



## *Alberta Water Council Board of Directors Meeting*

**March 17, 2026**

**Microsoft Teams Conferencing**

### **In attendance:**

AWC Board Directors and Alternates:

*Italics* denotes an alternate attending while their sectors' director attended.

Dan Moore, Industry – Forestry

Doug Kaupp, NGO – Watershed Planning and  
Advisory Councils

Emily Jobson, Industry – Oil & Gas

*Jamie Wuite, GoA & Provincial Authorities –  
Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation*

Janelle Sandboe, Government – Small Urban

Jason Unger, NGO – Environmental

Jay White, NGO – Lake Environment  
Conservation

Jeanette Sarac, GoA & Provincial Authorities –  
Primary and Preventative Health Services

*Jeff Shipton, Industry – Forestry*

John Conrad, GoA & Provincial Authorities –  
Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

*Kai Horsfield, Industry – Chemical and  
Petrochemical*

Kate Rich, GoA & Provincial Authorities –  
Environment and Protected Areas

*Kylie Hill, Alberta Municipalities – Government –  
Small Urban*

Lesley Peterson, NGO – Fisheries Habitat  
Conservation

Margo Jarvis Redelback, Industry – Irrigation

Mark Donner, GoA & Provincial Authorities –  
Science and Research

Megan Van Ham, Government – Large Urban

*Melody Garner-Skiba, Industry - Livestock*

Nevin Rosaasen, Industry – Cropping

*Richard Phillips, Industry – Irrigation*

Rob Hoffman, Industry – Chemical and  
Petrochemical

Rob Van Diemen, Industry – Livestock

Andre Asselin, AWC Executive Director

### **AWC Staff:**

Alec Carrigy, Anuja Hoddinott, Katie Duffett, Katrina Calon

### **Observers:**

Morna Hussy, Canada Water Agency

### **Regrets:**

Brian Deheer, NGO - Environmental

Janice Linehan, Industry – Mining

Josh Bishop, Government – Rural

Lindsay McBlane, NGO – Wetlands Conservation

Vicki Lightbown, GoA & Provincial Authorities – Science and Research

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**Meeting Summary**

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Andre Asselin convened the business meeting at 12:01 p.m.

## 1 Convene Meeting

Participants were welcomed to the meeting.

This meeting was scheduled on short notice as AWC received notification from Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) that no grant funding would be provided for 2026 and that the current grant agreement would end effective May 26, 2026. The purpose of the meeting is to hear information on the announcement from EPA, discuss the impacts of the announcement on the AWC's operation, and to begin determining next steps.

## 2 AWC Financial Update

The provincial government's annual budget was released on February 26, and following the release EPA reached out to Andre to inform him that EPA would not be providing grant funding to both the AWC and the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) for 2026 and that the current grant agreement would end effective May 26, 2026.

EPA representatives stated that the decision was financial and not related to the provincial government's commitment to the *Water for Life* strategy nor was it a reflection of the AWC's work. However, it has been some time since the Minister has requested the AWC's advice on water issues.

The grant agreement stipulates that in the case of an early termination of the agreement, AWC operations can continue to be funded by the GoA grant for 90 days from date of the notice of termination before any remaining grant funds must be returned. As the notice was received on February 26, operations can continue until May 26. After that point, remaining funds have to be returned by July 26.

EPA respects that AWC is an independent and autonomous organization with its funding and governance and can continue operations if alternate funding is sourced.

In addition to the operational grant, the AWC has \$200,000 in a winddown fund which is to be used for costs related to ceasing operations, such as staff severance or fees for prematurely ending contracts.

### 3 Recent Activity & Discussions

Time and finding funding are the biggest challenges related to this change, as considering different funding models requires discussion and support from members before action can be taken, and identifying and applying for grant opportunities is also a time-consuming process.

Since the announcement from EPA, AWC staff have been working to arrange meetings to share information and begin strategic discussions. A joint AWC and CASA executive committee meeting was held on March 3 to share the news and provide an opportunity for the committee members to ask questions. That meeting was quickly followed by caucus meetings to further share the news amongst the board. After the caucus meetings were held, staff began sharing information on the announcement with project team co-chairs.

Early discussions have focused on strategic approaches to continuing AWC and exploring initial needs related to winding down the organization, should no alternate funding be secured. Operational considerations include staff levels going forward, whether the current office space will continue to be available, and continued availability of AWC's reports and other materials.

Discussions with project team co-chairs have been on key milestones for active projects and what can be reasonably accomplished before May 26.

### 4 Impacts on the AWC's Operations & Other Considerations

If alternate funding sources are not secured prior to May 26, the AWC will likely need to consider winding down operations soon. The process to winddown operations takes some time, and as such the board may need to decide on this before the end of April.

Important considerations for the AWC's operation were highlighted for the participants, including:

- The winddown fund was intended be used for costs associated with closing the organization and can not be used to extend operations for any meaningful amount of time.
- AWC spends approximately \$35,000-\$40,000 per month during normal operations, which includes five staff members, contract accountant, and four or five active projects.
- AWC shares operational costs with CASA; if one organization closes but the other continues, the operating cost of the remaining organization will increase significantly.
- The status of the current grant is being finalized, but it's expected that by the end of May, between \$60,000 and \$90,000 will remain.
- If staff are not retained and the funding situation changes, it will be difficult to rebuild a staff that is as effective as the current one.
- CASA has funds (\$177,000) that are not tied to the EPA grant and do not have to be returned, which could allow them additional operational time. The AWC does not have access to such a fund, but as CASA and AWC share costs, how those funds are used will likely impact the AWC's operations.

Staff are working on developing different operational scenarios with different funding requirements the board to consider. They range from “business as usual” to having the organization exist largely in name only (e.g., one or no staff, and no projects).

A suggestion raised at the recent CASA board meeting on funding was for staff to request an amendment to the existing grant agreement to allow those unspent grant funds to be used to support operations rather than being returned. If approved, that would allow an additional month or two of operation.

Discussion:

- **Q:** Staff have looked at grant opportunities in the past for funding project work. What has the experience been regarding potential for operational funding?
  - **A:** The grants staff have investigated are usually project-based and aren’t aimed at providing support for core operations. AWC is not a charitable organization, and that limits the type of funding that can be applied for.
    - There are a handful of operating grants available at the federal level; some prefer registered charities but not all. They should be explored to find out if they’re suitable.
- **Q:** Can EPA clarify what is meant by Minister not making use of AWC for advice?
  - **A:** It is a recognition that when budgets are tight, we have to focus on the things we’ve been asked to deliver on. Those deliverables include policy perspectives, but we are gaining that by directly engaging with stakeholders now, whereas in the past we have engaged with AWC to help inform policies.
- **Q:** Is it an option to pause the organization in case funding availability fluctuates over the next 12-24 months?
  - **A:** The operational scenarios put forward for consideration will include options that are essentially pausing the organization, but they come with risks. The biggest risk being that it’s unlikely the staff could be retained in that scenario, and it would be difficult to rebuild.
- **Q:** Are there actions we can take to increase the likelihood of a grant amendment to use those unspent funds being approved?
  - **A:** The likelihood of approval might be increased if AWC members write letters of support referencing the request from AWC, and include information on any commitments they are able to make for funding or resources to support the organization’s operation as well.
- **Q:** Is it better for letters of support to come from individual organizations or sectors, or from broad sector groups?
  - **A:** That is up to the AWC members to decide. Sending individual letters could provide an opportunity for members to personalize them and speak to the value that the AWC brings to their sector, rather than more general commentary. A single letter would also likely take longer to approve.
- We will need an understanding of what AWC’s operational and project funding needs are to determine if member-funding is feasible. There is also a concern that if AWC becomes member funded, the products will be seen as having a bias toward industry, which currently isn’t an issue.

- Different operational scenarios are being developed by staff and will be provided for consideration. It is more difficult to provide an estimate for projects; that funding is very project specific. Some projects have not required any additional funding, and others have needed hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- It will be hard to get around products potentially being viewed as having industry bias. The lack of bias may need to be demonstrated through a robust process that allows everyone's views to be represented in a fair manner.

## 5 Next Steps

Andre summarized next steps as follows:

- Andre will distribute the meeting slides, a meeting summary, and the letter from EPA on the grant termination to the board following the meeting.
- Staff will engage EPA to request an amendment to the existing grant to allow use of the remaining unspent grant funds to support operations beyond May 26. AWC and CASA will send separate requests for this amendment rather than a joint request.
- Staff are developing an information package that includes operational scenarios to support discussions amongst sectors and some survey questions.
- Sectors should meet to discuss the following by the end of March:
  - Consider sending letters of support to EPA referencing the AWC's request for an amendment to the grant agreement, or encouragement to rescind the decision to terminate the operational funding grant.
  - Exploration of alternative funding sources, such as a member-funded approach or grant applications, and what, if any, changes would be needed for the AWC to move to different funding approaches. For example, one consideration is the role of GoA on the Council moving forward.
- An invitation for a board meeting on April 17, in Edmonton and via MS Teams, will be sent to members.

Sector representatives should reach out to Andre with any further questions and to share any outcomes from sector discussions, and board members should come prepared to discuss and decide on actions during the board meeting in April.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:54 p.m.

### **Action Items:**

**Action: Andre to provide the slide deck, the letter from EPA announcing the grant being terminated, and other information in a follow up email.**

**Action: Andre will work with Kate to determine the process for requesting AWC be able to use the remaining grant funds to extend operations rather than returning them to EPA after May 26.**

**Action: Staff to follow up with Janelle Sandboe on potential federal grant opportunities.**

**Action: Staff to prepare an information package for the board that includes background, operational activity scenarios and costs, and a series of survey questions.**