



**Minutes**  
**MRWCC Board Meeting**  
**September 21, 2023 – 1:30 PM**  
**Town of Milk River & via Zoom**

**Present:**

*In Person:* Ed Sloboda, Peggy Losey, Will Lindeman, William King, Scott MacCumber, Ron McNeil, Ross Ford, Warren Cunningham, Roger Houghton, Cheryl Dash, Jollin Charest, John Ross, Joan Hughson, Janna Casson, Tim Romanow, Jon Boyle, Ken Miller

*Virtually:* Richard Oster

**Absent:** Kristen Dykstra, Mary Lupwayi, Ken Brown, Ben Ellert

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

- John Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting
- He brought the meeting to order at 1:31pm

**2. Approve Agenda**

**Motion 1: Ross Ford moved to approve the agenda as presented. Jon Boyle seconded. Carried**

**3. Minutes from February 2, 2023, Board meeting**

- Past minutes were reviewed

**Motion 2: Scott MacCumber moved to accept the minutes as presented. Peggy Losey seconded. Carried**

**4. Financial update**

- April to Aug 2023 Financial Statements
  - Financial records were reviewed and discussed, questions regarding negative values carried through under SOW and PLTW need additional clarification before being accepted as presented.
  - Tim indicated the values are likely related to checks deposited after the year end review and likely need to be rectified within QuickBooks, but Mary will need to clarify.

**Motion 3: Will Lindeman moved to defer acceptance of the financial statements for clarity at the November board meeting. Peggy Losey seconded. Carried**

**5. Website Revamp and Launch**

- Chris Clark, contractor working on the new website joined via zoom and demonstrated the new website design, functionality, and content. Tim noted that the new platform is much easier to update and improves the functionality of the digital library, and socials.

**Motion 4: Jollin Charest moved to accept the project as complete and to have the new website go live. Ed Sloboda seconded. Carried**

## 6. Grants

- AEP core grant update
  - \$320,000 per year for the next 4 years ending March 2027. The full annual amount was received at the end of May. We are on budget for this fiscal year. Reporting requirements are being revised with a new reporting template anticipated shortly, this won't be a significant departure from what we already tracking and reporting
- Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
  - Grant has been fully approved, expenditures back to the end of July are acceptable for payment, we will be using some of the funding to cover Jessica's part time work this fall and winter.
  - Wildlife-Outreach Technician: we received 8 good resumes for the position which closed Friday. The committee will be interviewing and hopefully hiring to start ASAP.
  - The grant will be for a 2-year agreement (\$75,000 and \$85,000 consecutively)
- Canada Summer Jobs
  - Received payment from GOC for expenditures ending in August, will be keeping Jessica on part time to finish some monitoring and data management projects.
- Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Project
  - The Water Supply and Management Team has submitted an application for \$190,000 project that would install metering devices on all irrigation systems in the watershed for near real time monitoring and development of a water conservation program with customized planning and beneficial management practices.
- Cows and Fish – MRWCC Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk application
  - Submitted a 3-year \$660,000 project joint application with Cows and Fish for a stewardship project looking at 25 riparian health assessments, in stream fish assessments and valuation of tributaries to small, bodied fish habitat, and a fleet of stewardship projects with adjacent landowners – including off stream and remote watering systems, fencing, beaver analogs, and drought resiliency projects.
- ECCC - Piloting native grassland conservation and SAR habitat stewardship incentives within the Milk River Watershed Project
  - We have been approached as a potential partner to pilot a landowner stewardship credit payment program in the watershed with Canadian Wildlife Service, based on the SARPAL program that is currently being piloted in SW Sask. Additional information is required and affirmation of program partnerships before a decision can be made to carry on with council. Funding is confirmed and meetings will be held in October to clarify additional details.

## 7. Producers Leading the Way Project Phase 2 update

- Workshop series update
  - Succession planning workshops are being planned for Cardston and Cypress County
  - Ranching for Profit workshop
    - Might be held near Medicine Hat in February, confirming support.
  - Conservation tools showcase
    - Will be tasked with the new WO Technician to organize in January
  - Open to additional suggestions from our Municipal partners, might include a ranch planning workshop this winter similar to those hosted by the Foothills Forage Association.

## **8. Elected officials/MRWCC board headwaters tour report**

- Participants reported that it was a beneficial tour, it was a long day but appreciated seeing the entire system.
- Follow up information was sent to Minister Ric McIver, and thank you's to our Montana hosts
- Noted that the busing out of Shelby was affordable and we could do an additional community and irrigator tour similar next year that would be open to our membership.

## **9. Board Governance training**

- SEAWA is hiring a new ED and is interested in hosting a joint governance training session this winter, likely out of Medicine Hat. The OWC has also expressed interest in participating and we might be able to host a joint executive session with the three councils to identify areas of collaboration between the Watershed Councils.
- Mary will be in contact with the other WPACs and coordinating a session over the winter.
- Discussion: all were in favor of a joint planning and training session when appropriate.

## **10. 2023 SOW project update**

- Milk River Transboundary State of the Watershed Report - Update

Prepared by S. Riemersma, PESL

September 21, 2023

Most of the background "front end is complete", and effort continues to focus on filling in gaps throughout the document. Good progress has been made, but there have been a few challenges with access to information and the need to consolidate raw data. The number of gaps is getting smaller, with much of the mapping complete and currently in review. The following provides a summary of current efforts and next steps.

### **CURRENT EFFORT**

#### **Maps**

- Received updated maps from P. Wensveen in late August, working to review the maps and statistics provided.
- Will meet with P. Wensveen this month to discuss any discrepancies.
- Most maps complete, need input into a few maps: active gauging stations, water quality summary for MT, fisheries map.

#### **Highlight Box - Dinosaurs**

- Seeking input from local and regional experts to review the draft section.

#### **Riparian Areas and Wetlands**

- In contact with Grasslands National Park and received partial data for the Frenchman River and Rock Creek; the remainder of the data will be available Sep 21, 2023.
- Working through the US Environmental Protection Agency to access federal data sets related to the National Wetland Condition Assessment and National Rivers and Streams Assessment.

#### **Tourism and Recreation**

- Received user data from Grasslands National Park.
- Currently seeking information from Gold Springs Park.

## **Oil and Gas Activity**

- Section drafted for Alberta, working to find information for SK and MT.

## **CHALLENGES**

Most of the information received is delivered in raw format with little processing; as the information is compiled and summarized, there has been a need for additional data mining and clarifications of the data; through summer it was difficult to reach many due to vacation time. Several people who worked on the past report are retired, and new connections have been sought.

### **11. Groundwater project update**

- Reviewed 13 water reports from Cardston County, County of Warner, and County of Foremost. Jessica said most were from Cardston County, and that a lot of people simply weren't returning phone calls. Kristen has started to try and track down some sample locations for Cypress County and hopes to have some collected next week. (The Medicine Hat office has been short staffed, and some staff have been away on vacation).
- Sample results have been quick to come back (routine chemical and trace metal within two to three weeks).
- Homeowners with health/ water quality concerns have been contacted (or a message left). All homeowners have received water results via mail/ email, along with an interpretation sheet of what the results mean.
- Once all results are in, I'll send them to MRWCC.
- A total of potentially 32 well sites to sample from original 2007 project, some wells have been abandoned, decommissioned or simply inaccessible.

### **12. Canoe Trip report**

- Hosted the annual trip, most of the feedback was positive! We did lose two staff along the way, but the conditions were great and the BYOB (bring your own boat) and transportation back to the launch site worked great.
- Thank you to the organizers and volunteers that made it a good day.

### **13. Hike Tour update**

- We currently have 22 registered for the hike tour with room for 30, plans are to hike Steam Laundry Pass in the Milk River Natural Area. WOSPP is providing a bus leaving from Milk River for participants, Temporary Field Authorizations have been approved.

### **14. Meander Newsletter update**

- The next newsletter will be printed at the end of November, articles are due the first week of November if you have topics or materials to submit, please contact Mary.

### **15. AB WPACs update**

- Train the Trainer report – Municipal Multi year Drought Resiliency project workshops
  - Tim led a one-day training session for WPAC staff from across the Province in July. The WPAC collective has decided to host 4 regional workshops starting with Camrose in November, Peace, Red Deer, and Lethbridge in the new year. There will also be a

WPAC booth in the tradeshow for the RMA conference in Edmonton and ASB conference in Lethbridge.

- **WPACs summit Oct 12-13 Drumheller AB** (Red Deer River Watershed Alliance host) Agenda is set, if any board members are interested in attending, please let Tim know.
  - Tim and Ron to attend on behalf of the MRWCC, Tim is presenting on the Resilience to Multi-year drought project and upcoming workshops.

## 16. Team updates:

- Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)
  - Hosted a meeting in July, continued to provide direction and coordination for community events, also provided leadership and direction on outreach and education programming in partnership with WOSPP.
  - Youth Range Days Program
    - Held a successful 3-day camp near Del Bonita in July, young group of new families from across the region participated, planning to apply for the Rangeland Sustainability Grant from AEPA before Nov 15
- Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)
  - Team Chair – Will Lindeman has offered to step back into the Team chair role as Janna's schedule is tight on time for the commitments.
  - Monitoring will be wrapping up for the Season mid-October, largely uneventful year with regards to water quality.
  - From Kristen (Alberta Health sampling): For Writing-On-Stone beach sampling
    - Weekly sampling occurred from May long to September long.
    - High counts were observed in the weeks of June 12, July 4, and July 31.
    - High counts triggered source tracking.
    - Of the three samples that had source tracking done, one was positive for ruminant (July 4 sample). Advisory was not issued at that time, as a decision was made to wait and see the results from the following week (which were satisfactory).
- Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)
  - Meeting report – submitted a WRRP application for water metering and conservation activities.
  - IJC Study activities are running behind schedule, anticipating a community update this winter within Milk River.
- Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)
  - Transboundary Grasslands Partnership Workshop will be held in Swift Current Dec 6-7<sup>th</sup> 2023 registration is now open for council members that want to attend, we will likely be sending our new WO coordinator on behalf of the MRWCC.

*Project Summaries (missing from digital agenda package in Sept):*

### **HSP – Bio acoustic monitoring of Bat and Amphibians \$150,000**

ECCC contribution to the project will enable the MRWCC to create a comprehensive inventory and distribution of bats and amphibians, with emphasis on the at-risk Little Brown Myotis and the Northern Leopard Frog across private lands within the Milk River Watershed. This information will be useful to understand population distribution, monitoring populations, and

stewardship. Landowners will receive a “Property Report Card”, which will provide site specific information on water quality, species presence/absence, habitat assessments, and recommendations for beneficial management practices to maintain or improve the area. A minimum of 5 sites will be selected for wetland/riparian enhancements. Enhancements may include appropriate fencing and off stream watering systems to maintain or preserve current habitats, as well as planting initiatives that will improve site condition. The sites will be used as community demonstration sites for the MRWCC. The project will improve SAR awareness via outreach events, presentations, social media posts, and articles in various newsletters. Purchase materials for BMP implementation for habitat maintenance and enhancement projects including: 5 riparian site enhancements, fencing, water sampling equipment, additional acoustic monitoring equipment to expediate site assessments and landowner report cards.

**ECCC – Piloting native grassland conservation and SAR habitat stewardship incentives within the MRW \$600,000**

Staff or contractors (SALTS, ACA, MULTISAR, etc.) engage representative landholders or counties to secure participation in grassland conservation programming related to a municipal based incentive payment. Implementation of grassland conservation pilot field assessment program by MRWCC and contractors (SALTS, ACA, MULTISAR, etc.) in association with ECCC. Pilot will use Rapid Habitat Assessment Protocol in association with existing habitat data.

Payment of grassland conservation pilot program incentives to producers meeting program targets. Staff or contractors provide continued outreach to landowners and stakeholders throughout the programming pilot period. Evaluation of grassland conservation tax pilot protocols and design for Year 1 with recommendations for Year 2.

MRWCC or contractors engage in assessment of additional alternative credits that would support producer participation in conservation. A report is developed that details mechanisms that are favourable to producers and would lead to increased conservation update.

**WRRP - Milk River Water Use Conservation and Metering Project \$190,000**

Will bring together water use data from all licensed water users along the Milk River to provide innovative drought management of water usage during water shortage periods and improve resiliency to drought within the watershed. To accomplish the project, the approximately 60 active licenses will have a metering device installed at pump sites that will be calibrated by a contractor to report active water use and projected use weekly. This information will be compiled and retained by the MRWCC and with consent of the water users provided to provincial and IJC regulators to better inform transboundary water management. In addition to metering, the project will provide customized irrigation and water use planning resources to producers to maximize water conservation and meet plant/crop needs with projected available water supplies.

**The Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk – with Cows and Fish \$660,000 (over 3 years)**

Supporting small fish through big ideas and stewardship Project

This project will improve riparian and in-stream habitats for multiple at-risk fish in the Milk River and connected St. Mary River watersheds, through improved education, research, monitoring and stewardship. The Western Silvery Minnow, Rocky Mountain Sculpin and Stonecat have overlapping needs and inhabit partially overlapping regions of the St. Mary, Milk and North Milk Rivers. These species are proposed for joint species action (Alberta’s Recovery Plan (2023, all 3 species) and federal Action Plan for Milk and St. Mary River watersheds (2018 first 2 species).

This project will be delivered collaboratively, with Cows and Fish (Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society - ARHMS) and Milk River Watershed Council Canada (MRWCC) co-leading. Working with local counties and landowners will be instrumental to achieving success. This work will address threats related to land use and management of private land; our existing strong relationships and reputation will ensure success.

This project will tackle issues from multiple angles and create longer lasting impact, building the knowledge, sense of ownership and responsibility that results in stewardship actions to benefit these at-risk fish, long-term.

Education and Stewardship Objectives:

1. Engage First Nations and determine role – mostly Yr 1-2; more later if they become involved.
2. Engage, educate and increase management skills - Newspaper/newsletter articles (3); ongoing social media; 1 project summary hand out; 3-5 in person outreach events to showcase habitat and management – combined, over all 3 years
3. Work with landowners, implement 6-8 BMPs and restoration, directly influencing 6-10 km of river – engage & plan Yr 1-2; implement mostly Yr 2-3

Monitoring and Research Objectives to support Education and Stewardship:

1. Examine 25-35 sites for riparian health and develop recommendations for management – Yr 2
2. Sample 6-8 water quality sites – mostly Yr 2
3. Sample 3-5 tributaries for fish presence/absence – mostly Yr 2

## **PLTW Phase 2 – Extension Programming**

Conservation Tools Showcase event – Milk River or area likely Jan 2024

Have funding available to host additional workshops before the end of March, if there is municipal interest we can host another ranching for profit, other farm business, or succession workshops.

## **17. Round table discussions**

- Jon Boyle – after AGM financial discussions with Tim, Jon has been looking at opportunities to engage the Industrial Partners active in the watershed in some financial support of the council's work.
  - Looking at doing some fund development planning had initial discussions with our past board member Trevor Murray Council who has put Jon in contact with both IPC and Journey Energy. Would like to see if there is interest in some targeted support for underfunded projects and activities like Water Quality Monitoring. Noted that other WPACs have similar arrangements and partnerships.
- LinkedIn – Suggested that the MRWCC set up a corporate account, for sharing work, making connections, and advertisement of job postings.

## **18. Other items**

19. **Tim's leave schedule** (Baby #2) – Original Due date is November 18<sup>th</sup> and planning on taking a minimum of 3 weeks leave after the birth, Tim's wife is having some complications, and the baby is likely to come early. Hoping to hand over all responsibility to Mary when she is feeling better and returns to work from her injury.
  - Ron and John both offered to help with any of the day-to-day duties with Tims absence.

## **20. Meeting adjournment**

**Motion 7: Ed Sloboda moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:11pm.**

**21. Next meeting date**

- November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

**Signatures:**

**Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary:** \_\_\_\_\_