



Minutes MRWCC Board Meeting

September 23, 2021 – 1:30 PM

Zoom Meeting

Present:

Brian Hills, Darcy Wills, Will Lindeman, Scott MacCumber, Ron McNeil, Lorraine Nicol, Ross Ford, Warren Cunningham, Ben Ellert, Kristen Dykstra, Margaret McCanna, Tim Romanow, Mary Lupwayi

Absent:

John Ross, Suzanne Liebelt, Ken Miller, Aaron Domes, Ed Sloboda, William King, Joan Hughson, Ken Brown

1. Welcome and introductions

- Ron McNeil welcomed everyone to the zoom meeting
- He brought the meeting to order at 1:36pm
- Margaret McCanna represented Suzanne Liebelt for the Town of Milk River at the meeting

2. Approve Agenda

- The agenda was approved with the following additions:
 - Canada Summer Jobs 2021 update
 - WPAC Virtual Summit

Motion: Lorraine Nicol moved to approve the agenda. Ross Ford seconded. **Carried**

3. Minutes from May 27, 2021 meeting

Page 5 first bullet should read: There is no water to offset Milk River use. So, in July and August, there is a possibility dependent on natural flows that water would not be available for irrigation and there is still the opportunity for the US to create a deficit in the last 2 weeks of May

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

4. Financial update

- April to August 2021 Financial Statements
 - The financials were discussed

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

5. Grants

- WRRP project (AEP)
 - Project now completed
 - The final report was submitted to AEP
 - 18 producer projects were completed across the watershed resulting in \$182,136 direct investment into producer projects
 - In-kind contributions from producer cooperators were over \$136,000
 - Directly improved the management of over 2300 herd of livestock
 - 37 km of riparian fencing for both exclusion and corridor
 - There will be another call for WRRP funding proposals

Action: The Board members to direct any project ideas to Tim

- Other project examples were:
 - Drought mitigation to build on the water shortage contingency plan
 - Dugout improvement projects

Action: Tim to look into the feasibility of dugout improvement projects

Action: Tim to circulate the final WRRP report to the Board

Action: Tim to circulate the WRRP call for proposals once it's out to garner project ideas

- Core operations (AEP)
 - The second installment (\$275,000 funding) for the 2021/22 fiscal year of the 3-year funding was received in June
 - \$20,000 has been set aside to support education outreach projects. There is an opportunity to partner with other WPACs and leverage some of the CAP funding for outreach projects. This has not materialized, however, there are plans to use the funds as the MRWCC share of the other project funding that were approved such as the bat project
- Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP)
 - The initial partnership funding application between SEAWA, OWC, and MRWCC was declined but we were contacted by the grant administrator to submit another streamlined application for a few projects
 - OWC is taking a lead in the application for the joint project between OWC and MRWCC to pay for contact expenses and a technician
- From the Field – Virtual field trip educational series grant (ACA)
 - Received a \$10,000 grant
 - Working in cooperation with OWC
 - OWC have a couple of summer interns who will work on the program

- Will highlight two producers from each WPAC who are doing positive things for the environment especially SAR
- Planning to develop a field video of their operation and how it benefits the wildlife to be used for in class presentations
- 2021-22 Myotis bat stewardship project - Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP)
 - Finally approved for \$60,000 grant funding through the SAR stewardship program for SAR to be used for the myotis bat project
 - The project will center on bat inventory and stewardship project with producers working to identify both bat roosting locations and overwintering habitats
 - Build bat boxes for producers to put on their property and 2 bat condos to offset loss of habitat
 - Hire a wildlife technician to conduct roosting surveys to collect data on location and distribution
 - There is a bat disease called white-nose syndrome (WNS). It is a disease of hibernating bats caused by fungus that affect bats during the winter and has caused a decrease in bat population in Eastern Canada and the US. Had been detected in the Milk River Watershed around Glasgow, Montana last summer
 - It has not been detected in Alberta yet but it's a matter of time before it gets to Alberta since bats migrate across the border
 - There is a study that shows that areas with healthy bat populations are good for lactating cows by increasing milk production and better weight gains on the calves due to less pressure of blood sucking insects on livestock
 - Finishing renegotiating timeline since the grant was approved late than anticipated
 - Recommending that we hire a technician for one year from January to December who will also help with education outreach activities

Action: Tim to put a request in writing describing the position, costing, funding sources and allocation for the Board to review and make a decision on. Since there is no October Board meeting, the request will be sent to the Board through email for an email response

- Canada Summer Jobs 2021 update
 - Did not get reasonable candidates
 - Later were able to secure a qualified candidate but due to family obligations, it did not work out
 - Have been encouraged to reapply in 2022

6. Milk River Watershed Contingency Plan project update

- Project was contracted to WaterSMART Solutions Ltd.

- Currently working on interviewing water users
- Have completed 10 out of 18 interviews
- Thanks to all who have been interviewed or have been scheduled to be interviewed

Action: Tim to set up a zoom meeting for a project update with the committee in two weeks

7. Producers leading the way project update

- The committee met and selected Arvensé to conduct the project
- Have just completed the contract agreement
- Project committee will be meeting with Arvensé on September 27, 2021
- The contractor will be sending out invites for technical advisory working group scheduled in October
- Surveys to start in November

8. 2023 SOW project update

- Sandi is putting together the list of names for the transboundary teams and has been soliciting data for the report
- Started building on the TOR
- Have strong buy in from the transboundary neighbours, virtual meeting to be held with MT and SASK to confirm lead organizations likely SODCAP and MRWA
- An update will be sent to the R&M Team when appropriate

9. WPAC-Municipal study results

- Lorraine gave an outline of the survey results from the WPAC-Municipal study
- She focused on MRWCC but compared the results with the other WPACs
- She stated that the results show that by in large the MRWCC is effective in working with municipalities
- Four WPACs participated in the study: MRWCC, OWC, NSWA, and BRWA
- The study survey was sent to cities, towns, villages, MDs, rural municipalities, counties, improvement districts, and special districts
- An invitation to participate was sent to the elected municipal representative of the WPAC, senior/chief administrative officers or planner, Ag. Fieldmen, extension specialists, water specialists or parks department head where available
- Response rate on average was 31%
- MRWCC had 78% response rate
- Complete results can be accessed at <https://www.mrwcc.ca/index.php/projects/wpac-municipal-study/>

- Part of the study was to identify strength and weakness of the relationship between a WPAP and the Municipalities within the WPAC
- The study is intended to provide improvements on how WPACs work with municipalities

Discussion:

- The MRWCC will continue to keep the lines of communication with municipalities open
- Communications with municipalities can be done on a regular basis
- The staff to make synopsis and recommendations going forward and the Board can respond for future planning
- The study will help to make staff aware when conducting future strategic workplans

10. Red Creek potential tour

- Ken Miller was not available to discuss the potential tour
- Summarizing water quality data collected over 10 years
- Looking to conduct a tour of the Red Creek when it is safer to do so
- If Covid conditions continue, would like to host a virtual meeting over the winter with the community to go over water quality trends
- Presentation ideas are welcome

11. 2022 AGM Proposed date - May 26

Motion: Ben Ellert moved to host the 2022 AGM on May 26. Meeting format will depend on the Covid-19 health protocols at the time. Brian Hill seconded. **Carried**

12. Team updates (see attached)

a) Community Awareness and Involvement Team (CAIT)

Had a meeting on September 14, 2021

Youth Engagement Program:

- School programs
 - Will continue to promote Caring for Our Watersheds Program
 - Any requests for school programs will be accommodated
 - There was a request to do 2 days of field trips for an indigenous class from the UofL at WOSPP, however, after much preparation on our side, the program was postponed and later cancelled
- YRDs
 - The 2021 camp was cancelled due to Covid restrictions
 - Plans to host YRDs in 2022
 - Received \$4,000 grant from the Rangelands Sustainability Fund from grazing lease revenue. 2 year agreement, will now be used for the 2022 program

- Planning to have 2 groups: young group and older youth group called young managers program
- From the Field Virtual Field Trip Project in collaboration with OWC
 - Had an initial meeting with OWC
 - Highlight two producers from each WPAC who are doing things for the environment especially SAR
 - Planning to develop a field video of their operation and how it benefits the wildlife to be used for teachers for class presentation

Upcoming events:

- Meeting format and date:
 - Community Appreciation Forum
 - Date has been set for March 17, 2022
 - Plan for an in-person meeting unless the Covid-19 restrictions still apply
 - Science Forum
 - Meeting to be postponed to fall 2022
 - Date to be determined by R&M Team
 - AGM
 - Scheduled for May 26, 2022
 - Format will depend on Covid-19 restrictions at the time
 - WOSPP Weed Pull Day
 - Liaise with WOSPP to plan a weed pull day in 2022 if conditions allow
 - Watershed tours
 - MT infrastructure
 - With the MT border still closed it will not be possible to hold a transboundary tour as planned
 - If possible, next year, plan for 2 bus tours in spring: One for community members and the other for elected officials
 - Spring 2022 Tour
 - Plan for a spring hike tour at the Milk River Canyon but if ground is wet, should have a back up plan, probably tour around Verdigris Coulees
 - Canoe Tour
 - Plan for a Coffin/Wier reach tour on June 24, 2022 for 20 people maximum (MRWCC members only) if restrictions are still in place

Action: Mary to check with Ken Brown on canoe availability

- WRRP Tour
 - There is need for a WRRP tour to showcase the project to AEP staff late June 2022
 - Board members and producers who participated in the project can be invited

Community Awards Programs:

- Heritage Tree Program

- Environmental Stewardship Awards Program
 - If conditions allow, start advertising in January, 2022 for next year's programs

Meander Newsletter:

- Winter Newsletter
 - Production of the newsletter is end of November
 - All articles to Mary by end of October

Action: Mary to communicate exact dates for article submission

Invasive Species Display boards:

- Got a \$3,500 grant from Invasive Species Center last year to be used for promotional materials for aquatic invasive species
- The displays were designed but need to print so they are ready for CAF in March

Harvest Festival – September 25th, 2021:

- Cancelled due to Covid restrictions on Sept 16th
- The MRWCC has donated an item for their online auction

b) Research and Monitoring Team (R&M Team)

- Water Quality Monitoring Program:
 - 2020 report was completed and can be accessed at https://www.mrwcc.ca/files/6916/2948/2095/Milk_River_Water_Quality_Monitoring_Report_2020_Final.pdf
 - Surface water quality data now available online on DataStream at <https://doi.org/10.25976/33tj-bs38>
 - 2021 program is ongoing:
 - Due to limited analytical budget, we are now sampling only 5 sites: Pinhorn, HWY 880, US Milk River, North Fork and South Fork
 - Compiling a summary on the Red Creek data, supports both WSG efforts on the ground and potential investigations into off stream storage opportunities
 - The 2021 water sampling will be completed in October
- 2023 State of the Watershed (SOW) Report:
 - We continue to compile data for the 2023 SOW report
 - Currently compiling participants from all three jurisdictions
 - Zoom meeting with project team members expected in November
- Long-term water quality report – 15-year trend:
 - Working on a 15year trend data
 - Planning to produce 2 reports: The detailed report and a research and science note, a wrap up for the state of the watershed report

c) Water Supply and Management Team (WSM Team)

- Work on Landsat water usage study was postponed until 2023 due to shut down of Alberta irrigation
- Meetings were hosted by the IJC to inform Water users of current situation and challenges over the summer
 - Milk River Water Users Association continues to have a dialogue regarding potential off stream storage

d) Transboundary Watershed Team (TWT)

- A meeting was held Monday September 13th with the core team:
 - Review of annual workplan with a focus on continued communication virtually with closed borders
 - There was a discussion regarding Policy and valuation of term conservation easements in Sask with SODCAP taking a lead
 - Some of this information may help feed into the producers leading the way project here
 - MRWCC update introduced the three major grasslands and SAR related projects and reminded partners that we will be reaching out for SOW report support soon
- 2021 TGP Workshop Update:
 - Global Vision – Local Action
 - October 19 – 21, 2021 9:00AM – 12:00PM each day
 - October 19 – Global theme
 - October 20 – Local action, presentations from each jurisdiction
 - October 21 – Indigenous Perspectives from each jurisdiction
 - Will provide jurisdictional updates via email to participants and on the webpage
 - You can register on the PCF website: <https://www.albertapcf.org/2021-transboundary-grasslands-partnership-workshop>
 - Team Chair is rotating now to Montana with the new chair to be determined in December

13. Ongoing Covid: events and operational challenges

- Staff will mostly operate from home offices until the Covid restrictions are lifted, however, they will come to the Milk River office on a need basis or appointment

14. Round table discussions

- Brian:
 - Water quality: publicly released the technical investigation into the winter high salinity levels in Milk River to the open government portal at: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460151358>
 - DFO and other provincial fisheries staff are sampling on the Milk this week again
- Tim:
 - The contractors were out to do the Milk River Milk River Flood study work

- A fact sheet outlining the new approach to mapping floodways and updating flood hazard maps has been posted at: <https://www.alberta.ca/draft-flood-maps.aspx>
- Warren:
 - What percentage of water is left in Sherburn Lake?
 - It is down to normal elevations (35 to 40%)

Action: Brian to send a link on water levels

- Mary:
 - The MRWCC in conjunction with the County of Warner are hosting a virtual Working Well Workshop on December 2 at 6:30pm
- Tim:
 - The WPAC virtual summit invitation will be held in October and will be divided in 4 sessions of 2 hours each
 - Encouraging board members to attend

Action: Tim to send the invite through email to the Board members

15. Other items

- Ben:
 - Involved in Producer driven project called Living Labs Initiative for scientists to listen to producers
- Tim:
 - Good luck to the Municipal reps for the upcoming elections in October
 - Appreciate the support
 - Both Margaret and Suzanne will not let their names stand

16. Meeting adjournment

Motion: Will Lindeman moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:57pm.

17. Next meeting date

- November 25, 2021

Signatures:

Chairman: _____

Secretary: _____