



Minutes

MRWCC Board Meeting

September 24, 2020 – 1:30 PM

Hybrid Milk River/Zoom Meeting

Present:

In person: John Ross, Brian Hills, William King, Joan Hughson, Ed Sloboda, Suzanne Liebelt, Ken Miller, Darcy Wills, Ross Ford, Will Lindeman, Scott MacCumber, Warren Cunningham, Tim Romanow, and Mary Lupwayi

Virtually: Ben Ellert, Ron McNeil, Lorraine Nicol, Aaron Domes, Stephen Kirkpatrick

Absent: Devon Ford

1. Welcome and introductions

- John Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting and brought the meeting to order at 1:45pm
- It should be noted that the video call quality was poor which caused a few members to leave the meeting early

2. Approve Agenda

- There was an addition to the agenda under item 13: WPAC/Municipal study

Motion: William King moved to approve the agenda as amended. Ross Ford seconded.
Carried

3. Minutes from May 28, 2020 meeting

- Two corrections were identified as follows:
 - Page 4, part 8, under Discussions, should read:
 - The Milk River Joint Board of Control has indicated to their users that they are getting water for one irrigation cycle, and will likely only get water to the end of June. This could change if there is enough precipitation
 - Page 7, last part of the first bullet, should read:
 - While Chris and Lorraine have adequate funding for the project, there are plans to apply for an Alberta Real Estate Foundation grant

Motion: Ron McNeil moved to accept the minutes as amended. Suzanne Liebelt seconded. **Carried**

4. Financial update

- Financial statements updates
 - April to August, 2020 Financial Statements

- There was concern that the WRRP project income was not clearly identified in the records and needed to be rectified, may consider having a notice to reader to explain the connection
- The entire core grant as per the agreement could be recorded as an accounts receivable
- Ross Ford offered to assist Mary in reorganizing the statements for clarity

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

- Employee benefit rates increase
 - The over 50% rate increase in employee benefits was discussed
 - Small number of employees has made pooling difficult for even a basic package. Notified of the rate increase just before going from 3 to 2 employees

Action: Tim to explore other avenues that will get the benefit rates more affordable such as teaming up with: Milk River Community Business Association, Town of Milk River, or other WPACs and report back in November

5. WPAC Core/Project grant status update

- We received 40% (\$110,000) of the total approved amount of \$275,000
- We are expecting to receive the balance soon
- The government is changing the grants and payroll finance system November 1st, so will need to inquire about the grant payment as the changes may delay grants release

6. Other grants

- CAP
 - A 3-year grant that was applied for the joint outreach coordinator position between SEAWA, OWC, and MRWCC
 - Grant decision delayed until November
- Alberta Ecotrust
 - An application was submitted for \$20,000 to support education outreach activities and help tell the story of water conservation during water shortage periods
 - Application is still pending
- ACA
 - We submitted an Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) covid19 relief grant
 - Grant amount was for \$2,500 to help with conservation activities and also help organizations suffering financial hardship with raising funds
 - We were not successful because we did not meet the grant criteria that required showing a decline in revenue between March and July 2020 of a minimum of 15% compared to the same period in 2019
 - We did not meet that criteria because we showed slightly more core income than last year

- WRRP wrap-up
 - Almost 100% has been allocated
 - Picked up a few larger projects this summer as more producers were installing alternative watering systems and building exclusion fences as they anticipated water shortages
 - Will be submitting an interim report in October
 - Collecting testimonials from producers who participated in the program to be included in the final report and lesson learned report in March, 2021

7. St Mary Diversion update

- Got an update that water will be released in the diversion October 8th until October 31. Weather permitting
- There are plans to release water from Sherburne into Swift Current creek and into the St. Mary's the week of September 28 so that water is available for diversion
- Drop 2 structure is complete and only the liner and site grading remain
- Drop 5 has four more wall pours remaining, of which two will be completed shortly and the final two next week There is a lot of site grading on Drop 5 that still needs to be done as well as rip rap placement
- Drop 1 has had a new floor poured earlier in the week, and wall overlay to help extend its life before water comes on
- Have received inquiries from irrigators needing to know if irrigation is possible this fall
- Credited officers and field representatives advised on July 24th that there was no more irrigation and have not rescinded that decision
- The IJC accredited officers are meeting October 7
- It was stated in the throne speech about the revitalization of PFRA dedicated to water infrastructure in western Canada

Action: Tim to inform water users to remove temporary fences over the river before water is released this fall

Action: Tim to circulate a factsheet on how water is allocated to the membership

Action: Tim and Ken to assist water users in coordinating any irrigation request to AEP

8. WPACs Manager's report

- There are a couple of new WPAC Managers
- Mark Bennet has retired and there is a new Executive Director for the BRBC
- Red Deer has a new manager
- Most WPACs are trying to adjust their programs to deal with the Covid-19 and challenges of conducting meetings
- The Municipal Drought Resilience program with Alberta Water Council is being finalized. Tim will be leading the train the trainer sessions to train other WPACs staff to deliver to their municipalities and partners in the watersheds this winter, dates still to be determined

9. Strategic Planning review (3-year plan) – Winter 2020/21

- Need clear direction on the next 3-year strategic planning from board, if Covid19 restrictions are not relaxed do we have a backup strategy?
- Date:
 - In the new year, sometime late January for a day and half
 - Combine with the January Board meeting
- Format
 - Facilitated
 - To be held in Waterton or somewhere nearby for a day
 - Topics
 - Engaging first nations, moving forward with water security projects, role in supporting biodiversity stewardship programs, Education and Outreach

Motion: Ross Ford moved to hold a facilitated day and half strategic planning session late January in person if covid19 restrictions are easing. Combine with the Board meeting at Waterton or elsewhere close by. Ed Sloboda Seconded. **Carried**

10. WPAC/Municipal study

- Lorraine presented the WPAC/Municipal research proposal to the WPAC Managers' meeting on August 11
- The study was positively received by the managers
- Four WPACs are going to be involved in the study: MRWCC, OWC, NSWA, and the BRWA
- There was a question that other remaining WPACs may not be gaining the feedback that the other four would be. It may be possible to expand the study next year to include all 11 WPACs depending on how the study goes this year and funding situation and alignment with WPAC performance evaluations
- The next steps will be in October/November, develop the survey questionnaire, a list of participants and their contacts
- Additional steps after that will be to obtain approval from the UofL and design the survey to be given to the participants in February and March 2021 and will be available for 6 weeks
- There is some internal funding available but limited
- The Alberta Real Estate Foundation grant of \$25,000 has just been approved
- Tim will circulate the project summary to Council with the minutes for more clarity

11. Science Forum

- Date:
 - Plan for winter 2021
- Format
 - Had planned to partner with the County of Warner
 - Milk River Civic Center can accommodate more people
 - Start with a few speakers and see how it goes?

- Can look at having a virtual meeting as a webinar series and have it available through the MRWCC website and County website
- Topics
 - Timely to have a presentation on the work done at Milk River Ridge Reservoir
 - MRWCC water quality long term trends
 - Soil carbon storage and greenhouse gas emissions from rangeland and cropland in Southern Alberta. By Dr. Benjamin Ellert, Research Scientist, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
 - Fisheries assessments conducted this summer by AEP and DFO
 - Report on the natural flow observations this summer including Drone footage

Action: Tim to contact proposed speakers

12. Aquatic Invasive Centre partnership

- AIS displays and monitoring
- Received \$3,500 grant from Aquatic Invasive Centre to produce displays and promote aquatic invasive species awareness and reporting
- Have produced the designs and in the process of producing displays

13. Municipal Road allowances and off highway vehicle trails – Darcy Wills

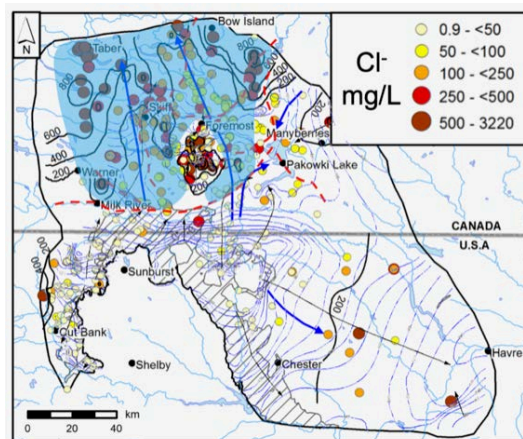
- Cardston County has had significant recreation pressure with off highway vehicles. Getting pushback from recreation lobbying to all levels of government
- There is need for local WPACs to be involved in the process of decision making as this can impact watershed management
- This would be worth noting since it can set precedence and can affect future policy in other WPACs

14. Milk River Aquifer groundwater study

- Contacted by Dr. Reika Yokochi a research scientist at the University of Chicago interested in studying groundwater within the Milk River aquifer
- Dr. Yokochi is aware of the recent extensive work by the Milk River Transboundary Aquifer project and has read the papers published by Dr. Petre.
- Short summary of her project proposal:
According to Petre et al. (2019), the mean residence time of groundwater in the MRA would be on the order of 200,000 years. This is much shorter than the estimate of > 1 million years from groundwater age tracer ³⁶Cl. The apparently older ³⁶Cl age can qualitatively be explained by a mixing of Cl from subsurface source. Other reported tracers do not have sufficiently long-time range for the north of Milk River, so there has been no tracer that support the flow time scale determined by the hydrological model. Krypton-81 is the best existing tracer to address this - it has a half-life of 229,000 years, with dating range of 40,000 - 1 million years. She would like to study the distribution of ⁸¹Kr in the MRA to determine mean residence time (flow rate), whether the low salinity (and high transmissivity) track reported in early study actually have shorter residence time

than other areas, and how much contrast there is between the low salinity track and the rest. She believes this would be useful information for the water resource assessment of the aquifer. Krypton-81 is a relatively new tracer. It requires large quantity of water that has never been in contact with atmosphere. She works with physicists at Argonne National Laboratory who operates the custom-made instrument, and have apparatus for collecting samples and preparing the gas samples for the analyses.

- Currently, preparing a proposal to the US-National Science Foundation NSF, and seeking for two things:
 - First is information on the number and distribution of active/accessible wells and springs from which we may be able to collect samples without atmospheric contamination
 - More specifically, she would like to study the area shown in blue (Figure modified from Petre et al.). Mixing complicates the interpretation of the data, so she would like to avoid near Foremost and east of Pakowki Lake at least for the beginning



- Second, if agreed, a letter from the MRWCC either already established research team or from individuals, that states that we are willing to collaborate if the proposal gets funded as requested
- The MRWCC has provided contact information to Dr. Yokochi, and have reached out to the AEP groundwater specialist to connect him with the scientist but have not heard back from him
- The board has reservations in supporting the project without understanding the intent of the research and potential management ramifications. Would like to have more information and clarity before ensuring support

Action: Tim to ask for a more detailed proposal for the project in order for the Board to make an informed decision

15. Team updates:

➤ **Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)**

- Due to cancellation of community events and further education/outreach restrictions in 2020, the Team decided to postpone all remaining meetings until 2021
- Conducted an online auction since we could not have the silent auction due to the cancellation of the Community Appreciation Forum:
 - Total for online auction = \$1826.00
 - Cash donation = \$ 750.00
 - Grand total = \$2576.00
- Produced the 2020 summer Meander Newsletter
 - Summer Meander newsletter was distributed in June
 - Looking for articles for winter Meander newsletter

Action: Mary to circulate deadline for article submission

- Highlighted the diversion failure and history
- Website and social media updates
 - Website has been updated regularly, social media posting has been lower without EO coordinator dedicating time to page followers have exponentially increased over the summer with diversion and river monitoring updates. Over 10,000-page engagements since June
- Youth Engagement Programs
 - With schools closed there were no school activities
 - Attempts were made to have online programs available instead, supporting a joint project by the AB WPAC collective – Education coordinators to develop common video messaging profiling unique watershed aspects across the province (to start this fall)
 - Supported and promoted the Deep Roots program - revisions with PCF, GOA, Ducks Unlimited, and OWC staff were completed and updated program was made available for local teachers
 - Initial planning has started for a YRD camp in 2021 with a revised terms of reference/expectations document for organizing partners, updated workbook formatting and custom field guide. MRWCC will continue to be the lead organization and funds raised for 2020 will be carried forward for 2021

➤ **Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)**

a. Programming

- Covid19 impacted some of the work planning early in the season; we were planning for a more limited field monitoring program to limit staff and volunteer time and focus resources to summarize past data especially for the tributary sites

- The Diversion failure presented an opportunity to document as much natural flow period data as possible and team zoom meeting was held June 9th 2020 with available team members and additional interested academic representatives from Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge
- b. Water Quality Monitoring
- Long-term water quality monitoring program
 - MRWCC and GOA program alignment
 - Currently sampling 4 sites: US Milk River, HWY 880 bridge, North and South Forks at 501. Had to downsize the tributary monitoring from 9 sites to 4 sites due to financial constraints and summarize previous trend reporting data.
 - 2020 Sampling will be ending in October
 - AEP has a tributary monitoring network at the Verdigris creek, Miner's Coulee, and Red Creek near the mouth, and on the main stem at HWY 880 bridge which is AEP LTMN site. AEP and MRWCC coordinate water sampling to ensure that the data is comparable
 - AEP has installed and monitored 4 data sondes on 4 sites in the river at the 2 Forks sites (North and South Fork at 501), at Milk River Town site, and at HWY 880. Getting continuous measurements every hour for parameters such as conductivity, temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen
 - Assimilation of wastewater below Milk River sewage lagoons
 - The Town of Milk River is dealing with challenges associated with lagoon seepage.
 - The MRWCC in conjunction with AAF conducted studies a few year ago, to see if there was presence of human coliforms in the river. There are erosion issues between the river and the lagoon
 - At the request of the Town of Milk River, we are conducting water quality monitoring of the river at the down stream Milk River site to observe effect of the lagoon water seepage into the river during low flows data will continue to be provided to the Town of Milk River and AEP, with review conducted by the R&M team this fall

Discussion: The Quad Council Meeting hosted on June 25th 2020, town of Milk River staff took attendees and MLA Hunter and MP Motz to the lagoon site to observe the low flow, seepage, and erosion issues. The Town of Milk River has indicated they want the lagoon project in MSI grant list, and that they will work with the adjacent landowner on the erosion control measures needed. Recent monitoring conducted on the lagoons has also indicated significant seepage likely accelerated by cleaning conducted in 2018. Landowner Robert Kohl has contacted his MLA and wants the province or town to fix the erosion problem immediately

Action: Tim to provide photos, drone video, and WQ monitoring results to Brian Hills as soon as possible.

- c. Volunteer Observation Reporting Project
 - Volunteer monitoring forms have been collected from community members and our membership since June. Completing this form has helped us gather information on the river, land uses, wildlife, algal growth, other changes that might occur as well as possible impacts to species at risk
 - This has also provided a link between observations. IE) fish mortalities and stranding
 - General observations:
 - Have been noting observations of algae
 - Avian predators of larger fish
 - Dead fish
 - Stranding of minnows
 - Exposed gas pipeline
 - Upswelling/bubbling of groundwater
- River time-lapse photography project
 - Currently 9 cameras have been strategically deployed to take daily images of the river valley and changes in stream flow. Cameras have also been collecting wildlife movements opportunistically
 - Most locations have had cameras setup since June and complement monitoring photos taken during sampling periods. We will start to pull select camera over the next couple weeks
 - Colynn Kerr has donated his time for the collection of drone footage for parts of the Milk River to MRWCC
- d. Groundwater influence or impact
 - Little to no changes have been noted or reported with regards to well water depth especially within the Whiskey Valley aquifer
 - Water sampling at the HWY 880 Bridge. The chemistry at times is not consistent with the water from other areas with higher salts during natural flow. There was interest expressed from the R&M Team to investigate where the high EC and TDS is coming from to determine the source drainages across the Deer Creek Ranch
 - Ron offered to take the lead in the investigation, with identifying drainages of interest and take grab samples of drainage water during low flow to compare above and below deer creek in a scoping study
 - Samples were collected in August by Ron and Tim, initial review of the WQ data have confirmed that there is a large concentration of high salts water flowing in even during late summer from Deadhorse Coulee as the primary contributor. Followed by a few drainages from the north

- The team will review the data and compile a brief report on the findings this fall/winter

Action: Tim to work with the R&M Team to compile a summary of observations and monitoring lessons learned during the natural flow period and present at a future forum.

➤ **Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)**

- Continue to participate as Co-chair of the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership organization
- Border closure has challenged planning for future annual events. Might be moving towards digital conference in the new year

➤ **Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)**

- The Team hosted 3 meetings over the summer, provided updated information for all water users, community members, and officials when applicable. The team assisted in the communications with licenced water users, collecting contact information for the GOA. The team worked with the Milk River Water User's Association to collect water use information and report to AEP. We also held discussions on voluntary water use restrictions and best practices for both the municipalities and irrigators as the season went on
- Current Situation Update
 - Reconstruction continues on drop 5 as drop 2 has neared completion Additional water is still being held in Sherburne Reservoir for potential release in Early October if possible
 - Town of Milk River water situation appears to be better than anticipated a couple months ago with sufficient capacity to pump restored after cleaning of infiltration galleries and examination of engineering capacity of the town storage ponds

16. Round table discussions

- William King:
 - In May grazing did not occur within the natural area
 - Grass came back really good after the burn
 - Will start building more fence in October, current projected location cuts off vehicle access along the trail to the Rooster Comb. Working with Cam Lockerbie to maintain access
 - Cam is available if we want him to provide an update on the research and monitoring plan for the KCER and natural area over zoom at the November board meeting

17. Other items

- Office situation
 - We were approached by a private business owner to see if we would consider moving our offices to another vacant building in town.

- Not moving as, we are happy with the current office space within the Town office, and recently signed a new one-year lease at a very good rate
- Conservation offset tax incentive pilot program at the County of Forty Mile
 - Contacted potential leaseholders/landowners only by phone interviews this spring due to Covid19 restrictions
 - Received a letter from the Federal government (Canadian Wildlife Service) asking if there is interest in going into the next phase
 - Wondering how to proceed since there was only about 25% of landowners willing to participate within the high priority zone with known Sage Grouse protection orders

Discussion: The County could ask to proceed with a broader area to get additional landowner buy in, and work to accommodate the remaining high priority property managers more individually. Also, a community or stakeholders meeting to get additional feedback would be more appropriate. Should consider hosting a meeting with Covid19 precautions in place and have a facilitated discussion on the project. Might be worth discussing with Sask producers and elected officials.

- Ben Ellert: A River of Dreams – Journey through Milk River Country by Liz Bryan is available for purchase through Amazon
 - Liz has joined us many times over the years for spring and fall hike tours as well as canoe trips. She has been documenting stories and sites along the river and throughout the watershed to complete this book for many years

18. Meeting adjournment

Motion: Ed Sloboda moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:46pm.

19. Next meeting date

- Next meeting will be on November 26, 2020

Signatures:

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____