



Minutes
MRWCC Board Meeting
November 28, 2024 – 1:30 PM
Town of Milk River

Present:

In-Person: Ron McNeil, Ed Sloboda, Warren Cunningham, Will Lindeman, William King, Scott MacCumber, Ross Ford, Roger Houghton, Ben Ellert, Ken Brown, Ken Miller, Jill Makins, Tyler Eresman, Tim Romanow, Mary Lupwayi

Virtually: Richard Oster, Cheryl Dash, Jon Boyle, Jollin Charest,

Absent:

John Ross, Peggy Losey, Kristen Dykstra, Darcy Wills, Joan Hughson, Mike Bruised Head

1. Welcome and Introductions

- Vice Chairman Ron McNeil welcomed everyone to the meeting
- He brought the meeting to order at 1:33 pm

2. Approve Agenda

- Little Fish Stewardship Project should read Little Fish, Big Stewardship Project
- Add Canada Summer Jobs as the sixth bullet on part 5 – Grants
- There was a discussion to refrain from using acronyms

Motion 1: William King moved to approve the agenda as amended. Ross Ford seconded. Carried

3. Minutes from September 26, 2024, Board meeting

- Part 17, bullet 1 should read: This summer Ron, Tyler, Jessica, and Jill searched for Weidemeyer's Admiral butterfly and were able to find one at Pinhorn Grazing Reserve

Motion 2: Ed Sloboda moved to accept the minutes as amended. Ross Ford seconded. Carried

4. Financial update

- Financial Statements from September and October, 2024 were reviewed

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

5. Grants

- EPA Core grant update – cashflow forecast
 - We received \$320,000 for fiscal year 2024/25
 - As of October 31st, the Balance on AEP Core is \$138,000

- We are in the process of requesting project funds that have been expended so far from ECCC
- Overall finances are in good standing
- Phase 2 - Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
 - Project cash flow is going as expected
- 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 approval
 - *Pollinators- Growing Our Understanding of Native Pollinators and Their Habitats in the Milk River Watershed*
 - Pending approval
- Cows and Fish – MRWCC CNFASAR – Little Fish, Big Stewardship Project
 - Project cash flow is going as expected
- Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program Grant Application - Water Conservation and Metering project – Pending approval
- Canada Summer Jobs
 - Have applied for 2 positions. This summer, one student was over stretched between education outreach program and assisting other projects
 - Asking for 16 weeks per student
 - Pending approval

6. Little Fish Stewardship Project update

- The focus this fall was planning and implementing the water quality testing and the fish sampling
- Water quality sampling took place at four project sites and three tributaries (where the fish sampling also occurred). Tributaries were Peters Creek (North of Whiskey Gap), the creek on Sandstone Ranch and South Fork of the Milk River (Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area). Bottles were also collected at the tributaries to help the U of Calgary in an isotope study
- We contracted John Derksen from Lethbridge Polytechnic, who co-led the fish sampling with Jill
- Fish sampling took place within 300m of the confluence of tributaries including Peters Creek, the creek on Sandstone Ranch, South Fork and Red Creek. We were hoping to sample at Lonely Valley and Tree Creek Coulee, however there was no flowing water and water pools were not connected to the main stem of the Milk River. Consequently, we were unable to sample these two tributaries and did a condensed sampling of the mainstem of the Milk River at these sites instead
- We found Rocky Mountain Sculpin at Peters Creek and the creek on Sandstone Ranch. Lot of Stonecats were found at the South Fork. A Plains Sucker was found in the mainstem of the Milk River near Tree Creek Coulee
- There was lots of mature Sculpin at the creek at Sandstone Ranch, which is good. During the fish sampling with DFO in September, we found mainly young of the year Sculpin at Whiskey Gap. It is thought that the larger fish were affected more by the diversion failure
- Fish were impacted by the diversion failure over the summer. Late July/ Early Aug, the water levels were low, and connectivity was not good, in many places the river was dried up to individual pools. High water temperatures were seen from the data loggers at

shallower sites and fish mortality was observed including Rocky Mountain Sculpin at Whiskey Gap and Stonecat at the South Fork at Hwy 501

- There was flowing water at the confluence of the South Fork during the sampling even though it is dry at the 501 Hwy crossing, we expect it to be groundwater sourced. We also expect the other creeks with flowing water to be groundwater sourced
- We have five BMP projects started with landowners
- Projects include fencing and watering systems along the river to help protect fish habitat, by redistributing cattle away from the riverbank
- Projects are in various stages of completion; three landowners have completed their projects. The other two will be completed next year, one is half complete and other one has purchased the materials this year
- We will be doing more projects with landowners next year
- To advertise for next year, we will hold a Conservation Tools Showcase in February
- We are starting a restoration project with one landowner
- Jill and Ron did the initial visit, we learned afterwards that this is Cows and Fish's responsibility under the agreement. Jill typed up information for Cows and Fish and presented ideas and topics discussed. Jill has joined on a subsequent site visit, and has a minor role in supporting, however Cows and Fish has taken over leading this project
- Cows and Fish will be pursuing some of the ideas Jill, Ron and the Landowner discussed as a part of the restoration plan. This includes supporting the landowner with tree wrapping, to help young saplings avoid herbivore browser and beavers, allowing them to become mature trees. The landowner has been doing this for many years and has found an effective method to wrap the trees, we will be supporting them in continuing this work. Cows and Fish are also pursuing the idea of supporting the landowner in purchasing saplings in the spring from a greenhouse
- Cows and Fish through their discussions with the landowner are looking to take steps towards restoration of a small kochia field, this will be their main project/expense in the restoration plan. They are still figuring out the plan and are looking to contract Tannas Environmental Services to write the plan
- Stewardship BBQ on September 19th, 2-7pm at the Weir Bridge Day Use Area. We had a good turnout and good discussions with landowners

7. Wild Nights Monitoring Project update

- Have gone through 300GB of audio data for acoustics, about 40,000 bat passes each
- Putting together reports for landowners
- Lots of bat activity around wetlands
- There have been positive results for White-Nose syndrome (WNS) from 6 locations
 - 3 positive results found for WNS in Forty Mile County
 - 1 inconclusive result in County of Warner and must go through another round of testing
 - 2 negative results
- Will start to go through the stewardship projects: a vegetation planting project, fencing project and a spring development project
- Need to look at having a community session to involve the community in our projects

8. St Mary Siphon replacement update

- Have made significant progress, ahead of schedule

- Planning completion in September 2025
- Completed culvert installation at new diversion
- We receive regular updates from Jenn Patrick, Milk River Joint Board of Control

9. 3rd Edition Milk River Transboundary State of the Watershed (TSOW) project update

- Completion
 - Working on final touches
 - Contractor just finished a 14-page summary document
- Project budget update
 - Looking at approximately \$150,000 total expenditure including outstanding invoices
 - An over expenditure of approximately \$50,000 from the original budget of \$100,000 from the Terms of Reference
 - Receiving printing quotes
- IJC support/funding update
 - In discussion to enter into an agreement for approximately \$40,000 grant to support cost overruns for the SOW with incorporation of agreed upon deliverables

Motion 4: Ben Ellert moved to go ahead with printing 500 copies of the Transboundary State of the Watershed Report and 500 copies of the summary document at a cost of no more than \$20,000. Warren Cunningham Seconded. Carried

10. Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) Feedback – Mural

- PCAP is a program that focuses on the conservation of native of prairie native ecosystem
- PCAP has been in operation for close to 35 years
- Every five years the action plans are updated
- Looking for feedback on the current action plans from stakeholders
- Ron has provided feedback and asking that Board members to consider providing their feedback

Action 1: Tim to provide the template document to Board members for feedback

Action 2: Tim to participate in the December 11 workshop and report back

11. Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) Managers' update

- SEAWA is looking for a new Executive Director
- Had a manager's meeting in Edmonton last week

12. WPAC Forum Report

- The focus of the discussion was around the water availability engagement, no discussion was had regarding current grants or priorities from WPACs or GOA.
- More work needs to be done to build common goals with the new GOA staff in Water and Circular economy and the business case for continued WPAC support beyond the current grant agreement.

13. Water availability engagement

- Detailed survey – WPAC

- An opportunity for the Assistant Deputy Minister to flag the water availability engagement happening now
- Feedback for thoughts on opportunities or barriers that can be addressed to enhance the water management system in Alberta and make more water available to use for years to come
- Population growth, economic growth, and water variability are challenging the water management system in Alberta. New or updated policy and regulatory tools could be used to increase water availability for Albertans and optimize the water management system to better address these issues while continuing to protect the aquatic environment
- General survey
 - Board members are encouraged to complete the general survey at <https://www.alberta.ca/water-availability-engagement>
 - Public survey available until January 10th on the GOA website

14. Youth Engagement Programs

- School programs
 - Underway
- Youth Range Days Program
 - Planning for 2025 camp underway

15. Fall/Winter Meander Newsletter 2024

- Out for distribution – November 29

Action 3: Mary to bring hard copies to the Christmas party on December 6th

16. Community Awards Programs

- 2025 Heritage Tree Program
 - Deadline to receive nominations is February 28
- 2025 Environmental Stewardship Awards
 - Deadline to receive nominations is February 28

17. Municipal Appointments

- All past rural and urban municipal representatives were reappointed back to the MRWCC Board
- Congratulation to all members

18. Municipal Water contingency planning update

- Pushing for pipeline from Middle Coulee to Warner to Milk River for raw water
- Treat the water in Milk River

19. 2025 Meeting dates

- The following dates were approved:
 - Board meeting dates:
 - January 23
 - March 20
 - May 29 (after the AGM)

- September 25
- November 20
 - All Board meetings start at 1:30pm in the Milk River Town Office Council Chambers
 - The meetings are scheduled for the 4th Thursday of the stated month, unless stated otherwise
- Other meeting dates:
 - Community Appreciation Forum – To be determined by Executive Board
 - 20th Annual General Meeting - May 29, 2025
 - Strategic Action Plan review – October 24, 2025 – to be confirmed

20. Past Events Reports:

- Fall Hike Tour – September 27, 2024
 - Well received by participants
 - 30 people attended
- Transboundary Grasslands Partnership Workshop – October 22 to 24, Shelby, MT
 - Great presentations
 - Good representation from MRWCC
 - Alberta will host the 2025 workshop
- Water for Life Celebration – October 23, Edmonton
 - A report was presented
 - Honourable Rebecca Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas sent a recorded address. Would have liked to see her attend in person
- Science Forum - November 7th, 2024
 - Good meeting
 - 39 people attended most in person and some virtually

21. Upcoming Events:

- Christmas Party – December 6, 2024
 - Those planning to attend to register with Mary
- Community Headwaters Tour
 - Upon completion
- 20th Annual General Meeting – May 29th, 2025
 - Since it's the 20th anniversary, will need to come up with celebratory activities

Motion 5: Scott MacCumber moved to host the AGM on May 29th, 2025 at the Warner ASB meeting room. William King seconded. Carried

- 2025 Community Appreciation Forum
 - Date to be determined by Executive Board

22. Team updates as discussed:

- Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)
- Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)
- Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)
- Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)

23. Round table discussions

- Ross Ford:
 - South Saskatchewan Regional Plan
 - There is a 10-year review
 - Looking for feedback by completing an online survey, deadline is December 6th
 - Land use bylaws to conform to the plans adopted by municipalities

Action 4: Tim to send the link of the survey to Board members for feedback

- Ron McNeil:
 - Montana Rangeland Resources Program will present a Grazing Academy on June 3 to 4, 2025 in Havre, Montana
 - A good event for MRWCC staff to attend
- Warren Cunningham:
 - Monitoring water use by Milk River water users
 - EPA is planning a meeting about the plan, but no dates have been mentioned yet

24. Meeting adjournment

Motion 6: Ed Sloboda moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:27 pm.

25. Next meeting date

- January 23rd, 2025

Signatures:

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____