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# The Athabasca Dispatch

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Beaver Boardwalk—Hinton, Alberta

## Athabasca Watershed Council hosts Introductory Forum with Athabasca Watershed Municipalities—February 16, 2011

The Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC-WPAC) hosted the first introductory **Athabasca Watershed Municipal Forum** in Athabasca on February 16, 2011. Attending this meeting were:

- Athabasca County
- County of Barrhead
- County of Lac St. Anne
- Lac La Biche County
- Town of Athabasca
- Town of Edson
- Town of Hinton
- Town of Mayerthorpe
- Town of Westlock
- Town of Whitecourt
- Westlock County
- Woodlands County
- Yellowhead County

The Athabasca Watershed Council provided a brief introduction to the mandate and goals of the organization and an invitation to all Athabasca Municipalities to work with the Council on achieving a healthy watershed that supports community sustainability.



Municipal representatives and Athabasca Watershed Council Directors discuss the challenges and successes of Municipal initiatives in watershed stewardship.

Reeve Pat Alexander of Clearwater County provided an important introduction to how Municipalities have worked with the Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the North Saskatchewan watershed, and how this participation has provided excellent information for Municipal planning related to water and watershed concerns.

A key focus of the Forum was to hear from the Municipalities to learn more about the innovative programs and initiatives already underway in communities and counties in the Athabasca watershed.

Lac La Biche County, County of Barrhead and the Town of Hinton presented a variety of innovative solutions for both county and community water or watershed related issues. These projects included riparian set-back

stewardship groups and their water quality improvement projects; local creek restoration initiatives; and innovative eco-industrial developments that raise the bar for more sustainable water consumption and improved waste-water treatment.

Group discussions in the afternoon brought forward valuable suggestions for future engagement between the AWC-WPAC and municipalities. These suggestions included visits and presentations directly to Municipal Councils to create solid relationships and encourage meaningful dialogue between Council members; encourage watershed education programs in schools; share new information and innovative ideas regarding watershed stewardship with Municipalities; and encourage dialogue across all sectors in the Athabasca Watershed.

The AWC-WPAC looks forward to working with all Athabasca Municipalities to improve watershed health and sustainability.



Pat Alexander, Reeve of Clearwater County, and Vice President of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, addresses the Athabasca Municipal Forum

## SAVE THE DATE!

**Athabasca Watershed Council Annual General Meeting 9 am—4 pm, Saturday, May 28, 2011**

**Hinton Conference Centre, 965 Switzer Drive, Hinton, Alberta**

**Board of Directors—Sector positions open for nominations:**

**Aboriginal (2); Non-Gov't organizations (3); Other (1); Government (1)**

***"Our Watershed—Our Responsibility"***



## AWC-WPAC hears from Athabasca Watershed Stewardship Groups at Forum in Athabasca—January 29, 2011

The Athabasca Watershed Council hosted a Forum for Athabasca Watershed Stewardship Groups on January 29, and despite freezing temperatures and bad road conditions, stewards from throughout the watershed made the gathering a success. Thanks to all who braved the elements to attend!

After an introductory presentation by the AWC-WPAC, the workshop focused on stewardship action from the upper headwaters to the lower Athabasca at Fort McMurray. Stewardship work is challenging and diverse, and focuses on both local and regional



Photo: C. Simmons  
Jeff McCommon of the **Lac La Nonne Stewardship Society** talked about the challenges and successes of his stewardship



Photo: C. Simmons  
Terry Sly from the **Alberta Water Council** discussed the options for increased communication between stewardship groups, WPACS, and the Alberta Water Council.

concerns and projects, including (but not limited to!) fish passage and habitat restoration in Hinton; watershed assessment and management planning at Lac La Nonne; gravel mining issues along the Athabasca at Fort Assiniboine; water withdrawals for industry from the Clearwater River (a recognized Canadian Heritage River in Canada); and river re-alignment and riparian damage in the Tawatinaw River.

Helping watershed stewards is also a full time job, and support groups provide invaluable support for stewardship work throughout Alberta.

The **Alberta Stewardship Network** presented at the gathering, outlining their project grant program, and capacity building opportunities for stewards. The **Cows and Fish Program** provided sound advice on riparian protection as well as resource support for stewards doing innovative work for riparian health.

The WSG Forum provided an excellent introduction for stewards to other stewards, as well as to the AWC-WPAC. The Council looks forward to building a strong relationship with Athabasca stewards in the future.



Photo: C. Simmons  
Watershed stewards in small group discussion—what are the next steps for WSG's and the AWC-WPAC?

## Athabasca State of the Watershed—Phase 1 Report Review of literature is now completed

As a foundational document for the Final Athabasca State of the Watershed Report, the **Athabasca State of the Watershed—Phase 1 Report** was completed March 1, 2011. As a review of available data and knowledge about the Athabasca Watershed, the SoW Phase 1 Report includes a preliminary atlas and spatial geodatabase of the watershed; a list of potential watershed health indicators; a data and knowledge gap assessment; and a preliminary Traditional Knowledge Report of the Athabasca Watershed.

The Athabasca State of the Watershed-Phase 1 Report is a working document, and the information contained in the report will require further review and discussion by the AWC-WPAC and watershed science advisors before inclusion to the Final State of the Watershed Report.

The AWC-WPAC has applied for project funding from Alberta Environment to complete the Athabasca State of the Environment—Phase 2 Report in the 2011-2012 fiscal year. The SoW Phase 2 Report will build upon the Phase 1 Report, and work towards a completed

Athabasca State of the Watershed Report in 2012-13.

For more information on the Athabasca State of the Watershed Report—Phase 1, contact us at [admin@awc-wpac.ca](mailto:admin@awc-wpac.ca) or call 780-865-8223.



Photo: C. Simmons

Horseshoe Lake—Upper Athabasca Watershed

## Athabasca Watershed Council Recruits Science Advisory Team

The AWC-WPAC has requested the participation of key scientists to provide expert advice to the Council during the research and writing of the Athabasca State of the Watershed Report (SoW). The Final SoW Report is an important foundation for the future Athabasca Integrated Watershed Management Plan.

The Council is pleased to welcome the Science Advisory Team members to work with the Technical Committee and the Board of Directors on this important project.

### Science Advisory Team members:

Dr. Ernst Kerkoven—AB. Environment (Hydrology/Climate Change)

Dr. Margaret Klebek—AB. Environment (Groundwater)

Dr. David Schindler—University of Alberta (Water Quality)

TBA: (Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems)



## Athabasca River Voyageur Canoe Brigade - August 18–23, 2011

The Athabasca River Voyageur Canoe Brigade (ARVCB) event is slated for August 18-23, 2011, starting at Jasper and ending downstream of Hinton, Alberta. Voyageur canoes are a colourful part of Canadian history, providing waterway transportation for the early fur trade (late 1700's – early 1800's). Goods from Europe were taken west for trade with aboriginal people, and furs were brought back from the interior of western North America to Upper and Lower Canada trading centres. The voyageur canoes were paddled predominantly by French Canadian '*Coureur de bois*' (woodsman and expert paddlers) or voyageurs.

To mark the importance of the historical legacy of the voyageur, Voyageur Canoe Brigades have been organized in the past from 1967 to the present day on several major river systems in Canada, including the Athabasca River. The purpose of the ARVCB is to promote recreational paddling as well as future paddling brigades, and to foster awareness and deeper appreciation of the beauty, history and importance of the Athabasca River.

Voyageur teams of 6-8 people will be paddling 25 foot long canoes, based in the 'Canoe du Nord' design, starting near the community of Jasper, and travelling pre-arranged distances over 4 days. Several teams have registered or expressed interest in participation, and look forward to not only wonderful days on the Athabasca River, but social gatherings and local entertainment each evening. If you are interested in learning more about this event, please contact Rick Zroback at [rickzro@shaw.ca](mailto:rickzro@shaw.ca).



"Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall" by Frances Anne Hopkins



Photo: C. Simmons

Hinton Team in Voyageur Canoe on the Athabasca River

### Monitoring Reviews— lower Athabasca Watershed

The lower Athabasca River has been the subject of several recent studies related to monitoring the environmental impacts of oil sands development.

These reviews may be found at the following websites.

- "The Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel findings on Environmental and Health Impacts of Canada's Oilsands Industry" (December 2010)  
To review this report see: [http://www.rsc.ca/expertpanels\\_reports.php](http://www.rsc.ca/expertpanels_reports.php)
- Federal Oilsands Panel Report: "A Foundation for the Future: Building an Environmental Monitoring System for the Oil Sands"  
To review this report see: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/pollution/default.asp?lang=En&n=E9ABC93B-1>
- Provincial Ministerial Review: "Evaluation of Four Reports on Contamination of the Athabasca River System by Oil Sands Operations"  
To review this report see:  
[http://environment.alberta.ca/documents/WMDRC\\_-\\_Final\\_Report\\_March\\_7\\_2011.pdf](http://environment.alberta.ca/documents/WMDRC_-_Final_Report_March_7_2011.pdf)



Photo: C. Simmons



Photo: C. Simmons





## Athabasca Watershed Council



### BECOME A MEMBER!

*Our Watershed ...Our Responsibility.*

### The Athabasca Watershed— some interesting facts

The Athabasca River originates in the Columbia Icefields, Jasper National Park, at an elevation of approximately 1,600 metres (5,249 feet). The river flows northeast through Alberta, past the communities of Jasper, Hinton, Whitecourt, Athabasca, and Fort McMurray before entering Lake Athabasca near the community of Fort Chipewyan.

The Athabasca River travels 1,231 kilometres, to flow into the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Lake Athabasca.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world, and is considered a globally significant conservation area for threatened species and waterfowl concentrations. It is a Ramsar Site Wetland of International Significance, and is listed as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO).

The Athabasca Basin encompasses 95,300 sq. kilometres, or 36,796 sq. miles, and extends into the province of Saskatchewan as well as a small area in the Northwest Territories.

Average water discharge is approx. 623 cubic metres/second  
Maximum water discharge is approx. 4,790 cubic metres/second  
Minimum water discharge is approx. 75.0 cubic metres/second

The Athabasca watershed is the southernmost sub-watershed of the Mackenzie River Basin that flows north to the Arctic Ocean.

### *From the mountain headwaters... to the delta lowlands*

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Lower Athabasca River in moonlight

Photo: M. Hayward



#### *Why the "Dispatch"?*

In 1904, Billy Louttit, a Métis dispatch carrier for the Hudson Bay Company, ran 100 miles from Athabasca to Edmonton in 16 hours to get help for the town, threatened by an imminent flood. Then, like now, water was an issue to be taken seriously. "Dispatches" were often official messages, sent with haste and importance, to a particular destination. And so it is with this newsletter—important information about the Athabasca Watershed Council and its work, sent to keep you informed and up-to-date.

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