



Minutes
MRWCC Board Meeting
March 20, 2025 – 1:30 PM
Town of Milk River

Present:

In-Person: Ron McNeil, Will Lindeman, William King, Scott MacCumber, Peggy Losey, Ken Brown, Joan Hughson, Ben Ellert, Jollin Charest, Roger Houghton, Warren Cunningham, Tyler Eresman, Tim Romanow, Mary Lupwayi

Virtually: Richard Oster, Ken Miller

Absent:

John Ross, Ed Sloboda, Kristen Dykstra, Darcy Wills, Mike Bruised Head, Cheryl Dash, Jon Boyle, Ross Ford

1. Welcome and Introductions

- Vice Chairman Ron McNeil welcomed everyone to the meeting
- He brought the meeting to order at 1:36 pm

2. Approve Agenda

- Add report on the Habitat Management Workshop by Tyler Eresman who attended the workshop in Consul, Saskatchewan

Motion 1: Scott MacCumber moved to approve the agenda as amended. Ben Ellert seconded. Carried

3. Minutes from January 23, 2025 Board meeting

Motion 2: Ken Brown moved to accept the minutes as presented. Jollin Charest seconded. Carried

4. Financial update

- Financial Statements from January and February 2025 were presented

Motion 3: Will Lindeman moved to accept the financial statements as presented. Peggy Losey seconded. Carried

5. Grants

- EPA Core grant update – cashflow forecast
 - Received \$230,000 for the 2024/25 grant funding
 - Cashflow in good standing
 - Expecting the 2025/26 grant sometime in May. There is a clause that less funding could be given dependent on government financial standing and commitments
 - Currently working on financial statements files ready for review of engagement

- Phase 2 - Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
 - Completing the project March 31st 2025
 - Reporting to be done before April 30th, 2025
 - Deliverable and financial commitments in good standing
- Phase 3 Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk Project Application:
 - *Bats and Amphibians - Bio-acoustic Monitoring of Sensitive Habitat for Species at Risk in the Milk River Watershed*
 - Pending
 - *Pollinators- Growing Our Understanding of Native Pollinators and Their Habitats in the Milk River Watershed*
 - Pending
- Cows and Fish – MRWCC CNFASAR – Little Fish, Big Stewardship Project
 - Jill's contract will not be renewed beyond this fiscal year due to financial and restructuring needs
 - Tyler will be taking a larger role with the MRWCC as the Watershed Science Coordinator. He will take on the role of Little Fish, Big Stewardship technical work while waiting for the Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) grants results
 - Tim will take on the project stewardship work for the project
 - The project is progressing well
 - Moving some dollars to riparian projects including purchasing 4 fish friendly River Screen systems to support irrigators in valuable habitat
 - There will be minor changes next fiscal year but will not impact on the overall project deliverables
- Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program Grant Application - Water Conservation and Metering project
 - \$190,000 has been approved
 - Waiting for contract execution
 - This project will provide technology and extension support to improve water use reporting, provide opportunities for scheduling and sharing water, and continue to implement best practices with irrigation by installing water meters at pump sites along the Milk River to promote conservation and efficiency
 - Currently working with Milk River Water Users Association, GOA-Environment and Protected Areas, and IJC on project logistics and implementation
 - 9 out of the 11 WPACs received WRRP funding
- Canada Summer Jobs
 - Pending

6. Little Fish, Big Stewardship Project update

- Looking into fisheries consultant availability. John Derksen might not be available to conduct fish samples in the next fiscal year due to work relocation. John's cost was around \$6,000 compared to others at approximately \$20,000. His availability might cause some budgeting constraints for the next fiscal year
- Planning to start fish sampling 3rd week of May
- Planning to collect drone footage of the field work
- Still soliciting producers for next fiscal year (3rd year)
- The status of fish in the watershed was discussed
- Collecting information on fisheries in the watershed

7. Wild Nights Monitoring Project update

- Wrapping up work on project
- Report card sent to all participating landowners
- Started working on final report which is due before April 30th
- 3 Landowner Projects protecting or enhancing important habitat in the watershed found through monitoring efforts
- Implementing habitat improvement projects on
 - Vegetation planting with the help of grade 8 students from Erle Rivers High School
 - Exclusion fencing, and
 - Spring development to reduce pressure on important wetland habitat
- Winter acoustic monitoring is being conducted on 2 sites to monitor winter bat flights one monitor has confirmed winter activity and that at least 2 species of bats are overwintering along the Milk River

8. Conservation Tools Showcase report

- Close to 40 registered including 10 organizations
- Some registrants couldn't make it due to other ranching obligations
- There was a discussion to consider moving the showcase to January to accommodate producers since March is a busier month
- There was another consideration to host the next showcase east of the watershed
- Good forum for organizations to interact with other stakeholders

9. Habitat Management Workshop report

- Tyler attended the workshop intended for landowners
- About 12 landowners attended the workshop
- Good interaction by landowners with Saskatchewan partners (Nature Sask, SODCAP, Stock Growers Ass., PCAP)
- Dropped off TSOW reports to SODCAP

10. WPAC Managers update

- Robyn Saude, the new Director for Water Outreach and Partnerships, with Water Availability and Partnerships, Water and Circular Economy, Environment and Protected Areas joined the meeting and is willing to help WPACs roles and mandates
- WPACs are moving towards having 4-year strategic plans instead of 3 to align with the 4-year grant cycles
- Alberta Water Council statement of Opportunity is being reviewed, and the Drought Guide Document is being updated to be more user friendly to municipalities and explain indigenous community relationships with other levels of government and regulator differences for drought resiliency planning
- The WPAC compendium needs to do a better job of telling the WPAC success stories leading up to negotiation of the next 4-year WPAC operations agreement, more work is being done to ensure a transparent valuation of our work and resource leveraging

11. WPAC Summit – Waterton, October, 2025

- Planning for the 3rd week of October
- OWC is hosting the summit, to be held in Waterton

- Presents an opportunity to showcase work done by WPACs and social opportunity to interact with other WPACs
- Planning a tour on stewardship projects - Tim is helping to organize

Action 1: Tim to send information to Board members once available

12. Youth Engagement Programs

- School programs
 - Short presentation followed by tree planting activity with high school in early May
- CFOW
 - Will be helping to judge the written portion on March 19-21
 - No requests for presentation this year, delivered info and presentations to Foremost, Warner, and Milk River Schools
- Poster and Video Contest
 - Postponed with Community Appreciation Forum to October 8th
 - Warner School Elementary would like to be involved this year in the contests
- Youth Range Days Programs
 - Will be held at Kimbal Community Campground in Cardston from July 22 to 24
 - Sponsorship letters to be sent out this week
 - Financially in good standing
 - Will start advertising soon
 - There are several new and younger students interested in the project
- WOSPP program
 - WOSPP has several schools that have booked presentations
 - Becky Toly will contact Tyler with more information about the bookings

13. Community Awards Programs

- 2025 Heritage Tree Program
 - Deadline for nominations extended to August 22, 2025
 - There was a discussion on the elm trees at the old school being nominated
- 2025 Environmental Stewardship Awards
 - Deadline for nominations extended to August 22, 2025

14. Milk River Fish Recovery Workshop (DFO) report

- The report was presented
- Presented on recovery work but no funding was discussed
- Jill gave an update on the LFBS project

15. Visitor Information Centre Building committee request – update

- Scheduled meeting on Monday with Municipal CAOs to discuss how to go about renting the Centre
- Will need renovations to setup office space and update exhibits
- Discussion on whether Weston Foundation Grasslands grant could be used to renovate the Visitor Centre – Expression of Interest deadline is April 1st

16. Upcoming Events:

- 20th Annual General Meeting – May 29th, 2025
 - Save the date
 - Will be sent out in the coming week
 - To be held at Warner ASB meeting room
 - Business meeting only
 - Call for nominations
 - Board members with open seats were asked to let Tim know if they plan to stay for nominations
 - Academic position is still vacant
 - Ron McNeil seat will be vacant a year from now as he is relocating and therefore will be leaving the MRWCC after September
- 2025 Community Appreciation Forum – October 8, 2025
 - Celebrating the MRWCC 20th anniversary
 - It will be from 4 to 8pm
 - Have 2 presentations only from 4 to 6pm:
 - Photos/videos over time to tell stories of MRWCC significant events and milestone achievements
 - A keynote speaker on the St Mary siphon replacement and diversion dam construction project
 - Meal at 6pm followed by entertainment by Decadent Phase Band for 2 hours and until 8pm
 - Apply for alcohol licence for drinks at the event
 - Promotional items for the Anniversary:
 - Branded jacket for staff and Board members with 20 years anniversary
 - Planning to purchase other branded items to give out
 - Silent Auction
 - Planning to have a big silent auction and possibly incorporate a live auction by a local auctioneer
 - Will start soliciting items in August
 - Have started receiving some donations
 - Planning a raffle – still working on details
 - Entertainment
 - Decadent Phase Band has been booked
- MRWCC Strategic Planning Session
 - Dates
 - 24 to 26th September, 2025
 - Will incorporate the September Board meeting during the session
 - Plan to have it every 4 years to align with funding cycles
 - To be facilitated in house
 - Location
 - There was a discussion to have the session in Montana, some locations were suggested

- Invite Rancher's Stewardship Alliance to give a presentation to learn their perspective

Action 2: Staff to investigate logistics and affordability of having the session in Montana

Action 3: Staff look at other locations in Alberta such as Elkwater in Cypress Hill in Alberta if Montana doesn't work

Motion 4: Joan Hughson moved to schedule the Strategic Planning Session for 24 to 26th September, 2025. Incorporate the September Board meeting during the session. Staff investigate logistics and affordability of having the session in Montana but also look at other locations in Alberta such as Elkwater in Cypress Hill in Alberta if Montana doesn't work. Warren Cunningham seconded. Carried.

- Community Headwaters Tour – Upon completion of diversion reconstruction
 - Date will depend on diversion completion
 - To visit the newly constructed site
 - The draft tour schedule is being planned
 - Tentative date in August if completion is done

17. Team updates:

- Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)
 - Hike Tour
 - There was a discussion that we still need to have a simple tour
 - Suggest date: June 20th, 2025
 - William King will work with staff on location and other logistics
 - This is a very busy year, but the public is interested in a tour
 - World Water Day
 - Luncheon Webinar 12-1pm March 21st
 - Topic- Glacial Preservation, supported and organized by the Education Outreach team
 - Tyler can send registration online link to anyone interested
- Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)
 - 2025 Water Monitoring
 - Program Planning is underway
 - Met with AEPA on March 12 to go through project collaboration and AEPA has confirmed collaboration with MRWCC
- Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)
 - Metering and water conservation work
 - was discussed
 - Water availability update
 - St Mary Siphon replacement is ahead of schedule
 - St. Mary snowpack at 70% of snow load
 - The St. Mary might benefit by about 20,000-acre feet of water
 - Municipal water contingency planning update
 - There was a meeting on March 4th in Milk River

- Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)
 - Transboundary Grasslands Partnership Workshop
 - Alberta will host the 2025 workshop

18. Round table discussions

- Warren:
 - Congratulated staff for putting on the Conservation Tools Showcase. Attendance was not as good, but was impressed with some of the reptile photography and diversity of conservation organizations that attended and good conversations
 - Need to look into similar pictures of the bat project to promote project work and interest

19. Meeting adjournment

Motion 5: Ken Brown moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:15 pm.

20. Next meeting date

- May 29th, 2025

Signatures:

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____