Our Water – Our Legacy

The Meander

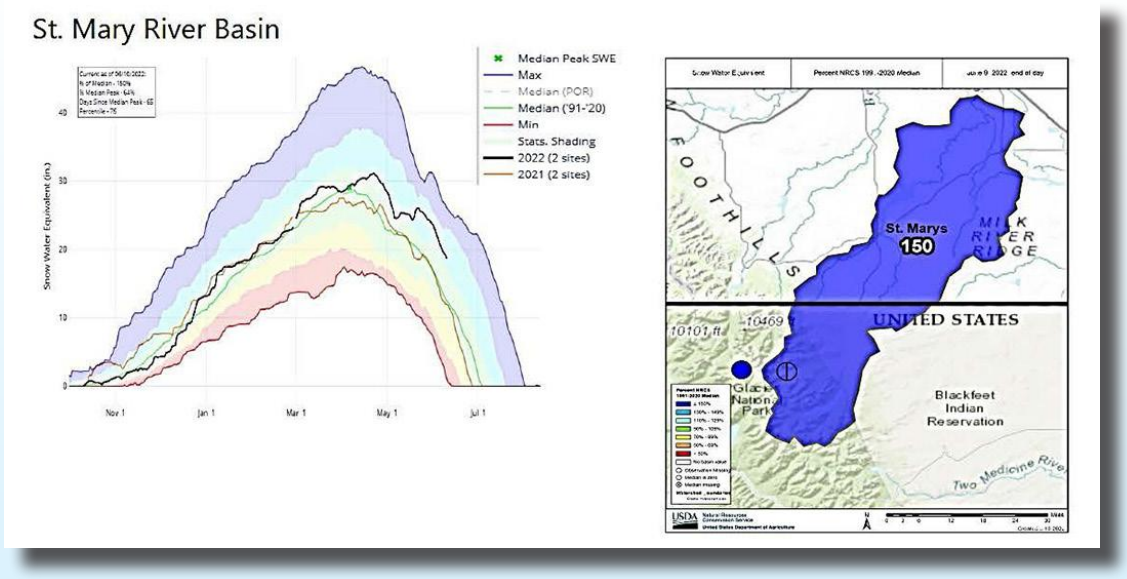
THE MILK RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL CANADA ▪ SPRING/SUMMER 2022

St Mary diversion canal near Babb Montana

Water Supply

As of Mid-June, the late spring melt in the headwaters of the upper St. Mary has allowed the USBR to accumulate a deficit under the letter of intent just over 2100cfs days. This is good news for Milk River irrigators in Canada as it should allow for repayment water to be used for irrigation purposes until mid-August, and possibly early September despite potentially low or zero natural flow.

Conditions look good for sustained summer flows on the St Mary's system with remaining snowpack over 150% of normal. The extreme drought in North Central Montana unfortunately does not seem to be letting up and is expanding to the eastern portion of the watershed. Let's all hope for some rain in the forecast to ease pressure on our dryland crops and grasslands.



Temporary Diversion licenses available to fill dugouts from the Milk River

Producers with low dugouts that are within reach of the Milk River can apply on a case-by-case basis to pump water from the river to fill dugouts and get through the season. Alberta Environment and Parks is allowing Temporary Diversion Licenses (TDLs) for stock watering purposes in the basin this year due to the availability of repayment diversion waters from Montana. The application process has changed since last year, as applications have moved to a new system called the Digital Regulatory Assurance System (DRAS) for all Water Act applications, including TDLs. The new system can be a challenge to navigate for new users, but if you are experiencing problems with dugout water and are within a couple miles of the Milk River this could be a good option for many producers. To find information on the system and application process search Alberta.ca for TDL DRAS, or follow the link: https://www.alberta.ca/digital-regulatory-assurance-system.aspx Applicants will need a MADI or a MADI-B account to sign-up; if you are experiencing challenges contact our office to be directed for help in applying.

Alberta Agriculture, Forestry & Rural Economic Development (AFRED)'s Water Pumping Program is still operating and is very busy throughout the province; if producers obtain a valid TDL, they can also get on a list for assistance to set pipe and pumps to bring water to their dugouts. Producers can find some basic information on the website: https://www.alberta.ca/water-pumping-program.aspx

If you have any questions regarding the water pumping program or the CAP Water Program, feel free to contact our Farm Water Specialist in Lethbridge, Joe Harrington at joe.harrington@gov.ab.ca

International Joint Commission Tour of the St. Mary's and Milk River systems

Andrew Reese, Kyle Turner, and Elise Walker represented the next generation of irrigation farm families and spoke well on the IJC Tour.

The North Milk and Milk Rivers originate in the foothills of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in Montana and flow northeasterly across the international boundary into Alberta. Downstream from the confluence of the North Milk and Milk Rivers, the Milk River flows eastward and roughly parallels the international boundary for about 125kms and then flows southeastward before it re-crosses the International Boundary into Montana and eventually empties into the Missouri River. The United States St. Mary Canal was constructed in 1917 and is used to divert water through a series of syphons from the St. Mary River to the North Milk River. The IJC provides direction for the measurement and apportionment of water that crosses the international boundary in the St. Mary and Milk River basins, in accordance with the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and the IJC Order of 1921.

In early June a delegation of the appointed Commissionaires, Accredited officers, and International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study board members spent three days touring infrastructure in both Montana and Alberta before meeting with the MRWCC and irrigators from the watershed. This was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the importance of the river and diversion security to the senior officials with the IJC. The launch of the international study will address opportunities for the first time to improve management for the benefit of both countries including possible changes to the administration of water sharing and jointly managed water infrastructure including structural dams or storage facilities. In the spirit of cooperation, the committee members committed to work with the local leaders and water users to address sustainability issues and water security for the future of our community.

Launched in November 2021, the study is exploring options to improve access to apportioned waters by each country, in recognition of climate change and challenges to apportionment since the original 1921 Order was issued. The effort includes a desire to achieve long-term resilience in accessing the shared waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers.

Producers Leading the way Project Report

We are excited to have completed an Environment Climate Change Canada (ECCC) funded project called "Producers Leading the Way" that took a new approach to grasslands stewardship engagement. An online survey was deployed to producers that operate on deeded or lease native grasslands. The survey focused on gathering information from producers on a variety of conservation topics. Additionally, five in-person meetings were held in local municipalities to ensure that producers had the opportunity to speak to the group first-hand. Approximately 25% of producers within the watershed operating on native grasslands responded and provided input to the project. The results of the survey were very informative and provide a wide berth of ideas and comments to understand why producers may feel and act the way they do and provide context to the current mindset of producers on conservation programming. From the feedback it was clear that local NGOs like the MRWCC and local municipal partners from the Ag Service boards are critical to future programming and that communication and transparency will be key to maintain and improve species at risk programming, keep grass right side up, and keep our ranching community sustainable.

Once meetings are held with key project stakeholders, a full report will be available from the MRWCC. Some key suggestions for future programming and conservation incentives are projected to be included in a follow up project starting as early as this fall. The feedback was clear: we need to do a better job of aligning new projects with producer needs, be transparent with expectations and limit bureaucratic creep, build a contact list for landowners in the 4 counties so availability of supports can be easily committed, and reinvest in local Ag extension services or programming that supports practical tech transfer and training.

Photo submitted by S. Riemersma

Milk River Transboundary State of the Watershed Report 2023 Underway

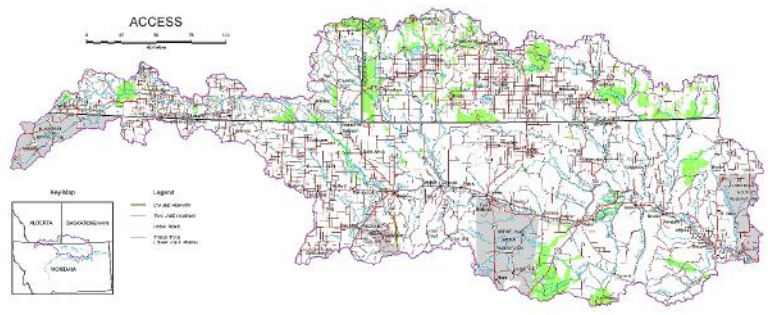
S. Riemersma, Palliser Environmental Services Ltd.

After 10 years, the Milk River Watershed Council Canada, in partnership with the Milk River Watershed Alliance (Montana) and the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program (Saskatchewan), is again working to create a 2nd Milk River Transboundary State of the Watershed (SOW) Report. The project Terms of Reference was prepared in 2021 to guide the update of the original 2013 SOW Report.

Transboundary reporting recognizes that watershed ecosystems, including the flow of surface water and groundwater, migration of fish and wildlife, and dispersal of plants, are not contained within political boundaries. Cross-border collaboration and management should be considered. The benefits of this collaboration may

- Lead to common reporting for similar ecological regions in terms of methodologies and standards that can help to achieve environmental targets and objectives
- Improve the collective knowledge of the state of resources and their management across the watershed
- Improve the interpretation of local observations (MRWCC 2013).

Since 2013, the first transboundary SOW report has been used to support



education programs, stewardship efforts with residents and landowners, and water management discussions with local, provincial/state, and federal decision-makers.

This collaboration is unique, and brings together technical experts from across provincial and international borders to discuss topics such as water quantity, water quality, riparian areas and wetlands, biodiversity and stewardship.

Several key events have occurred in the last 10 years that have had an impact on the condition of the Milk River, including:

2013 First PFRA pasture transition to the Province in the South of the Divide area in Saskatchewan

2015-2017 A series of wildfires occur in various parts of the watershed

2017 Early shut-down of St. Mary Diversion results in water shortages for Alberta irrigators

2018 Transboundary Grasslands Workshop Glasgow, Montana

2019 Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site

2020 Catastrophic failure of the St. Mary River Diversion in Montana creates water shortages for Alberta irrigators

The Transboundary SOW Team is currently working to compile and synthesize new information generated from research programs and monitoring initiatives. Residents, landowners and resource managers can look forward to reading about the impacts of some of the events above, as well as reports on trends in water management, water quality, riparian condition, species-at-risk, and industry developments in Spring 2023.

Water Quality Monitoring Report for 2021

S. Riemersma, Palliser Environmental Services Ltd.

For the MRWCC, the 2021 water quality monitoring year marks the 15th complete year of monitoring at the Milk River and some tributaries. No samples were collected at Lodge Creek, Middle Creek or Battle Creek (the Eastern Tributaries) in 2021, or at Verdigris Coulee.

Precipitation and the St. Mary Diversion flows strongly influences water quality in the Milk River. In 2021, total precipitation ranged from 139.9 mm at Onefour to 294.1 mm at Cardston. On average, May was the wettest month (62.4 mm) and September was the driest month (7.2 mm). The 2021 year was the third driest of 10 years (2012 to 2021). The St. Mary Diversion operated from about April 1 to Mid-September.

Red Creek

At Red Creek, only the downstream site was sampled in 2021. All samples analysed for dissolved oxygen and pH met water quality guidelines. The median conductivity (2,550 µS/cm) did not meet the safe irrigation guideline and the water is considered unsuitable for irrigation. The median total phosphorus concentration (0.019 mg/L) was the second lowest of the five monitoring years (2017 to 2021), and the median TSS concentration (4.6 mg/L) was also low, similar to previous years. The median fecal coliform bacteria count (5 cfu/100mL) met the irrigation guideline and was the lowest compared to the previous five years. All total selenium samples in 2021 (N=4) exceeded the chronic guideline for the protection of aquatic life.

Miners Coulee

Four samples were collected at Miners Coulee in 2021. Similar to Red Creek, all samples analysed for dissolved oxygen and pH met water quality guidelines. Unlike Red Creek, three of four specific conductivity samples met the objective for safe irrigation. Total phosphorus concentrations (range: 0.020 and 0.054 mg/L) were lower than previous years. The median total suspended solids (TSS) concentration (3.6 mg/L) was similar to previous years. The median fecal coliform bacteria count (75 cfu/100 mL) was lower than previous years; however, two of four samples did not meet the irrigation guideline (≤100 cfu/100 mL).

Milk River Mainstem

The streamflow regime at the three Milk River sites augmented by the St. Mary diversion were within the range of typical flows and duration that occurred from 2017 to 2019. Due to reduced snowmelt and precipitation in 2021, peak flows were generally lower than the previous four years.

Milk River Water Quality Objectives (WQOs) were used to determine water quality at sites in 2021. Dissolved oxygen and pH met aquatic life guidelines at all Milk River sites. For conductivity, the WQO-50 (median) was not met at the HWY 880 or Pinhorn sites during natural flow. The WQO-90 (90th percentile) was met at all sites during diversion, and at Milk River at 501 during natural flow. Compliance in 2021 for conductivity during natural flow was the second lowest of four years.

Overall, compliance with total phosphorus, total suspended solids and fecal coliform bacteria objectives was the highest in 2021 of four years at the Milk River sites:

- For Total Phosphorus, all sites met the WQO-50 and WQO-90 during diversion and natural flows, except the Pinhorn site which was in the cautionary WQO-50 range during the diversion.
- For TSS, the WQO-50 and WQO-90 was met at all Milk River sites during diversion. The WQO-50 was not met during natural flow at the Milk River at 501 site.
- For fecal coliform bacteria, the WQO-50 and WQO-90 was met at all Milk River sites during diversion. During natural flow, the fecal coliform WQO-50 was not met at the HWY 880 site.

The MRWCC water monitoring program was conducted in collaboration with staff from Cardston County and Alberta Environment and Parks.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Cardston County for providing staff and vehicles required to undertake the surface water monitoring program. Thank you to Alberta Environment and Parks for their continued support.

The following individuals contributed to the successful completion of the 2021 monitoring year:

Stephen Bevans, Cardston County
Mary Lupwayi, Milk River Watershed Council Canada
Tim Romanow, Milk River Watershed Council Canada
Ryan Martin, Alberta Environment and Parks
Brian Hills, Alberta Environment and Parks

Milk River Water Contingency Plan for Water Shortage Periods Report

Spurred on from the diversion failure of 2020, The MRWCC received a grant from the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation to develop a Water Shortages Contingency Plan that sets a strategy for future challenges to municipalities, water users, and our community. This plan is now complete and identified short-medium term actions that are targeted at mitigating the impacts of water shortage events in the watershed. The plan proposes that the four actions expected to have the greatest effect on mitigating impacts of water shortage periods include: 1) The development of a water sharing agreement(s) intended to address how water is managed during water short situations. Water assignments can be organized between a group of irrigators, or between two individual license holders. Assignments are intended to take effect when there is less water supply than the sum of all diversions. 2) The development of a water-use reporting template; if accepted by the IJC accredited officers improving water use reporting on the Milk River could increase accuracy of water apportionment calculations, which would allow Milk River water users to access more water from the system as they are entitled to under the Boundary Waters Treaty. 3) The identification of options for small off-stream storage(s) could be used to store water during high flow periods in the spring and to release water to supplement river flows in the late season when shortages occur to meet treaty obligations and secure irrigation during critical time periods. 4) An evaluation of new locations for Bulk water fill stations; are not only used during water shortage events, but also during normal operating conditions. Additional bulk water fill stations could reduce travel times during shortage periods and for those who use or rely on these fill stations, and support emergency preparedness for fire during dry periods. New bulk water stations should not be reliant on surface water licensing and access the whiskey valley or milk river sandstone aquifer.

Thank you to all the community members, municipal staff, and water managers that helped shape the contingency plan work, this document provides a framework for future challenges, but more work is needed to ensure that our water security needs are met.

St. Mary's – Milk River Consumptive Use Study Validation of Remote Sensing Estimates

The U.S. Geological Survey, with the support of the International Joint Commission, and in cooperation with Alberta Environment and Parks, Blackfeet Nation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, is leading a project with an intended deliverable being estimated consumptive water use. Satellite imagery can be used in combination with gridded weather data to estimate evapotranspiration, a major component of consumptive use, at 100-meter spatial resolution up to every week from 1985 to present (figure 1). Because these models are dependent on remotely sensed and gridded data, it is necessary to validate the outputs using direct, ground-based observations.

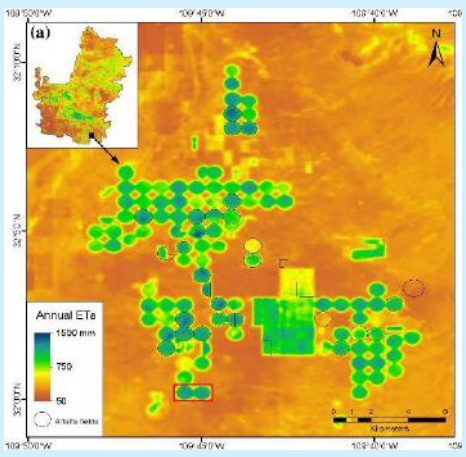


Figure 1. Example of evapotranspiration estimates made using a remote-sensing based model.

The most robust way to validate model outputs is to use eddy-covariance methods with *in-situ* data to estimate evapotranspiration. To do this in the Milk River basin, instrumentation in both irrigated and dryland fields has been installed (figure 2A and 2B, respectively) and will be in operation for the 2022 and 2023 growing seasons (April – October).

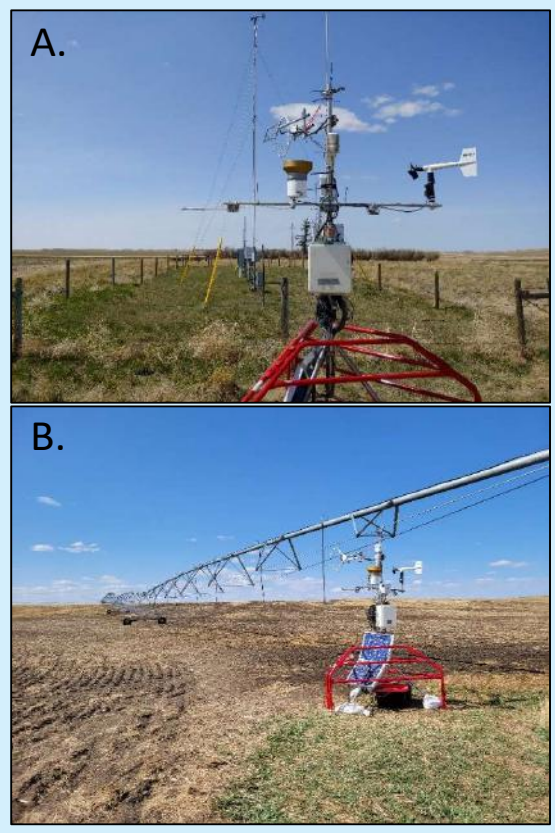


Figure 2. Equipment used to collect data necessary for estimation of evapotranspiration using eddy-covariance methods in A.) a dryland setting, and B.) an irrigated setting.

Prior to this study, there had been no direct measurements of evapotranspiration from irrigated fields in southern Alberta. The data collected by these instruments, and the final validated model outputs will be published as a USGS data release and made available to the public with an interactive web visualization tool. All phases of the project are expected to be completed by 2025.

For more information on validation of the remote sensing estimates, contact Chris Spence (Environment and Climate Change Canada; chris.spence@ec.gc.ca) or Roy Sando (U.S. Geological Survey; tsando@usgs.gov).

3-chambered bat houses.

Partially funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada

Securing a Home for Bats in the Milk River Watershed

Did you know, Alberta is home to 9 species of bats? In fact, 8 of these species can actually be found throughout southern Alberta. These small nocturnal mammals may not seem like much right off the bat, but they have significant ecological and economic benefits. As insectivores, bats are responsible for pest and insect control across their habitats, keeping insect populations in check and ultimately reducing the burden of pesticides and related pest management for farmers and landowners. However, bat populations in Alberta may be at risk. White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is a fungus severely impacting bat populations across eastern Canada, and has been spreading westward at an alarming rate. WNS spreads through contact with infected surfaces and individuals, growing on the snouts and wings of hibernating bats. Once infected, the mortality rate is 80-100%. The Little Brown Myotis is a species of particular concern due to their preference for roosting in large colonies, thus the spread to individuals is easier. The Little Brown Myotis is listed as endangered federally, and as of 2021, provincially within Alberta.

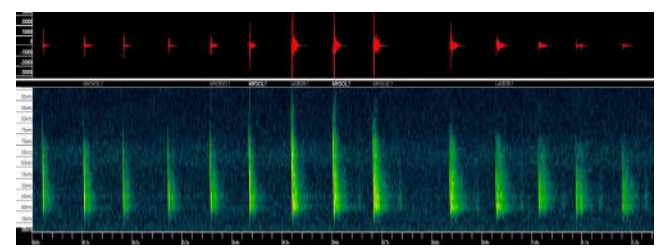
Passive acoustic bat monitoring equipment deployment.

Project Background

By working with private landowners, the MRWCC hopes to formally document important roosting and hibernacula sites used by Alberta bats to identify and record species presence and distribution, with an emphasis in detecting the Little Brown Myotis. This will help to monitor the size of colonies, and potentially allow for the identification of WNS presence once it enters the watershed, which will aid in future mitigation and management efforts.

Work Completed to Date

Through collaboration with landowners, passive acoustic monitoring equipment has been deployed at 10 different locations and 20 bat houses have been distributed to properties across the watershed. The calls of several different bat species have been identified at several of these locations, including the calls of the Little Brown Myotis. Acoustic monitoring and collaboration with landowners will continue throughout the year to further document what species are present and in what habitats.



Spectrogram of myotis calls from a farm located in Aden.

Additionally, a "bat condo" which is essentially a very large bat house, is planned to be built later this year. The purpose of this structure will be to serve as an overwintering hibernacula or maternity roost site for bats. The location of this bat condo is yet to be determined, but ideally will be used to provide an alternative habitat to an existing hibernacula or roost site which may be lost in the future.

How to Get Involved

With the goal of collaborating with 50 landowners across the watershed, the MRWCC is continuously seeking out more private property owners to work with. Properties with bats currently active on the land or with habitats including riparian areas, old wooden structures, or large trees and hoodoos are of particular interest. Please contact Allison at allison@mrwcc.ca or call 403-647-4035 to learn more about how you can get involved.

From the Field – Bringing the Ranch to the Classroom

'From the Field'

Virtual field trip educational series is a project developed for grades 8-12 to complete an in-classroom virtual fieldtrips with wildlife researchers and local ranchers that are responsible for sustainable management of land, water, and biodiversity in southern Alberta. Two modules were developed to directly highlight stewardship and innovative ranch management of Alberta cow/calf operations. These modules include a teacher's package with classroom activities, and a supporting video with two local producers. The activities prompt the students to develop a ranch management plan using information shared in the videos, and the supporting resources provided in the package. This serves to help educate youth on the importance of proper management of working landscapes, and how it ties directly into supporting the conservation, sustainable usage, and monitoring of land, water, and biodiversity in southern Alberta.

After a successful test run, we are proud to announce that the From the Field Virtual Field Trip is ready for educators! Please contact Allison at allison@mrwcc.ca to book a field trip, or to provide feedback! Special thanks to the Alberta Conservation Association for providing funding to develop this program.

We would like to thank the teachers and students for the feedback on how to make the project a fun experience for everyone!

Thank you to our 2021/22 sponsors!

We have accomplished a lot with your valuable donations. Without your support much of this accomplishment would not be possible.

Alberta Government

A big thank you goes to our main funder Alberta Environment and Parks. 2021/22 Grant - $275,000

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:
Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier de :
Environment and Climate Change Canada / Environnement et Changement climatique Canada

$60,000 from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to identify watershed bat species' roosting and overwintering habitat within the Milk River watershed. The project goal is to fill existing knowledge gaps regarding bat activity on private lands, with specific emphasis on the endangered Little Brown Myotis.

$50,000 from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to enable us to identify tools of interest to producers to implement conservation strategies and incentive trigger points necessary to ensure participation.

ALBERTA ecotrust

$20,000 from Alberta Ecotrust Foundation to produce a work plan that will form the main component of a project focusing on keeping the community informed of the complexities of the Milk River and how to achieve maximum water conservation during water shortage periods.

Alberta Conservation Association
Conserving Alberta's Wild Side

$10,000 from Alberta Conservation Association to produce a virtual field trip titled 'From the Field', targeted for the grade 8-12 curriculum. The in classroom virtual field trips focus on local cow-calf farmers/ranchers responsible for sustainable management of land, water, and biodiversity in southern Alberta to educate students on the importance of multifaceted range management practices.

$4,000, Rangeland Sustainability Fund grant from Public lands grazing fees that have supported the Youth Range Days programming.

Thank You! 2022 Online Auction Sponsors

Platinum Level Sponsor ($500.00 and over)

County of Warner

Cypress County

Gold level contributor (over $100.00 to less than $500.00)

Barry and Bard Snow Judy O'shea
Linda Cerney Dianne Leonhardt

Writing-on-Stone Áísínai'pi

EQUS

Bronze Level Sponsor
(Less than $100.00 and Silent Auction Items)

- J.T. Wine and Spirits
- Ed Sloboda
- Riverside Market (AG Foods)
- Carol Wensman
- CCI
- Edgard Cartier
- Roxy Smith
- Barbara Dickinson
- Darcy and Robbie Wills
- Carly Stewart
- Ron McNeil
- Will and Rae Lindeman
- Kristen Dykstra
- Palliser Environmental Services Ltd.
- Milk River Home Hardware
- Mary Lupwayi

In addition, we wish to thank Board members, Team members and all volunteers who give their time and resources generously to the cause of the MRWCC. In a normal year (without Covid-19) we receive over $200,000 in in-kind contributions.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!!!

2022 Watershed Poster & Video Contest

This year's theme asked students to "Show us your favourite part of the watershed, and what you're doing to protect it". This prompted students to consider what characteristics about the watershed are special, factors impacting the watershed, and what they can do to protect these features. There were nearly 60 submissions for the poster contest and 8 for the video contest! The contest was judged by Milk River Watershed Council staff and prizes included cash, wildlife books and field guides, and a backpack. Thank you to all the students for their participation and the teachers for helping coordinate this competition!

Competition Winners

Grade 2
1st - Braxton Balog
2nd - Kaleb Johnson
3rd - Bentleigh Home

Grade 3
1st - Ella Court
2nd - Hailey Reese
3rd - Kinlee Wehlage

Grade 4
1st - Gracie Balog
2nd - Kira Hoytos
3rd - Brynlee McCulloch

Grade 5
1st - Rhett Pimm
2nd - Colt Russel Needham
3rd - Liam Bangs

High School
Lexi Holland & Wreesah Walker

Field Trips at Writing on Stone!

WRITING-ON-STONE ÁÍSÍNAI'PI

In 2022, the MRWCC provided in person field trips for school classes in partnership with Writing on Stone Provincial Park! Two field trips have been given to date, for grade 6 &12 classes. These field trip served to help educate the classes on plant identification, importance of riparian areas, history of water sharing between the US and Canada, as well as current issues facing the watershed. While field trips are done for this school year (resuming in September), MRWCC staff will be present in the park at various times throughout the summer to engage in watershed education and activities. Evening talks, plant walks, as well as roving interpretation are some of the possible outreach activities planned for the summer. We hope to see you there!

YOUTH RANGE DAYS
GRASSROOTS STEWARDSHIP

Southern Alberta Youth Range Days Registration is Live

Save the date! Southern Alberta Youth Range Days program is back for an exciting two-day event happening July 7-8th 2022 at the Lower St Mary's Reservoir Campground and Area! This program is geared for all interested youths aged 13-18.

This year's agenda includes in-field activities on insect biocontrol, pollinators, bat surveys, and sharp-tailed grouse!

Registration is now open for $50 per participant, which includes meals, activities, and campsites. Don't miss out on this event to learn about the unique rangelands of southern Alberta.

Follow our Youth Range Days page on Facebook at @youthrangedays for exciting updates and other opportunities for youth and families to learn about our working Rangelands!

For more information, contact youthrangedays@gmail.com or call Allison Choquette at 403-647-4035 or Stephen Bevans at 403-634-9474.

Community Events:

We are so pleased to resume back to our community events after 2 years of suspending events due to Covid-19 restrictions. Our Tours are designed to get people explore some of the beautiful and often wonders of extraordinary landscapes, diverse plants, and wildlife communities of our watershed.

Stay tuned and watch our website at www.mrwcc.ca for our next events!

Let the adventures begin!!

Canoe the Milk!

The MRWCC is planning a Canoe on Friday, June 24, 2022, weather dependent.

The tour will be launched at Weir Bridge to Deer Creek Bridge with lunch stopover at Writing-On-Stone-Provincial Park. After lunch the group will proceed to the destination, Deer Creek Bridge.

Special thanks go to the organizing co mmittee and participants.

Hike the Milk!

The Hike tour is scheduled to take place on September 29, 2022 at the Milk River Canyon on the North side. We will send out an ad and start the registration process once all logistics are completed.

Watch out for more information on this hike on our website at www.mrwcc.ca

Milk River Watershed Council Canada (MRWCC) 17th Annual General Meeting

We are so pleased to report that after 2 years of virtual meetings imposed by Covid-19 restrictions, this year we were able have an in-person meeting. 36 MRWCC members attended this year's Annual General Meeting. Many thanks to everyone who attended the meeting.

Vice Chairman Ron McNeil chaired the Annual General Meeting.

The quorum was read as defined by the MRWCC Bylaws:

Twenty-five percent of the voting Membership, should be present to carry on business at a general or special meeting. It will be the discretion of those present at the meeting to declare themselves a quorum. All decisions made when quorum is declared must be ratified at the next meeting where quorum is present.

Tim Romanow, MRWCC Executive Director, presented the Council's activity report by highlighting the roles of Alberta Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils. He thanked all Council members and Team members for their accomplishments and outlined a number of major projects that were accomplished in 2021/22 and some of the workplan highlights of next fiscal year (2022/23), including the completion of the 2023 Transboundary State of the Watershed report. He thanked Government of Alberta, which has been a major funder since inception, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Alberta Ecotrust Foundations for funding major projects this fiscal year. He went on to thank everyone who supported the Council's endeavors including the 2022 online auction which brought in over $3,500. Tim was pleased to announce that Government of Alberta has confirmed ongoing Alberta Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils' support and is working on a new operational grant for the next four years.

Kristine Dahl with Arvense, who was awarded the contract to conduct the project: *"the Producers Leading Way Project: Opportunities for Improved Native Grassland Conservation and Species at Risk Stewardship within the Milk River Watershed"* presented findings of the surveys completed by cow calf producers in the watershed on native grassland conservation. She highlighted the potential follow up work regarding improved communication with producers, need for extension tools, succession planning challenges, and leadership of new or revised conservation incentives. She thanked producers who participated in completing surveys. The complete project findings can be found on the MRWCC website at www.mrwcc.ca

Allison Choquette, Wildlife & Outreach Technician with the MRWCC gave a presentation on the Bat Stewardship project by stating the goal of the project as securing a home for bats in the Milk River watershed and collecting knowledge of bat activity in the watershed, more specifically study the status of the Little Brown Myotis, which was designated as an endangered species provincially and federally as a result of the threat of white nose syndrome. This project is a 2-year project and will be completed in 2023. She thanked all the landowners who are participating in the project.

2022 AGM

Nicole Barnett, CPA CA Partner, Insight Chartered Professional Accountants presented the financial statements year ending March 31, 2022. She presented the Independent Practitioner's Review Engagement Report. She went on to present the financial position of the Milk River Watershed Council Canada as at March 31,2022, and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year. Insight Chartered Accountants has been approved to review the MRWCC's financial statements for fiscal year 2022/23.

The Council's election process was chaired by Ken Brown. The following were elected for a 2-year term for the following positions:

- Non-Government Organization (General) - Ed Sloboda
- Non-Government Organization (Environmental) - Ron McNeil
- Agriculture (Farmer) - Ken Miller
- Agriculture (Rancher) - John Ross
- Water User - William Lindeman
- Municipal District/County - Ross Ford
- Municipal District/County - Joan Hughson
- Provincial Government (Alberta Environment and Parks) - Aaron Domes
- Provincial Government - Jollin Charest
- Health - Kristen Dykstra
- Commercial/Industrial - Jon Boyle
- First Nations - No nominations were brought forward. Position will remain open until occupied

See more information on the elected officials within the 'Board of Director's Corner' page.

In conclusion, the Vice Chairman thanked all participants for attending the 17th Annual General Meeting and a complementary dinner was served afterwards.

Board of Director's Corner

Not to tune our own horn, but the MRWCC has accomplished so much this past fiscal year. Most of this work could not be possible without the commitment of our Board members. Often, we have to remind ourselves that these are volunteer positions as we witness the dedication, giving spirit, and self-lessness of the Board members to the Council's endeavors. The MRWCC is forever indebted to the Board Members!

We are pleased to announce the following Board members who were elected at the 2022 Annual General Meeting:

Standing Left to Right: Ross Ford, Ed Sloboda, Ben Ellert, Jon Boyle, Peggy Losey, Roger Houghton, William King, Warren Cunningham. Seated Left to right: Will Lindeman, Ron McNeil, Lorraine Nicol, Scott MacCumber, Aaron Domes, Kristen Dykstra. Not on the photo: John Ross, Joan Hughson, Darcy Wills, Ken Miller, Ken Brown, Jollin Charest, Dustin Vossler

Aaron Domes - Provincial Government (Alberta Environment and Parks)

Aaron is an Integrated Resource Planner with the Lands Planning Branch of Alberta Environment and Parks. Prior to moving into this role in January 2022, Aaron was the Head of Visitor Services at Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi, where he led a wide range of park operations and development initiatives since 2008. Prior placements with Alberta Parks have included the Castle Parks, Cypress Hills, Dinosaur Park, and Kananaskis Country. In recent years, Aaron has become well acquainted with the work of MRWCC through active participation on the board of directors, supporting several subcommittees, and helping to coordinate and lead various group excursions into the watershed. Aaron holds a B.Sc. in Conservation Biology from the University of Alberta and a M.Sc. in World Heritage Management from University College Dublin. With family roots in southern Saskatchewan and southwest Alberta, Aaron and his young family now reside in Lethbridge and enjoy mountain biking, hiking and camping in summer, skiing in winter, and exploring new places year-round.

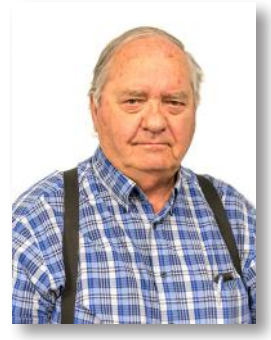
Ross Ford – County/ Municipal District

Ross grew up on his family's farm east of Coutts along the Alberta/ Montana border west of the Sweetgrass Hills and south of the Milk River. He received his primary education in Coutts & Milk River, graduated with a diploma in Vocational Agriculture from Lethbridge College, and over the years has taken several courses in leadership & management. After College he worked for several years in the Ag service industry obtaining his license as both a Heavy-Duty mechanic & Motor mechanic. In 1989 he began farming full time by purchasing some land and taking over the family farm with his brother. He first became involved with board governance through Agricultural Co-ops; Alberta Wheat Pool, Agricore United, & United Farmers of Alberta, serving as an elected member representative. He has also served on several community boards, including Mayor of the Village of Coutts, and Reeve of the County of Warner. Through all of his experiences he has learned much about governance & how it impacts the success of an organization or community. Ross has served on the Milk River Watershed Council since it began in 2006. He supports Alberta's Water for Life Strategy and is a strong advocate for water storage and the benefits it brings to communities. Today he continues farming with his wife of 41 years, Jackie and enjoys spending any free time with their daughter Katie, son-in-law Eric and grandchildren Scarlett and Langston.

Joan Hughson – County/ Municipal District (County of Forty Mile)

Joan was born and raised just outside of Calgary on a farm. She moved south of Foremost in 1964 when she was married to Darrell Hughson. She still farms and ranches with her two sons and their families. She has been an active Councilor with the County of Forty Mile since October 2008. Joan has been a member on the MRWCC board of Directors since 2009.

Ken Miller – Agriculture – Farmer

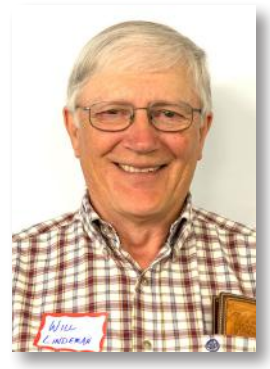


Ken was born and raised near Milk River and is a 3rd generation farmer. Ken attended school in Milk River and completed his degree at the University of Alberta. He is actively involved in the National Board for the Canadian Seed Trade Association, in various school organizations, and is a member of the Recovery Team for Species at Risk. Ken was a member of the Local Advisory Board for storage on the Milk River. He is an active participant on the Montana-Alberta Water Management Initiative. Ken has been a MRWCC board member since its inception in 2006 and served as a Vice Chairman for many years on the Executive Board. He is the Chairman of the Water Supply and Management Team and was also the Chairman on the Integrated Watershed Planning Team which was finalized in 2015.

John Ross – Agriculture – Rancher - Chairman

John was raised on the family ranch east of Milk River and is a 4th generation cattle rancher. He earned his pilot's license in 1978 and is also an advanced scuba diver. John attended SAIT and received a diploma in Architectural Technology. He returned home and has ranched full-time ever since. He has been involved in many local initiatives, one of which was being a member of the EQUS Rural Electrification Association for 27 years, which included being Chairman of South Alta REA for 6 years. He is a member of the Deputy Fire Chief of the Aden Volunteer Fire Department and served as Deputy Fire Chief for 25 years. He has just been named to the Lethbridge Economic Development Board. John was a member of the interim Steering Committee for the Milk River Watershed Council Canada and has been a member of the MRWCC Board of Directors since its inception in 2006 and currently serving as the Chairman.

Will Lindeman – Water User - Treasurer



Will was raised on a farm southwest of Milk River. He has a bachelor's degree in Agriculture and a Doctorate degree in veterinary medicine. He married LaRae and set up his practice west of Milk River. Will and his wife LaRae have three daughters. He retired from his practice several years ago and continues to ranch southwest of Milk River. Will is a member of the Milk River West Water Co-op. In his spare time, Will likes to spend time canoeing on the Milk River and on other rivers in southern Alberta and elsewhere. Will has been a member of the MRWCC Board of Directors since 2010 and currently serves on the Executive committee as the Treasurer. He is also the Chairman on the Research and Monitoring Team.

Ed Sloboda - Non-Government Organization (General)

Ed Sloboda has spent his entire life within 9 miles of the Milk River and has always been interested in archaeology. Ed has worked with the Royal Tyrrell Museum since 1987 on various projects in Milk River from the west end just inside the U.S. side to the east end to where the river runs into the U.S. Ed was also the environmental representative on the Twin River Special Places 2000. He has been a MRWCC board member since 2010. Ed is currently the Chairman of the Community Awareness and Involvement Team.

Ron McNeil - Non-Government Organization (Environmental) – Vice Chairman

Ron is a soil and land resource scientist and consultant based in Lethbridge. Ron's formal education was Land Resources at Olds College and Physical Geography at the University of British Columbia. Ron specializes in natural resource inventories, ecological land classification, soil survey and interpretative products. Ron has lived and worked extensively in the Counties of Warner, Forty Mile, and Cypress. Ron was instrumental in developing the link of soils and ecological range sites to native plant communities, which has been valuable for habitat management and species at risk. Ron was an external scientific advisor for the Grassland Vegetation Inventory (GVI). He has developed and provided many environmental training programs, including GVI certification, the use of resource inventory products, field tours, land reclamation assessments, and prairie restoration.

Ron is a Past Chair of the Prairie Conservation Forum and both transboundary and prairie connectivity issues are his main interests. Ron has been a member of the MRWCC Board of Directors since 2014. He is the current Chairman of the Transboundary Watershed Team and the Vice Chairman on the Executive Board of the MRWCC. Ron also farms 1300 acres of black soils near Benalto, located west of Red Deer.

Kristen Dykstra – Health

Kristen was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and was raised in a small village in the surrounding rural area. After attending the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon and obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology, she moved to Edmonton where she attended Concordia University and obtained an After-Degree in Environmental Public Health. Kristen worked in Medicine Hat as a Public Health Inspector for Alberta Health Services for over 6 years, and has lived in Lethbridge since 2013. She is the covering Public Health Inspector for the County of Warner, as well as Magrath and Del Bonita. She is a member of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. In her spare time, Kristen enjoys outdoor activities such as running, hiking, and kayaking. She views participation in the Milk River Watershed Council as being an excellent opportunity to learn more about the geography of the area and meet members of the communities.

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Board of Director's Corner

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Jollin Charest – Provincial Government

Jollin has a bachelor's degree in Agronomy from Laval University (1998) and a master in Plant Science from McGill University (2000). He worked in agriculture research for the federal government in Quebec and in Morden Manitoba. Then became an extension agronomist working with farmers for the Quebec Ministry of Agriculture before moving to Lethbridge in 2006. Since, Jollin has been with Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, working as a water quality specialist for 10 years and since 2016 as the manager of the Basin Water Management section composed on engineers and analysts providing support and expertise in water management, irrigation demand modeling, and geospatial irrigation infrastructure services.

Jollin is an avid outdoor enthusiast enjoying canoeing, kayaking, skiing, climbing, hiking and camping with friends and family.

Jonathan (Jon) Boyle – Commercial/ Industrial

Jonathan (Jon) Boyle, P.Ag., grew up in southwestern Manitoba and frequented a family farm near Riding Mountain National Park. As a graduate of Brandon University, Olds Collage and Montana State University, Jon has an educational background in business, land sciences and range management. Starting his career as a Range Management Technician with Agriculture Canada in the late 1980s, Jon quickly formed a passion for conservation of native prairie and promoting sustainable agricultural practices with landowners. Jon has over 25 years of energy, transportation, municipal and not-for-profit environmental planning experience throughout western Canada as an owner of his own environmental consulting company, Rangeland Environmental Services, and now as a Planning and Permitting Manager at CCI Inc. His experience includes managing multidisciplinary teams and staff, obtaining provincial and federal approvals, and managing vegetation, reclamation, and range management projects. With Jon's in-depth experience in linear development environmental planning, regulatory applications, reclamation, and research studies, he provides creative and cost-efficient environmental advice to his clients. Jon has also acted as an industry liaison between landowners and the energy industry promoting sustainable resource development for drilling programs along the southern Prairie Provinces. Jon has also conducted numerous grazing management related projects specific to the Milk River Watershed. With a background in office based environmental planning, regulatory applications and hands-on environmental pipeline inspection, Jon has an intuitive ability to integrate academics with field-smart, construction expertise creating common-sense environmental solutions. Jon's company Rangeland, has been a proud supporter of the MRWCC for approximately the past ten years and is proud to possibly be joining the Board of Directors.

At their 2022 Organizational Board meeting, Council also appointed the following members on the Executive Board for 2022/2023 fiscal year:

- John Ross – Chairman
- Ron McNeil – Vice Chairman
- Will Lindeman – Treasurer
- Warren Cunningham – Secretary

Outgoing Board member

Brian Hills – Past Provincial Government (Alberta Environment and Parks) Rep

Brain was with Alberta Environment and Parks for many years, later holding the position of Resource Manager for the Southern Saskatchewan Region when he decided to retire this year.

Brian was a member on the MRWCC Board representing Alberta Environment and Parks since 2012. He was instrumental in the MRWCC Transboundary State of the Watershed report project, the pilot Milk River Water Use Metering project, water supply conversations, and supervised staff who are members of the Research and Monitoring team. The Council would like to thank Brian for this outstanding contribution and wish him the best as he embarks the retirement phase of his life.

Executive Director's Report

The Milk River Watershed is wildly diverse, from the physical environment, communities, to our landuse and economic investments. A mentor of mine from Montana always says that watershed management is all about people. That it's about community, collaboration, and pulling together during uncertain times. That doesn't change. I am convinced more than ever that the people who collectively choose to take part in our community respecting diversity building collaboration and pulling together will find common ground and ensure our success. This organization and our relationships as friends, neighbors, colleagues, and partners represent a truly special group of people who have chosen collaboration before conflict and conversation before dispute.

Thank you to the staff and membership of the council for making all projects possible this past year. We are excited to get back to in person events and tours this summer and fall, and to continue to support producers through challenging conditions while continuing to facilitate science and improved understanding of the watershed conditions through monitoring and reporting initiatives. 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.

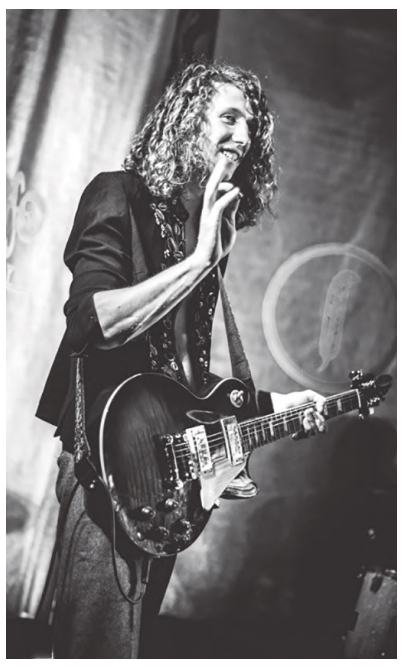
Introducing New Staff Members

Allison Choquette Wildlife & Outreach Technician

Allison joined the MRWCC back in January as our newest addition in the role of Wildlife and Outreach Technician. For as long as she can remember, Allison has always known she wanted to work with animals and take any opportunity to be outdoors, which motivated her to complete a degree in Environmental Science and a master's in Conservation and Biodiversity. Additionally, Allison has always had the desire to travel and explore new places, which is part of the reason she decided to take on this role and move from her home in Ontario. In her spare time, Allison enjoys hiking, rock climbing, live music, and discovering new foods and restaurants. During her time here, Allison hopes to discover all the beauty that Alberta has to offer, and use her field and research skills to help make a positive impact for the future of bats in the Milk River watershed.

Please join us in welcoming Allison as she will be looking for private property owners to work with across the watershed. Properties with bats currently active on the land or with habitats including riparian areas, old wooden structures, or large trees and hoodoos are of particular interest. Please contact Allison at allison@mrwcc.ca or call 403-647-4035 to learn more about how you can get involved.

Tyler Eresman Outreach Assistant



Tyler joined the MRWCC in May as a summer employee, working as an outreach Assistant. He is mainly working with youth education outreach programs and also helping with other programs that the Council is undertaking. He will be with the Council through end of August this year. Tyler spent a good portion of his life near Etzikom, and went to school in Foremost. He is already acquainted with some areas of the Milk River watershed. He has a diploma from the Lethbridge College in Environmental Assessment and Restoration. Tyler is currently near the end of a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from the University of Lethbridge. He is excited to help the MRWCC spread the word of the importance of a healthy and well functioning watershed. In his free time, he might be found backpacking and fly fishing the Rockies, or playing music in a local venue.

Please join us in welcoming Tyler to the watershed!

CONTACT US

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We are closed weekends and holidays

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Photo credits for the newsletter: William King, Ed Sloboda, Mary Lupwayi, Tim Romanow, Allison Choquette, and Sandi Riemersma