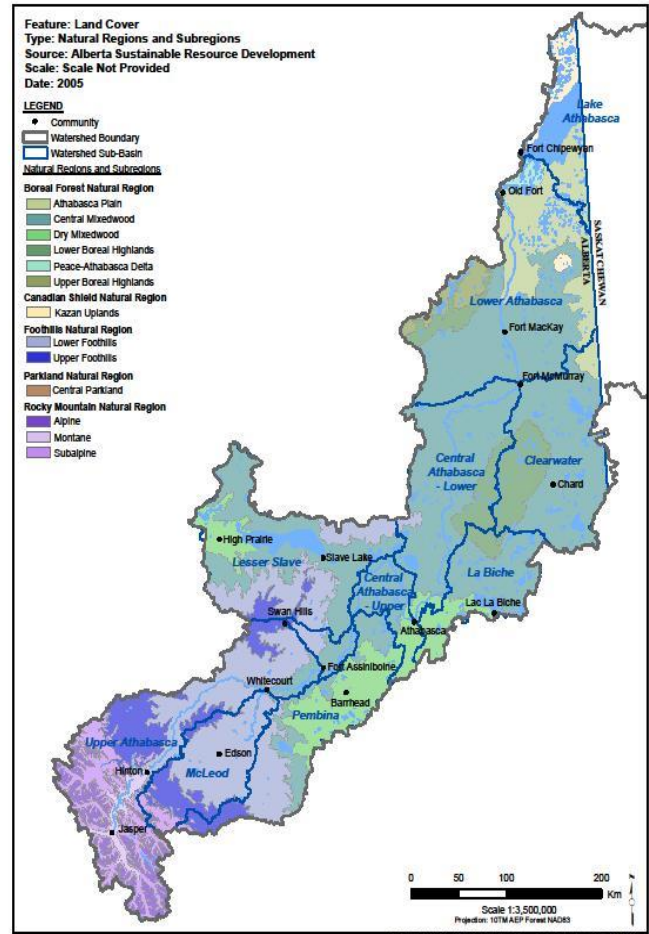
It will help identify key issues throughout the Athabasca watershed that affect the health of water, land, air, fish and wildlife resources upon which our own health and overall well-being depend on. We can then plan and work together to address these issues.

### What is the Athabasca watershed?

The Athabasca River watershed is the area of land that captures rain, hail and snow that eventually drain into the Athabasca River. Together with the area of land within Alberta that drains into Lake Athabasca, they form the Athabasca watershed. Our activities on land and in water affect the health of rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands. Whatever we do upstream affects water and land downstream. Therefore, the **watershed** is the appropriate landscape unit for managing our activities so that land, water, and air are clean and people, fish and wildlife are healthy. A **healthy watershed** is essential for our well-being.

### What is the Athabasca Watershed Council?

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC-WPAC) is a non-for-profit multi-sector organization in partnership with the Government of Alberta to assist in delivering the policy *Water for Life—Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*, <http://www.waterforlife.alberta.ca/>. This partnership gives the AWC-WPAC the status of a Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC) for the Athabasca watershed. Other partners working for *Water for Life* are the Alberta Water Council at the provincial level and various watershed stewardship groups (WSGs) at the grassroots or local level.



*The Athabasca watershed is divided into 10 sub-watersheds. This allows prioritizing of areas with specific issues. The water-shed has four natural regions that result in different vegetation and wildlife distribution in response differences in climate, topography, and bedrock geology or soil.*

### What are the goals of Water for Life policy?

- Safe, secure drinking water
- Healthy aquatic ecosystem
- Reliable quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

## What do WPACs do?

- Report on the **State of the Watershed**
- Lead in watershed management planning to address key issues identified in the State of the Watershed report as well as emerging issues
- Foster stewardship activities, develop beneficial management practices, and educate users of the water resource.

## How do I know that our watershed is healthy?

The health of a watershed can be determined by obtaining regular measurements of specific **condition indicators**. Provincial and national guideline values for each indicator show when effects are adverse to the environment (water, land, air, fish and wildlife). We also look at trends of **pressure indicators** over time. Pressure indicators result from human activities that pose risk to the environment. In consultation with scientists, the AWC-WPAC suggests using the following indicators for the Athabasca watershed:

### Condition Indicators:

- ◆ Alberta River Water Quality Index—metals, pesticides, nutrients, bacteria
- ◆ Lake trophic status
- ◆ Annual River Flow Quantity Index
- ◆ Water allocations vs. average annual flow
- ◆ Historical Lake Level Index
- ◆ Flow vs. Water Conservation Objectives
- ◆ Sediment Quality—Metals, Pesticides, Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)
- ◆ Groundwater Quality—metals, pesticides, Nutrients/related variables, bacteria
- ◆ Fish Communities
- ◆ Wildlife terrestrial ranges
- ◆ Waterfowl/bird abundance
- ◆ Climate change—temperature and precipitation

### Pressure Indicators:

- ◆ Sediment Quality—metals, pesticides, PAHs
- ◆ Mercury in Fish
- ◆ Land use—industrial, agricultural, municipal developments

There are also pressure indicators specific to some local areas or sub-watersheds (see map, front page):

- ◆ Selenium—McLeod

- ◆ Naphthenic Acids & PAHs—Lower Athabasca & Clearwater
- ◆ Groundwater Allocations—Lower Athabasca & Clearwater
- ◆ Oilsands Leases—Lower Athabasca & Clearwater
- ◆ Coal Agreements—Upper Athabasca & McLeod

## Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

The health of the watershed can also be determined by using knowledge gathered and passed down many generations of First Nations and Metis people. Some of this information is documented, but much of this knowledge is passed on orally within the communities. The use of TEK to help assess the state of the watershed is proposed as an essential component of the Athabasca State of the Watershed Report. The Athabasca TEK project will be initiated once funding is secured.

## What has the AWC-WPAC accomplished so far?

- ◆ Organization was incorporated in November 2009
- ◆ Organized a board of 16 members representing five different sectors, including aboriginal people; non-government organizations; government (federal, provincial and municipal); industry; as well as interested members at large.
- ◆ Hired 3 staff members
- ◆ Encouraged membership and participation by holding Annual General Meetings— May 2010 and May 2011
- ◆ Communicated to and engaged the public and members through presentations to community groups and municipal councils, brochures, info sheets, newsletters and initiated the website [www.awc-wpac.ca](http://www.awc-wpac.ca)
- ◆ Completed an initial study on how to proceed and what should be the contents and format of the State of the Watershed Report
- ◆ Started the State of the Watershed Report— expected to be completed in March 2012

## How can I get involved?

- ◆ Be a member
- ◆ Run for election to be a board member
- ◆ Attend our events or invite us to your events
- ◆ Participate in stewardship initiatives
- ◆ Donate in kind or cash
- ◆ Let's talk