



Minutes
MRWCC Board Meeting
March 24, 2022 – 1:30 PM
Virtual/In-person
Town of Milk River

Present:

In Person: William King, Warren Cunningham, Ed Sloboda, Joan Hughson, Ken Miller, John Ross, Scott MacCumber, Ron McNeil, Peggy Losey, Will Lindeman, Roger Houghton, Tim Romanow, Allison Choquette, Mary Lupwayi

Virtually: Lorraine Nicol, Ben Ellert, Kristen Dykstra, Darcy Wills, Dustin Vossler, Aaron Domes

Absent:

Ross Ford, Ken Brown

1. Welcome and introductions

- John Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting
- He brought the meeting to order at 1:33pm
- Introductions were conducted two additional municipal guests attended
 - Roger Houghton – representing Cardston County
 - Dustin Vossler – representing Cypress County

2. Approve Agenda

Motion: Ron McNeil moved to approve the agenda. Will Lindeman seconded. **Carried**

3. Minutes from January 27, 2022 meeting

- The following amendments were noted:
 - Page 4 MRCBA – Milk River Community Business Association
 - Page 5 added title: Dr McMartin, Vice-President (Research) at The University of Lethbridge
 - Page 9 replace RBC with TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

Motion: Will Lindeman moved to accept the minutes as amended. Scott MacCumber seconded. **Carried**

4. Financial update

- January and February 2022 Financial Statements

- The financial statements were discussed
- Fiscal year end update – core grant status
 - There will be surplus funds left over for Core for the SOW budget due to delays in the project. These funds will be applied as Accounts Payable to ensure that they are spent within the fiscal year
 - Overall, the projected budget for financial records ending March 2022 shows no balance of core funds

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

5. 2022 Summer student update

- Have shortlisted 2 good candidates
- Interviews are scheduled for end of next week
- Have not yet received confirmation of Canada Summer Jobs grant approval but expecting to hear from them soon
- The position is scheduled to start beginning of May

6. GOA Council appointments update

- Planning to fill the GOA rep from the AF, Irrigation/Land Use Department. Reached out to Jennifer Nitschelm, Director and Basin Water Management and Irrigation Secretariat with Agriculture and Forestry (AF) as a possible rep since she is well versed with the Council's work as she was previously a member of the Water Supply and Management Team. Jennifer is waiting for approval from the Department
- Aaron is back as the AEPs rep, taking over Brian Hill's position
- Shelly Woods with AF, Irrigation Department was also mentioned as a possible candidate

7. Strategic Planning

- Review 2022/2023 Work Plan
 - The 2022/2023 Work Plan was reviewed with some amendments

Motion: Peggy Losey moved to approve the 2022/23 Annual Workplan as amended. Ed Sloboda seconded. **Carried.**

Motion: Ron McNeil moved to start preparing the 3-year Strategic Planning Session to be held in October, 2022. Scott MacCumber seconded. **Carried**

8. Milk River Water Contingency Plan project update

- WaterSMART Solutions Ltd. is working on the final report
 - Incorporating feedback from project committee members
 - The plan should be ready by the end of March inline with the project completion timeline
 - Due to some significant gaps that needed to be addressed, there was an increase in the allocated budget of the Plan of up to \$5000, increasing the total cost to \$20,000
- It was noted that the contract work by WaterSMART as being challenging. The additional work by MRWCC staff was extensive.
- Concerns have been raised of contract expectations essential to produce a high value product
- It should be noted that this is a short-term water shortage contingency plan
- Completing the project factsheet, a summary Research and Science note that will help explain the diversion management and case study the 2020 failure

Action: Project to be discussed at the Water Supply and Management Team meeting, flag areas of potential further work and brought back to Council

9. Producers leading the way project update

- Finalizing the report. Should be completed next week before March 31, 2022
- Kristine with Arvensé has done a good job on the plan
- Open house meetings were crucial in helping to reflect producers' opinions and reinforce the report
- Next steps, potential funding and projects
 - Tim to make presentations at Municipal Agricultural Service Boards (ASBs)
 - ECCC is interested in funding MRWCC to facilitate or provide extension work that has been flagged as opportunities within the survey work. This may include supporting farm and ranch succession planning workshops, ranch management planning field courses, SAR identification and management for grazing associations and managers. This can help support agricultural extension programs by municipalities that are no longer being offered due to funding limitations

Action: Tim to provide a final report to rural municipalities within the watershed and schedule presentations on the project summary.

Action: Tim to circulate the final report to Board members.

Action: Kristine to provide a presentation of the summary of the project at a future MRWCC event.

10. Little Brown Myotis Bat stewardship project update

- Purchased relevant project field equipment
- Completing construction of 100 Bat houses and 1 condo
- Soliciting landowners interested in installing bat houses on their properties
- Have started installing bat houses on landowners who have requested for them. So far 2 houses have been installed
- Have acquired 10 landowners/properties interested in being surveyed and/or requesting bat houses
- Allison was interviewed by Western Producer for an article regarding the project
- Coordinated with the Provincial Species at risk biologists, Alberta Bat Program, Waterton Biosphere Reserve association and Saskatchewan SAR biologists
- Potential to match occurrence data and findings with the Sask portion of the watershed for the coming SOW report
- Applied and received research permit for Alberta Parks within WOSPP lands, will likely coordinate surveys at sites previously looked at in the late 80s
- Planning on placing some of our maternity boxes up at sites this spring to see if we can get occupancy within the current year
- Looking for sites to install the bat condo
- There is a troubleshooting factsheet available for those interested

Action: Allison to keep soliciting interested landowners for bat house installation.

Action: Allison to coordinate a Poverty Rock tour with interested Board members in spring when conditions are dry for safe access

11. 2023 SOW project update

- Team met Feb 15th to review Terms of Reference, report skeleton, discuss content/data availability and timelines, over 75 contributors have come forward to support the project in all three jurisdictions
- Montana and Saskatchewan have confirmed financial support to the project in the coming fiscal year
- Initiating design for the SOW report, Sandpiper Productions has been contracted for the layout and design work as was done in 2008 and 2013. This report will be an update of the work done on past SOW reports but will have an updated look and formatting
- A clear and updated timeline and more detailed budget is being prepared for the next project update, data is now being compiled for the 2023 report
- There will be photo contest and art project/exhibition component announced soon
- Indigenous inclusion will be strongly committed throughout the report

- If the partners provide funding as promised, there might be enough funds to print copies and produce SOW in digital USB card format, we are also looking at possible interactive data portals or mapping support that is GIS linked.

12. 2022 AGM – May 26, 2022

- Tim welcomed Roger and Dustin, new alternate reps representing Cardston and Cypress counties
- Tim to give MRWCC activity report presentations at ASBs
- Discussion of 2022 AGM
 - There are 3 seats currently vacant: one Provincial government, Commercial/Industrial, and First Nations
 - There is a candidate interested in the Commercial/Industrial seat but is liaising with his company to make sure the company is acceptable with the request
 - Planning an in-person meeting
 - Plan a business meeting with a couple of presenters from this years' projects
 - The meeting is scheduled to start at 3pm and have a dinner afterwards

Action: Staff to work with executive on the feasibility of the changes to this year's AGM format

13. AB WPACS update

- Meeting report
 - MOU between WPACS
 - SEAWA will not sign on the MOU
 - There is more work to be done internally to develop procedures and common understanding of the expectations and opportunities to work more collaboratively
 - WPAC collaboration update
 - Concerns with potential collaboration agreement have been addressed, as many as 5 new WPAC directors will be coming on board this year, with an additional two new directors this past year, a mentorship model is being implemented to support new staff and share resources and history
 - There is an interest from other WPACs to collectively work together
 - Mileage rate reviews
 - There was a discussion to increase mileage rate due to increase in fuel cost and inflation
 - There is a difference in mileage rates in organizations and how it is applied across the province from 54/Km to .75/km

Motion: Will Lindeman moved to increase mileage rate from .60/Km to .65/Km starting from April 1st, 2022. Warren Cunningham seconded. **Carried.**

- WPAC forum and GOA discussions regarding Water for Life, grants, priorities
 - There has been a commitment from AEP to improve communications regarding priorities and formalization of the roles and responsibilities of recognized WPACS within the coming year, this may take the form of a new MOU with the GOA or a boards mandate letter specific to each watershed.

Action: Tim to give an update on new developments on GOA discussions regarding Water for Life.

Action: Tim to update the Board on any GOA WPAC Forum this spring.

14. Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference – Calgary Zoo, Feb 2023

- MRWCC Supporting conference planning committee
 - Last time Alberta hosted a conference was 2013
 - There is a potential for a partnership to host a conference with Calgary Zoo
 - Tim has been asked to participate on the conference organizing committee
 - Abstracts will be submitted for consideration on the Bat stewardship and Producers Leading the Way projects
 - Can also be an opportunity to promote the 2023 SOW project

Motion: Peggy Losey moved that MRWCC support the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference with staff time. Ron McNeil seconded. **Carried.**

15. IJC Accredited officers and study bord Tour – June 7th - 8th (tentative)

- Was approached by Tim Ma for MRWCC to assistance with Milk River tour and discussion materials more details expected at the end of April, still working on cross border logistics

16. Community members and/or elected officials tour to St Marys diversion

- Discussion: Dates? Format? Participation?
 - Need to have 2 separate tours:
 - Elected officials' tour
 - Plan for last week of June, logistics are currently challenging, and no rental vans or busses are available, might be a small group that meets on the US side then travels together before retuning individually to Canada. Can-arrive app and vaccination records are still required at this time
 - Open community tour – can be planned for next year

- Form a committee to work on the tour logistics

Action: Send an email to Board members to look for committee members when needed.

17. Team updates (see attached)

- *Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)*
 - Team meeting scheduled for March 29th, 2022 to discuss ongoing projects for 2022/23
- *Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)*
 - 2022 Water sampling starts April 6 through to October 19
 - Planning to collaborate with AEP and municipal partners on water sampling
- *Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)*
 - The first Letter of Intent (LOI) call is April 20th, USBR will give updates at that time
 - Canadian Accredited Officers is meeting with the U.S. Accredited Officers prior to that, to see what they can do to encourage United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to create the LOI deficit for the Milk users later in the season
 - In March, at the International Records meeting, however, USBR reported that due to the event in November, Sherburne levels were up and they were not thinking that a deficit would be likely. This is dependent on weather, of course, and the resulting flows on the St. Mary River over the next few months as well. Until April 1st, the US share is 50% of the natural flows of the St. Mary River at the International Boundary (IB). After that their share drops to 25% of the St. Mary River at IB. They have until May 31st to create a deficit under the LOI
 - Carmen de la Chevrotière, the Transboundary Waters Team lead is working hard to advocate for a small amount of deficit on the Milk River for water users in the summer, to be made up between Sept 15 and Oct 31st as per the interpretation of the LOI. Alberta Environment and Parks is gathering past data to make the case that the Accredited Officers should be able to count on some deficit to be made up in the fall. The idea will be to show how likely this is and how much. The Accredited Officers are so far reluctant to allow a deficit, and bank on future flows that may not come.
 - If we do get a small amount, it would be helpful if water users are ready to do a lot of reporting to Alberta Environment and Parks again, like last fall, on who is on and off and how much water is being taken. The hope is to get more users some water, but reduce the amount that is cumulatively taken at the same time

Action: Tim to circulate the email from Carmen, on the ST Mary's - Milk River LOI water situation, to water users.

- *Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)*
 - Alberta is scheduled to host the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership (TGP) workshop this coming year after a virtual workshop last year. Tim is advocating for a smaller local in person meeting and invite transboundary neighbours to the Milk River area to regroup and strategically plan the future of the loose organization
 - Tim will be giving Team updates as new information comes available, likely won't be finalized until the fall

18. Round table discussions

- Warren:
 - Poverty Rock Tour – Allison to include Aaron Domes on the discussions
- Lorraine:
 - WPAC's World Water Day event on groundwater involved three speakers and two of those speakers were Indigenous. Like the point made during the event that 'we don't manage water but we manage people who use water'
 - Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (SaskPCAP) held their Native Prairie Speaker Series the week of March 7-11. This is an excellent series which you can find presentations at: <https://www.pcap-sk.org/home>
- Ron:
 - WPAC's World Water Day event on groundwater was a good session
 - Important for the 2-ground water aquifers within the Milk River (Milk River and Whisky Valley Aquifers)
 - As a WPAC, it's important to bring public awareness on the importance of the aquifer as a source of drinking water. This can be included in the 2023 SOW report
- Peggy:
 - Important to use local newsletters for program promotion: Town of Milk River, Village of Coutts, Mayors and Reeves newsletters, and the four rural municipalities within the watershed

Action: Mary to liaise with municipalities on the newsletter production dates.

19. MRWCC Board, staff, and volunteer BBQ – May or June ?? location?

- Would recommend that Brian Hills be invited and his contribution to the MRWCC be acknowledged and thanked, since his departure was quick and there was no advanced notice, so this event would provide him a proper thank you for his many years of excellent service. A gift would also be appropriate. Money could be approved by the executive committee

Action: Staff to plan the BBQ at Goldsprings park in May

20. Other items

21. Meeting adjournment

Motion: Ed Sloboda moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:35pm.

22. Next meeting date

- May 26, 2022

Signatures:

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____

#8 and bullet 2; the wording is too harsh in a written form about WaterSmart. Our minutes are public when posted and thus we must be cognizant of what should and should not be included. My thoughts are to delete sentence 3 and for the Board to discuss sentence 1 so it is softened. Overall, this is the only item that I request Board direction and consensus.