

# 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT



PREPARED BY

**MILK RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL CANADA**

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[www.mrwcc.ca](http://www.mrwcc.ca)  
Our Water, Our Legacy



# OUR PERFORMANCE

## 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.



## 2019-20 HIGHLIGHTS

### Water Supply and Management Team

*Ken Miller, Chairman*

The Team participates 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.
- Produced a summary report of Past Water Supply Investigations in the Milk River Basin to provide an objective review of past water supply investigations and supporting studies and establish a common understanding of the work completed among water managers and water users. The document will be used to guide future planning and decision-making to improve water security and drought resilience in the Milk River basin.
- Partnered with the Milk River Watershed Alliance (Montana) in partnership with, Montana DNRC, Conservation districts/Counties of the highline, Blackfeet Nation, and the Milk River Watershed Council Canada to release a video to showcase the St. Mary Diversion headworks and challenges facing water security for communities on both sides of the border.



2019 substrate mussel monitoring on the Milk River

### 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.

- Completed 14th year of water quality monitoring on the Milk River, including the 10 years of monitoring on the eastern tributaries.
- Monitored invasive mussels on 5 Milk River locations. No mussels were observed.
- 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.
- Implementation of phase 2 Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP) by identifying and completing watershed conservation stewardship projects located along the Milk River. Took site photos at strategic photo plots for tracking long term recovery and re-vegetation of banks. Also conducted Riparian Health assessments at a representative reach for each of the sites.
- Entered into a project agreement with the Canadian Invasive Species Centre to conduct AIS education through development of an Aquatic Invasive Species display and table top teaching tool.
- Prepared feedback to review the progress on the recovery of Rocky Mountain Sculpin, an internal only document for the recovery team at this time but will be publicly available for sharing sometime after April 10th 2020.
- Started plans to see if it is feasible to produce a State of the Watershed Science update. There is interest with the transboundary partners to go forward with updating the SOW report.
- Continuing to provide support for the County of Forty Mile on the Conservation Tax Credit Project update, though due to the COVID-19 restrictions no community interviews have been conducted.

## 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.

- Presented a Youth Engagement Program to local schools which included:
  - Participating in the Nutrien 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 within local schools and parks.
  - Had a 2-month position for a Summer Education and Outreach Assistant who helped with education outreach program delivery.
  - Conducted school interactive programs such as hosting the Annual Poster Contest.
- Partnered with local rural municipalities, Alberta Conservation Association, and GOA to develop and deliver the 12th Annual Southern Alberta Youth Range Days program.
- Hosted Community Engagement Activities:
  - Educational Tours: to bring awareness of Milk River watershed extraordinary landscape, diverse plant and wildlife communities, and historical attributes for residents, stakeholders and the public in general. This serves as part of an educational tool through presentations on watershed aquatic and terrestrial wildlife and ongoing activities that help improve management initiatives of the watershed:
    - Conducted the Canoe Tour – June 21
    - Spring Hike Tour – April 26
    - Fall Hike Tour in partnership with WOSPP – September 27
    - Participated in the Milk River Bonanza Days by bringing awareness of the MRWCC activities to the community.
- Conducted community awards programs to recognize Milk River resident's outstanding conservation efforts in sustaining, protecting, and enhancing the environment in the watershed:
  - Environmental Stewardship Award
  - Tree Heritage Recognition
- Completed a joint Xeriscape project with the Town Council by implementing a project on the Town office front lawn. The objective of this project is to bring awareness and demonstrate water conservation measures and the benefits of water conservation in the semi-arid climate with extreme temperatures, intense sunshine, high winds and low precipitation while showcasing the beauty of Xeriscaping.
- Planned to host the 4th Annual Community Appreciation Forum to celebrate the unique aspects of the Milk River Watershed and growing community involvement while educating the public about the work that the Council does as well as bringing relevant and time sensitive educative presentations.
- Hosted the 14th Annual General Meeting
- Introduced Milk River Watershed Best-Beef Stewardship Competition as a unique way of promoting stewardship message across the watershed by presenting the connection between water management, grazing/rangeland management, and biodiversity while appreciating good husbandry practices by beef producers.
- Participated in the establishment of a provincial Education/Outreach coordinator network to share resources and improve watershed education throughout Alberta.
- Facilitated the establishment of the Alberta Water Literacy Framework and identified opportunities to align programming to meet key outcomes.
- Distributed 2 Meander newsletters to all residents and stakeholders.
- Maintained the MRWCC website and promoted the Council through a strong presence on social media:
  - Twitter – 35,000 impressions, 169 Likes, 82 re-tweets.
  - Website – 4,627 views.
  - Facebook – 424 Followers.





## Transboundary Watershed Team

*Ron McNeil, Chairman*

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 common watershed resources.

- Attended the 5th Annual Transboundary Grassland Partnership Workshop in Regina, Saskatchewan end of February in conjunction with PCF, Saskatchewan and Montana partners to help foster the relationship among transboundary partners and keep the dialogue going.
- Continue with ongoing communication and program delivery with transboundary partnerships for the betterment of the common watershed resources.



2019 Canoe and Hike tours on the Milk River Forks confluence top and the Haffner Coulee bottom photo.

## Policy and Planning Ad-hoc Committee

*Ross Ford, Chairman*

The MRWCC is a valuable source of local knowledge for relevant government (federal, provincial, and municipal) policy development.

The purpose of Planning and Policy Committee:

- To support the Board in setting strategic goals and identify target accomplishments that need to be undertaken to achieve those goals.
- To review and keep abreast of key legislative, regulatory, professional, and other changes that impact the management of the MRWCC such as Integrated Watershed Management Plan implementation, source water protection, approved Water Management Plan, etc. in response to Provincial and Federal policies.

The Committee took a lead role in promoting and coordinating the creation and implementation of opportunities to integrate and adopt strategies from various planning, policy and operational products and processes.

The MRWCC enabled priority actions from current strategic plan and Integrated Watershed

Management Plan in 2019-20 which included the following activities:

- Helped plan the 5th Annual Transboundary Grassland Partnership Workshop (TGP) in Regina Saskatchewan at the end of February in conjunction with PCF, Saskatchewan and Montana partners to help foster improved relationships among transboundary partners and keep the dialogue towards addressing habitat and SAR issues within the watershed.
- MRWCC acted as an Alberta co-chair for the TGP in 2019-20, and elevated the value of a renewed Transboundary SOW report with partner jurisdictions who committed to support the project for a 2023 completion.
- Continued with ongoing communication and program delivery with transboundary partnerships for the betterment of the shared common watershed resources.

- Provided feedback regarding the planning and management of the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve (KCER) and Milk River Natural Area (MRNA).
- Assisted in the establishment of a long-term monitoring program for the health of land, water, and biodiversity of the KCER.
- Provided feedback regarding timing, duration, and need for grazing management and grassland recovery from fire within the KCER and MRNA.
- Facilitated conversations with Climate Change Environment Canada (CCEC) and the County of Forty Mile to establish a framework for the first Western Canadian municipally led Conservation Tax Credit Program that will pay producers for the maintenance of Species at Risk Habitat.
- Participated at the AB WPACs collective to improve collaboration and improved management of Alberta's watershed resources to provide a forum to share successes and develop innovative management solutions that are transferable between regions and among stakeholders' groups like municipal partners.



Photos by: William King, Kandra Forbes, Ed Sloboda, and Mary Lupwayi

Top right: Milk River Natural Area; Middle: Geese on the Milk River; Bottom photos; 2019 Youth Range Days



## Message from the Chairman

*John A. Ross*

We had a lot of successes in our watershed this past year.

We completed the summary of all the storage studies and engineering reports that had been done going back about 50 years. The summary was released about a year ago to a lot of interest. It showed that On-Stream Storage was the best solution; and re-affirmed the best location for it.

The On-Stream Storage Project would not only support the irrigators, but also secure the Instream Flow Needs for fish, flora and fauna throughout the watershed, as well as be able to generate hydro-electricity. Water security for the towns of Milk River, Coutts & potentially Warner would also be drastically improved. We would work with our American neighbours to reduce the costs of repairing their diversion structures, which in turn helps us. We're seeing less opposition to the building of the On-Stream Storage; due to the win-win situation it would create. The IJC (International Joint Commission) appears to be looking on it more favourably now as well.

There've been several articles in The Western Producer and The Furrow showing the dire state of the St. Mary's Diversion Infrastructure. This eventually led Tim, our Executive Director and I to go to Edmonton to make a presentation to the UCP's new Southern Alberta Caucus and make a case for the value of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) in the Province, and the On-Stream Storage Project. They were very interested in the project.

Our WRRP (Water Restoration and Resiliency Program) was a huge success with many projects being identified and completed. The community outreach has been another highlight of the year. People are always looking forward to Youth Range Days, and the Canoe and Hike Trips we put on. Unfortunately, we had to postpone our Community Appreciation Meeting and Supper this year due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. We plan to advise if and when the meeting will be rescheduled once the restrictions are lifted. We are also looking forward to hosting our Science Forum this fall. Covid-19 has changed the way we live our lives for the present time and probably the future. We haven't seen anything like this before. We've forgotten the times when Pandemics used to hit the world, like the Spanish Flu (H1N1) in 1918, that killed tens of millions of people, and the next flu epidemic that followed in 1928-29. My Dad lost his sister in 1929; she was only 8 years old. I've been looking back at some old pictures and it makes me realize that we are probably doing the right thing, although it feels very foreign.

Like the Pandemics we've forgotten that the Milk River used to be more of a seasonal creek; as it existed before the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. The construction of the St. Mary's Diversion changed all that, but now it's in incredible disrepair. We may see the Milk River as it used to be; unless we do something about it. We can't get complacent.

Keep safe, follow the rules, and we'll get back together sooner than later. Please take the time to enjoy your watershed; it's a wonderful place.

Good Wishes and Good Health.

## Message from the Executive Director

*Tim Romanow*

The Milk River Watershed Council Canada has an elected board of representatives from all walks of life. Our diversity is strength! Through thoughtful and informed dialogue, we develop projects that achieve balance among a thriving community, a healthy environment and a prosperous economy. After extensive work planning this past winter, and the security of a new three-year grant agreement with the Government of Alberta we have been busy leveraging this investment in our work to support our watershed and community. Then comes Covid-19 and the challenges of a Global Pandemic.

Like everyone, we have new challenges to overcome but our council will adapt, outreach programs and educational events will be postponed but we continue to support our community, land managers, and producers across the watershed. Now more than ever it's important to reflect on the most valuable things in our lives. One exciting opportunity is to continue building capacity for the coming year. A fundamental shift in the management of Species at Risk (SAR) in Canada is occurring. The shadow from a heavy-handed Environmental Protection Order for Sage Grouse that pointed the finger for wildlife declines at native prairie land managers across the Milk River Watershed in both Alberta and Saskatchewan is being lifted. This has been possible through the hard work of dedicated leaders in the ranching community, and strength of programs and organizations that have clearly demonstrated through science the value of grazing livestock to SAR. There is a clear recognition that the way forward is rewarding producers for the ecological goods and services they enable through good management of the rangelands. New programs are being assembled that incentivise both deeded landowners and lease managers for maintaining habitat for species at risk; rewarding as an asset not a liability.

The federal government, in collaboration with the provinces, has agreed to the implementation of a Pan-Canadian Approach to Species at Risk Conservation in Canada. This new approach will shift from a single-species such as Sage Grouse conservation to one that focuses on multiple species and ecosystems. There are 11 priority places identified under the pan-Canadian approach including the Milk River Watershed in Alberta and adjoining South of the Divide in Saskatchewan. The places selected have significant biodiversity, concentrations of species at risk, and opportunities to advance conservation efforts.

In each priority place, the federal and provincial governments will work to develop a conservation action plan. Within the priority places, the conservation action plans will be funded by the Canada Nature Fund. We are fortunate that ground work has already been done here to have a strong foundation for collaborative action with our municipalities, and producers. These foundational activities will allow partners to work together on-the-ground and co-invest in shared priority actions, such as: habitat stewardship, habitat restoration and education.

The work our watershed council embarks on does not play to left or right narratives. We have a well-respected track record of effective partnerships and sound science to navigate difficult issues and find common sense outcomes that achieve that goal. As the Pan-Canadian plan rolls out we will facilitate the delivery of incentives for our landowners; and continue to promote the stewardship of our watershed's biodiversity.

Thank you to the staff and membership of the council for making all projects and events a success this past year. Please watch for future opportunities to help support sustainable management within our watershed; and feel free to contact us to learn more about the projects and work of the MRWCC.





## 2019-20 Board of Directors

### Executive Board Members:

Chairman: John Ross, Agriculture  
 Vice Chairman: Ron McNeil, NGO Environmental  
 Treasurer: Will Lindeman, Water Use  
 Secretary: Warren Cunningham, Recreation Alternate

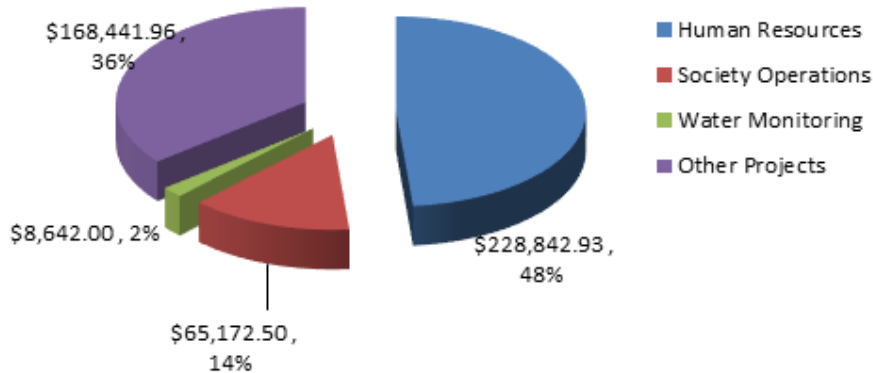
### Board members:

Ed Sloboda, NGO  
 Ken Miller, Agriculture  
 Aaron Domes, Provincial Government  
 Brian Hills, Provincial Government, AEP  
 Joan Hughson, Rural Municipality  
 Stephen Kirkpatrick, Health  
 William King, Individual  
 Devon Ford, Industry  
 Ross Ford/Shawn Rodgers, Rural Municipality/Alternate  
 Suzanne Liebelt/Scott MacCumber, Urban  
 Municipality/Alternate  
 Darcy Wills /Warren Cunningham, Recreation/ Alternate  
 Ben Ellert, Federal Government  
 Lorraine Nicol, Academia  
 First Nations – Vacant



# OUR LATEST NUMBERS

## 2019/20 Expenses \$471,099.39



## 2019-20 In-Kind Contribution

Members at large	\$50,128.75
Alberta Environment and Parks	\$28,204.65
Lethbridge College	\$840.00
Town of Milk River	\$2,752.25
Alberta Health	\$1,967.95
Industry	\$ 763.75
County of Forty Milk	\$2,038.75
County of Warner	\$12,080.75
Cypress County	\$10,000.00
Government of Canada	\$2,936.40
Village of Coutts	\$2,397.50
Cardston County	\$6,570.00
Trace Association	\$3,400.00
Alberta Energy Regulator	\$3,060.00
Alberta Conservation Association	\$10,498.70
Community	\$4,851.20
<b>Total in-kind</b>	<b>\$142,490.65</b>

## 2019-20 Income

AEP Core	\$275,000.00
Interest	\$481.05
Youth Range Days	\$10,675.00
Canada Summer Jobs	\$4,200.00
Other Donations	\$3,889.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$294,245.64</b>

## 2019/20 Expenditure

Human Resources	\$228,842.93
Society Operations	\$65,172.50
Water Monitoring	\$8,642.00
Other Projects	\$168,441.96
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$471,099.39</b>

thank  
you