

Milk River Watershed Council Canada 2015-16 Annual Report

Our Water, Our Legacy





MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

John A. Ross

After 11 years of operation there seems to be more than ever to do for the Milk River Watershed Council Canada. We continue to roll out our Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) and are getting resounding support from the Counties and Government. We continue to promote our Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP), which aims to initiate targeted riparian restoration and stewardship projects within the watershed. If you have a shovel ready project in mind, please let us know.

We continue to hold educational tours such as canoe and hike tours for anyone to attend, informing residents and visitors of the unique environment and challenges of our watershed. We also provide coordination of Youth Range Days, which is a popular event that teaches our future residents about the land we live on, with strong support for local agricultural societies and our municipal partners.

In 2015 we experienced the second lowest snowpack on record at the headwaters of the Milk River above the Sherburne Reservoir. This led to zero natural flow of the river during the months of July and August, which means 100% of the water was diverted out of the St. Mary River, causing a deficit balance in our water usage according to our International Agreement with the U.S. This is the first time this has happened in 100 years. The IWMP identifies the need for an on-stream storage solution below the Milk River Forks site that will prove essential for future allocation and management of our most precious resource. This will help with flood and drought mitigation, as well as secure water for municipalities, reduce bank erosion, increase the potential for irrigation and green power generation, and also enhance in-stream flow needs for fish habitat and riparian function.

We couldn't accomplish any of this without our dedicated Board Members and our staff, Tim Romanow, our Executive Director, Mary Lupwayi, our Program Coordinator and our Educational Outreach Coordinator, Kathryn Romanchuk, who continues to forge ahead with education outreach programming.

MRWCC VISION

A watershed where community well-being is supported by a vibrant economy and sustained by a healthy environment that will endure as our legacy for future generations

MRWCC GOAL

To achieve balance among a thriving community, a healthy environment and a prosperous economy through understanding, dialogue and action

PLANNED OUTCOMES

Reliable and Safe Water Supplies

- Water is managed in a manner that benefits communities while meeting the needs of the aquatic and riparian environment.
- Water sharing disputes are resolved.
- Groundwater is mapped, interactions are understood, and the resource is properly managed.
- An improved economy in the Milk River watershed due to a secure supply of water.
- Information on water use in the Milk River watershed is available to the public.

Quality Water

- Quality water is available for communities, terrestrial and aquatic life, recreation and industry in the Milk River watershed.
- Baseline water quality information is available to the public.
- Water quality and quantity information is used to achieve sustainable use and integrated management of water resources.

Riparian Protection

- Healthy, functioning riparian areas contribute to stream bank stability, good water quality, forage, shelter and biodiversity in the Milk River watershed.

Land Use

- Innovative and sustainable land use and development practices take place in the watershed.
- A healthy, vibrant economy that will attract people and investment to the watershed.

Biodiversity

- A diverse native wildlife and plant community is present in the Milk River watershed through habitat protection and enhancement efforts.

Informed Community

- A community that is informed and actively involved in the Milk River Watershed Council Canada and its initiatives.

Transboundary Relationships

- Good working relationships with Saskatchewan and Montana that create a process and forum to address transboundary watershed concerns.

2015-16 HIGHLIGHTS

Water Supply and Management Team

Ken Miller, Chairman

- Participated in the Alberta-Montana Water Management Initiative, a joint cross-border Council formed to address water sharing and management for the Milk River.
- Addressed issues of water supply including water shortages, predicting future supply scenarios and working with our Montana neighbours to investigate international water sharing management strategies.
- Currently helping to promote the Milk River Water Storage project.

Research and Monitoring Team

Will Lindeman, Chairman

The Research and Monitoring Team is responsible for collecting information about the watershed

and identifying gaps in our current knowledge. The team initiates science and research projects that will further understanding of the watershed health.



Above: Tree planting on Red Creek 2015

- Completed 10th year of water quality monitoring on the Milk River, including the sixth year of monitoring on the eastern tributaries.
- Conducted preliminary work on Groundwater Monitoring Project with Alberta Health.
- Assisted a local Red Creek Watershed Stewardship group by providing program coordination and monitoring assistance to the group in conjunction with the County of Warner.
- Conducted the first phase of the Watershed

Resiliency and Restoration Program by identifying projects to be implemented located along the Milk River.

- Worked on cooperative invasive weed drone mapping project in conjunction with rural municipalities in the watershed.
- Conducted a GoPro camera feasibility study to understand fish winter habitat conditions and availability, species that are using the winter habitat, and also identify critical winter habitat in the Milk River.
- Conducted preliminary work on the 2018 Transboundary SOW report.

Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) Team - Ken Miller, Chairman

Finalized the Milk River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) which makes recommendations to decision making authorities, natural resource managers, users, and residents regarding the management of land and water resources in the watershed that reflect the communities desired watershed outcomes.

- Completed Milk River Integrated Watershed Management Plan after revisions and presented to watershed stakeholders and GOA cross-ministry review panel.

Community Awareness & Involvement Team Ed Sloboda, Chairman

The Team ensures that community members are aware and involved in the activities of the Milk River Watershed Council Canada.

- Hosted the 10th Annual General Meeting.
- Presented a Youth Engagement Program to local schools which included:
 - Participating in the Agrium sponsored Caring for Our Watershed Program.
 - Partnered with Alberta Parks and local schools to develop and implement a Youth Engagement Program to deliver

watershed related education materials and foster a stewardship ethic within local schools.

- Offered an extensive one credit on-line course for high school students.
- Hosted the Annual Poster Contest to local schools.
- Conducted classroom presentations for local schools.
- Partnered with local rural municipalities, Alberta Conservation Association, and GOA to develop and deliver the 8th annual Southern Alberta Youth Range Days program.
- Hosted the Annual Canoe and Hike Tours to showcase the Milk River watershed.
- Attended Milk River Bonanza Days and participated in the local parade with a float, and presented a MRWCC display that brought awareness of the MRWCC activities to the community.
- Partnered with WOSPP to host a weed pull day.
- Completed 2 Meander newsletter publications
- Maintained the MRWCC website.
- Conducted community awards programs: Environmental Stewardship Award and Tree Heritage Award.

Transboundary Watershed Team - John Ross

The team is responsible for developing an action plan that will identify knowledge gaps and improve information sharing with neighbouring jurisdictions for the better management of the common watershed resources.

- Organized a Prairie Transboundary Workshop in conjunction with PCF to help foster the relationship among transboundary partners and keep the dialogue going.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Tim Romanow

The past year has been an opportunity to focus our energy with our now completed Integrated Watershed Management Plan. The plan is a roadmap, to find opportunities for project implementation based on watershed and community significance. We continue to seek opportunities to align and support municipal and regional priorities within the watershed. Delays in receiving provincial grant funding had resulted in a rush to complete some projects late into the summer and fall. Innovative invasive weed mapping using drone aerial imagery is ongoing with our municipal partners. This data was simply unattainable 10 years ago and will provide new tools for land managers and county Ag. Service Boards throughout the watershed to combat invasive species and provide valuable information on watershed health and integrity. We have also continued efforts in developing targeted stewardship projects along the Milk River and select priority tributaries as part of our commitment to flood and drought resiliency with our WRRP program.

The MRWCC recently completed a Strategic Management Plan to set goals for the 2016/17 fiscal year which brought a renewed interest in working towards resolution of water scarcity and security concerns. The council has identified projects that mutually benefit our watershed community and are prioritized within the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. We will continue to be a strong voice for our community in regional initiatives such as the potential redesignation and expansion of Twin River Heritage Rangeland and the development of a Biodiversity Management Framework. Council also agreed to expand capacity and renew focus on community outreach and education efforts by working closely with local schools and groups within the watershed.

Moving forward, we are starting to ramp up Transboundary efforts in recognizing the connection between water, land use, and biodiversity. The MRWCC will be establishing a 2018 State of the Watershed Report team of technical experts from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana in the coming months. We will also continue to share information and innovative programming with our Transboundary partners through the grasslands working group. The Council is working in tandem with our municipal partners to showcase our watershed this August at the Transboundary Weeds, Water, and Stewardship Tour.



Above: Canoeing the Milk River - 2015



Above: Hiking the Milk River - 2015



Above: Youth Range Days - 2015

2015-16 Board of Directors

Executive Board Members:

Chair: John Ross, Agriculture

Vice Chair: Ken Miller, Agriculture

Treasurer: Will Lindeman, Water Use

Secretary: Warren Cunningham, Recreation Alternate

Board members:

Ed Sloboda, NGO

Ron McNeil, NGO Environmental

Dennis Spackman/Aaron Domes; Provincial Government/Alternate

Brian Hills, Provincial Government, ESRD

Joan Hughson, Rural Municipality

Kristen Dykstra, Health

Roy Audet, Individual

Trevor Murray/Ryan Hall, Industry/Alternate

Ross Ford/David Cody, Rural Municipality/Alternate

Suzanne Liebelt/Lloyd Closson, Urban Municipality/Alternate

Darcy Wills /Warren Cunningham, Recreation/Alternate

Frank Larney, Federal Government

Lorraine Nicol, Academia

William King, Appointed member at large, Special Assignment

First Nations - Vacant

A big Thank You to the Board members who work tirelessly for the success of MRWCC!

Everyone leaves behind footprints in the sands of time, but your footprints will be engraved on stone for future generations to follow.

Thank you for your support!!

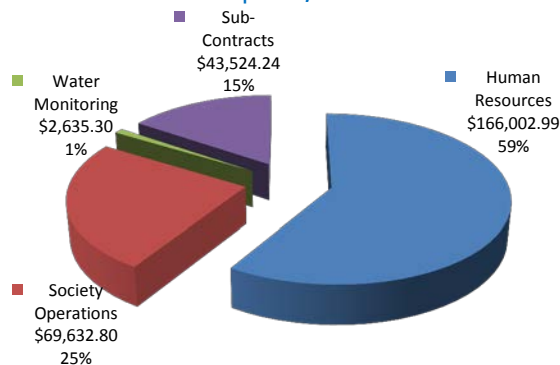
2015/16 Income

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Govt Canada | |
| AENV Core | \$ 280,000.00 |
| AENV Projects | \$ 70,000.00 |
| Interest | \$ 292.57 |
| Donations/Silent auction | \$ 16,841.00 |
| Workshop & Tours | \$ 1,565.00 |
| GST Rebate | \$ 3,461.11 |
| Total | \$ 372,159.68 |

2015/16 Expenditure

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Human Resources | \$ 166,002.99 |
| Society Operations | \$ 69,632.80 |
| Water Monitoring | \$ 2,635.30 |
| Sub-Contracts | \$ 43,524.24 |
| Total | \$ 281,795.33 |

MRWCC 2015/16 Expenses Total \$281,795.33



2015/16 In-kind Contribution

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Members at large | \$26,193.00 |
| Alberta Environment and Parks | \$15,249.70 |
| Nature Conservancy of Canada | \$320.00 |
| Town of Milk River | \$2,207.10 |
| Alberta Health Services | \$4,049.10 |
| Industry (Granite Oil Corp.) | \$4,714.00 |
| County of Forty Mile | \$2,028.50 |
| County of Warner | \$16,615.75 |
| Cypress County | \$10,937.50 |
| Government of Canada | \$3,401.10 |
| Village of Coutts | \$1,827.00 |
| Cardston County | \$13,983.00 |
| Alberta Agriculture & Forestry | \$968.00 |
| Cows and Fish | \$320.00 |
| MRWCC | \$8,920.00 |
| Alberta Conservation Association | \$7,369.10 |
| Community | \$6,841.70 |
| Lethbridge College | \$401.10 |
| University of Lethbridge | \$3,360.00 |
| Total in-kind | \$129,705.65 |

CONTACT US

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Our Water, Our Legacy

Thank you to all of the volunteers,
sponsors and organizations that
contribute in-kind and financial support
to MRWCC.

We have accomplished much with your
valuable support!





2016 MRWCC Spring Hike Tour

Photo Credits:

Andrew Schoepf

Ed Sloboda

William King

Tim Romanow

Mary Lupwayi