



**Minutes**  
**MRWCC Board Meeting**  
**January 31, 2020 – 9:30 AM**  
**Town of Milk River Office**

**Present:** William King, Ben Ellert, Ron McNeil, Joan Hughson, Ed Sloboda, Suzanne Liebelt, Ken Miller, Stephen Kirkpatrick, Aaron Domes, Darcy Wills, Ross Ford, Will Lindeman, Scott MacCumber, Warren Cunningham, Kandra Forbes, Tim Romanow, and Mary Lupwayi

**Absent:** John Ross, Lorraine Nicol, Devon Ford, Brian Hills

**1. Welcome and introductions**

- Ron McNeil welcomed everyone to the meeting and brought the meeting to order at 9:33am
- Introductions were conducted. Stephen Kirkpatrick introduced himself as the new Health rep on the MRWCC Board. He has replaced Kristen Dykstra

**2. Approve Agenda**

**Motion:** Suzanne Liebelt moved to approve the agenda as presented. William King seconded.

**Carried**

**3. Minutes from December 9, 2019 meeting**

- The minutes were reviewed and the following amendments were requested:
  - Part 16, second bullet should read: Fence construction between Milk River Natural Area and the Ecological Reserve has been completed and additional work to be conducted in the future

**Motion:** Ross Ford moved to accept the minutes as amended. Will Lindeman seconded.

**Carried**

**4. Financial update**

- a. Financial statements update
  - November and December, 2019 Financial Statements
    - Received the balance \$175,000 from GOA as the final payment for the 2019/20 core funding in addition to the \$100,000 that was received in March
    - WRRP shows that there is a significant balance that has to be cleared up by the end of the fiscal year. Approximately \$90,000 is already allocated to be disbursed. Which will leave enough funds to purchase a couple of loaner portable watering

systems to be used by the municipalities within the watershed. This arrangement fits within the objectives of the grant program

**Motion:** Will Lindeman moved to accept the financial statements as presented. Scott MacCumber seconded. **Carried**

## 5. WPACs Manager's report

- Had a meeting on January 21, 2020 in Red Deer
- Robert Stokes, the Executive Director Strategy Branch, who was overseeing WPAC programming was let go, and Rob Harris - Director of Community Engagement was able to attend the meeting but did not have a lot of updates in terms of questions concerning clarity of the grant agreement or reorganization of staff and divisions
- There was a discussion on a possible collective funding reallocation for all WPACs including Education Outreach staff which has had the most focus of budget cuts. Province wide fund development or leveraging to help cover some of the programs was proposed. Consensus was not achieved from all WPACs so additional work needs to be done to find common ground. Other discussions included collective application of funding:
  - Federal grant (Climate Action) for education and literacy that could be eligible for WPACs to submit an application and could pay up to 85% for man power
    - Would be a collective application for all Alberta, with GOA allocated core grant dollars used as matching. Rob Harris was supportive and offered to help coordinate an application
  - There are also other programs opening up that we can apply funding for matching dollars
  - There are 3 CAP grants through AAF: Public literacy, WSG, and Youth Education. Looking to submit a joint application for the Ag. Youth Education program jointly with OWC and SEAWA and share education outreach resources. If successful, will need to come up with a detailed work plan and formalize a working agreement on sharing resources among the three WPACs
  - This is to be discussed at the February 12 Annual Work Plan Development meeting
- There are some turnover challenges as some WPACs are losing managers and others are finding it difficult to maintain Educational Outreach staff
- Discussed formalizing a working agreement on sharing resources and training opportunities to standardize messaging, an updated AB WPAC terms of reference is in the works and will be presented for all 11 Council and approvals are planned for spring

- There are plans for a training day for WPAC staff and some executives in corporation with AEP. Working on framing the training material, the meeting is to be scheduled the first week of March likely in Spruce Grove – details to follow

## **6. PCF meeting report**

- Kandra attended the meeting and gave a brief update of the meeting:
  - There are new people elected on the PCF Board and some long-term members have stepped down
  - New PCAP coming soon to be done by next January
  - There was a presentation from Alberta Wilderness Association
  - Had breakout sessions in the afternoon to discuss programing and Kandra attended the grasslands session
  - There were discussions on the next steps on the connecting corridors and Transboundary issues, looking to identify partners to implement connecting corridors projects particularly in the SE portion of Alberta
  - PCF Board meeting minutes are available for those interested

## **7. Environment Canada – Conservation Tax Credit Incentive Project update**

- Was introduced at the last Board meeting
- Joan Hughson worked hard to get the program recognized at the County of Forty Mile
- Project will target the protection area for the sage grouse and Species at Risk
- If landowners qualify, they will get a tax rebate from the property tax for deeded grassland and leased land, but have to create or maintain habitat for Species at Risk
- The first time in Western Canada that a municipality would lead a conservation program
- There is a \$50,000 grant to cover up program and contract expenses in this fiscal year
- Next steps: County of Forty Mile is working with CWS staff to get some agreements in place, then hire a contractor to frame the program
- If MRWCC is approached to facilitate the landowner round table (next fiscal year), it will be brought back to Council for approval
- Although the MRWCC was chosen as an appropriate vehicle to help promote the program, it should be noted that some of the land involved is within SEAWA and it is important to work with SEAWA personnel on the project

## **8. Thanks to John and Kathy Ross for the Christmas dinner**

- The Board thanked John and Kathy for their generosity in hosting a well-planned Christmas dinner on June 9, 2019
- John was not available at this meeting

**Action:** Tim to present a card and a thank you gift to John at the February 12 meeting

## 9. Team updates:

### a. *Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)*

- The Team had a meeting on January 14, 2020
- Community Appreciation Forum – March 19, 2020
- Draft Agenda
  - Has been drafted and will be sent out next week
  - Kept the program format same as last year's program. Presentations start at 2:30pm
  - A couple of changes worked well last year and will be adopted this year as well
    - Posters to be placed in the hall way of the Civic Centre
    - Poster contest to be conducted after presentations to avoid distracting presentations
- Speakers
  - John Ross, Chairman – Greeting
  - Tim Romanow, Executive Director – Program overview
  - Megan Evans, Executive Director, Alberta Invasive Species Council – Native bees and pollination in the watershed grasslands or invasive species introduced in the watershed
  - Julie Landry-Deboer, MULTISAR, Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) - "With Gratitude, for Grass and Grazing"
  - Keynote Speaker:
    - Had approached Dr Bork to present on the Carbon Sequestration and effects of long-term grazing on native grasslands of Alberta at the Community Appreciation Forum, however, he was not able to attend due to conflicting schedules. Will keep him in mind for the Science Forum instead
    - Plan B - have invited Dr. Cameron Carlyle, an Associate Professor for Agricultural Life and Environmental Sciences, U of A. He is another good candidate to give the presentation. He has shown interest but would like to check availability before committing himself.
    - In the event that Dr. Carlyle is not available, Dr. Ben Ellert will present on soil carbon sequestration and green house gas emissions

**Action:** Tim to coordinate with Dr. Ellert on the proper title of the presentation in the event that he is the one presenting

- Highlight Education Outreach program and/or YRDs Top Hand presentation
- Feature winners of the "Best Beef Stewardship Contest"
- Awards
  - Heritage Tree Dedication

- Environmental Stewardship Award presentation
- School Poster Contest
- At 6pm – Dinner will be served
- At 7pm - Displays and end of Silent Auction
- Fundraising
  - There will be several fundraising opportunities:
    - Silent Auction - In the process of soliciting auction items
    - Raffles
      - Fly the Milk – need to request the flight donation from John Ross
      - Tour the Milk (tickets to partake the MRWCC hike and canoe tours)
      - WOSPP Rock art tour
      - Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve Tour. Sponsored by William King
    - 50/50
- Watershed Best Beef Stewardship Contest and Fundraising Project
  - The MRWCC is requesting interested beef producers within the watershed to donate beef that will be used at a BBQ contest. The proceeds will go towards MRWCC work initiatives. Charitable receipts will be issued to producer sponsors
  - The Best Beef contest is a unique way of promoting stewardship message across the Watershed by featuring the good work done by beef producers and Presenting the connection between water management, grazing and rangeland management, and biodiversity
    - The program will be launched at the Community Appreciation Forum on March 29, 2020
    - 10 producers to be selected for the contest and their profiles will be featured at the Community Appreciation Forum
    - The winning producer will get a gate sign for their operation
    - Will contact a professional cook/chef to donate time to do the cooking
    - Produce a one-page write-up for media release to highlight producers
    - An ad has been drafted to be sent out next week
- Food safety
  - An email was sent to Health Unit Services to ask what steps we need to take to ensure we are inline with health regulations
  - Beef has to be government inspected
  - Program will be launched at the Community Appreciation Forum on March 19
  - Best Beef Stewardship Contest is scheduled for July 1, 2020
  - Ranch tour to show case the producers' operations will be in August
  - The program venue is at Milk River Visitor Information Center
  - Have applied for a WSG grant for \$10,000 pending approval
- Education Outreach Activities:

- School programs
  - Poster Contest
    - Have approached all local schools about the contest
    - Will be contacting local Hutterites Colony schools as well
  - Caring for Our Watersheds
    - Have started presentations in schools
    - Deadline and judging scheduled for March
  - WOSPP partnership
    - Tentative interest in two watershed programs in May
    - Limited funding has resulted in reduction in staff (including Park interpreters)
    - Looking to apply for funding for student work placement again this year
  - YRDs
    - Will be hosted in Cardston County July 21 to 23, 2020
    - Had a committee meeting in Cardston and pre-toured some possible sites for this year's camp
    - Have chosen Lower St. Mary's Reservoir as a good site for the camp
    - Extending an invitation to Blood Tribe youth as well
    - Putting together a Terms of Reference for the program
    - A number of changes on the organizing committee as we are losing some key members
  - WPACs Education Outreach Program
    - Putting together a Terms of Reference
    - Jointly working on some interactive watershed maps
- Community Awards
  - Heritage Tree
    - Nominations have been submitted but just waiting to confirm with landowners
  - Environmental Stewardship Award
    - Nominations have been submitted but waiting for business approval
  - Creating online Arc GIS story map of past award winners
- Spring Hike Tour
  - Scheduled for April 24, 2020 at Devil's Coulee. Following up with Devil's Coulee Dinosaur Museum to see if there is interest in partnering in the program
- Elected Officials Tour
  - Planning to have it in June
  - Will visit the head waters and the Milk River dam site
  - Invite local MLAs, municipal Reeves or representatives, and the Minister of Environment and Parks
  - Need to put together a brief description highlighting the tour
- AGM – May 14, 2020
  - Save the date flyer has been circulated in the Meander Newsletter

- Will start advertising in due course

**b. Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)**

- Had a meeting on January 23, 2020

- Water Monitoring

- The AEP collaboration worked really well again this year
- Will start looking at the unvetted data through the monitoring year until the end of January. Wendell Koning is looking into sharing 2019 data with the Council this week
- Dr. Jason Kerr is the head of the Environmental Monitoring and Science Division and his plan is to continue with the collaboration but with the reorganization and budget cuts going on, he is not sure of the future
- If there is no AEP cooperation, what is our plan B?
  - There is need for continuation
  - Eliminate some sites? Like 880 and Pinhorn, since there is a duplication with the AEP project for 880 site and there is similarity in trend with Pinhorn and the 880 data
  - Will need to look for alternative funding
- Another challenge last year is concerning the instream flow data collection for 2018 which has not yet been received to date
- Follow up recommendations:
  - Red Creek water quality concerns regarding pesticides and heavy metals associated with runoff from old industrial sites and pit flaring in Montana, and reduction of leopard frogs at some sites. Consider looking at existing data and conduct a scoping study of 3 or 4 samples to see if additional investigation is needed
  - Eastern tributaries data collection: IWMP water quality objectives were not set due to lack of data at the time, we now have enough data that objectives could be set
  - Mainstem Milk River data set – Have about 15 years of data. We need 5 years of data for proper trend observation. Since we have the data, should consider preparing a 5-year data rollup and trend analysis
  - Stephen Kirkpatrick (AHS) will share some of the household drinking water data available and applicable, may be able to assist with some metal analysis of water on Red Creek to assist with the scoping studies
    - Need to look for funding for these projects
- State of the Watershed Science update

- There is interest with the transboundary partners to go forward with updating the Transboundary State of the Watershed (SOW) report
- Need to update the top 5 areas of concern in an electronic copy that can be distributed on a flash drive or card to keep costs down:
  - Surface Water Quantity
  - Surface Water Quality
  - Groundwater
  - Biodiversity (Fish, Wildlife and Plants)
  - Land Use (Parks and Protected Areas, Tourism, Recreation and Access, Agriculture, and Oil and Gas)
- Looking at \$20,000 contribution per jurisdiction to develop a workplan
- Since the department is not in a position to provide additional funding for an updated SOW project; can explore the idea of soliciting smaller donations of less than \$5,000 or in-kind donations from multiple contributing organizations as a way to source ongoing funding for the SOW project. The contributing organizations would have their logos in the report to acknowledge their support
- Would produce limited hard copies
- Formed a subcommittee to conduct needs assessment of the project
- Will ask AEP or ABMI for GIS assistance with maps (limited updating needed)
- St Mary/Milk River SAR Alberta Recovery Plan
  - Shane Petry sent his regrets as he was not able to attend the R&M Team meeting but sent the following update:
    - The Milk River three species recovery plan is currently being reviewed by the policy group in Edmonton. Once this is complete, it will be brought out for formal public consultations. A projected date for this has not been set
    - Currently, fisheries management is undertaking province-wide public engagement open houses to listen to Albertans with regard to what they would like to see as far as fisheries in Alberta. There are options for additional harvest as well as for new stocking of walleye and trout. This is really about seeing what people would like to see and then taking tangible actions towards objectives that are feasible and desirable. The Lethbridge open house was on Monday of this week and was well attended with 162 participants. Those who did not make the meeting are encouraged to go to the Talk AEP fisheries engagement website to fill out an on-line survey
  - Ken Miller and Tim participated on a conference call in May on the science feedback discussions on the actions, largely similar to previous recovery strategies



- Phase 2 Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP) update
  - Phase 2 is ending March 31, 2020
  - Uncertainty of core funding made it difficult to plan ahead for the current fiscal year
  - Continuing with producer projects
  - Performed site analysis for riparian health assessments and photo monitoring last summer
  - Will plan to continue with annual health monitoring and photo plots on the project sites even after the WRRP funding is depleted as it is important to continue with good and proper reporting to maintain working relationships with producer cooperators and future grant applications. Planning to rotate site monitoring for 3 to 5-year intervals
- 2020 Science Forum
  - Intended to be hosted in conjunction with County of Warner this past fall, but with the MRWCC funding uncertainty, the County's departure of their extension technician, and unavailability of GOA staff and researchers was too challenging to make work
  - The date to be changed as November 10 date is in conflict with other programs. Proposed dates are November 3, 4, or 5. Need to check availability of the County of Warner ASB staff and meeting room to confirm the date
  - Report back confirmed date to Council
  - Agenda and theme
    - Looking at a couple of themes for the Forum:
      - Habitat enhancement and Water quality
    - Presentation ideas:
      - Milk River Ridge range studies – water quality
      - Milk River Ridge Phosphorus filter project
      - WRRP outcomes
      - County of Warner stewardship projects/habitat plantings
      - Constructed wetland project

**c. *Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)***

- Making arrangements for the elected official water infrastructure tour, spring 2020
- Will be submitting an abstract on Transboundary Water management challenges, Milk River Storage Investigation work and water security concerns within the Milk River Watershed for CWRA branch workshop in Red Deer (Abstract deadline is February 15, 2020)
- Basin Water Supply note: Fresno Reservoir is being held at approximately 75% of capacity (150% of 30yr average), in part due to a wetter than average fall and inflow.

Snowpack above Sherburne reservoir is trending above average with high snow water equivalents, forecasts are for 94-100% of average water availability by spring

- Ken discussed the contents of letters that he received:
  - Looking at ways to improve shared water. Have been at work for 8 years and are winding up as more people are retiring
  - A letter from the Canadian and US Accredited Officers of the IJC to Bev Yee as Deputy Minister of AEP, announcing that they are committed to build on the work of the JIT. There are a couple of areas that need to be updated and will add on the resiliency and climate change sections. Have a budget of \$2 Million. Need to acquire that funding from the Federal Government. Will finish the JIT work with recommendations on how water allocation can be used beneficially
  - The structural change on the Milk within Canada will never happen without the input of the IJC
  - Ken will help with the upcoming tour
  - Ken to get permission to release a 6-page summary document for the tour
  - It is beneficial that the IJC is committing to finishing the work of the JIT
  - Important to get a summary report on the history for the tour attendants

**d. *Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)***

- Continue to participate as Co-chair of the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership organization
- Participants at the 2020 workshop in February will include: Tim Romanow, Kandra Forbes, Ron McNeil, and John Ross
- We will be hosting a meeting with EC and the municipal staff involved with the Conservation Tax Credit pilot project in Sask and AB
- We will also participate in Core Team work planning sessions coordinated by Sask PCAP
- Looking at having discussions at the conference into the possibility of transboundary partnerships to produce a Transboundary State of the Watershed report. The expenses should be split among the partners
- 2021 workshop will be in Montana

**10. Upcoming Events**

- a. Annual Work Plan development meeting – February 12, 2020, Council Chambers, Town of Milk River
  - Tim and Ron will work together to facilitate the work plan

- Will look at the 3-year plan on what has been done, what needs to be done and how it relates to future programs. Development of a new 3-year Strategic Plan will be conducted next winter
- Meeting will start at 9am to approximately 2pm
- Work plan to be finalized before the end of the fiscal year

**Action:** Tim to circulate the work plan information to the Board members as soon as possible before February 12

- b. Transboundary Grassland Partnership Workshop – February 25-27, 2020 Regina, Saskatchewan
- c. Community Appreciation Forum – March 19, Civic Centre, Milk River
- d. Spring Hike Educational Tour – April 24, 2020, Milk River
- e. AGM – May 14 – Council Chambers, Town of Milk River
- f. Science Forum – First week of November (Date TBD), County of Warner
- g. Strategic Planning review (3-year plan) – Winter 2020/21

## 11. Round table discussions

- Tim:
  - The Canadian Invasive Species Centre has funding available for the Milk River region for invasive species/species at risk projects, including monitoring, education, and prevention. Funding is targeted to Aquatic Invasive species; possible source of revenue for education outreach coordination, and develop additional monitoring of Quagga mussels with water users/recreationalists, and develop a citizen science project around the monitoring of crayfish (identification, location, spp.) and project associated with impact to western silvery minnow populations.
- Darcy:
  - There is an increase in reports of feral hogs in Montana. RMA reported that some municipalities are also having issues
- Ross:
  - There is a big push to eliminate use of glyphosate as reports show that it has cancer causing agents in the USA, something that should be on our radar, any kind of limit or ban can have a significant impact on our zero tillage farming operations
    - Ben: tons of research being done right now to defend usage, though agrees we need to get a handle on usage as a desiccant for food crops; especially canola growers up north i.e. Chinese refusal of canola imports
- Warren:
  - Requested that Tim give a brief report on snow pack data; Tim - overall above average snow pack and significantly higher than average snow water equivalent in

some areas, new update will be emailed out early February to council. Also noted Fresno Reservoir is being held near full supply level currently, if not held lower by spring may not see a significant enough deficit accumulated early spring to enable the letter of intent for AB irrigators in late summer. Will continue to monitor the situation

**12. Other items**

**13. Meeting Adjournment**

- Ed Sloboda moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:25pm

**14. Next Meeting Date**

- Next meeting will be on March 26, 2020 at 1:30pm in Milk River

**Signatures:**

**Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary:** \_\_\_\_\_