



ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

MEETING #56

February 25, 2021

Remote – Zoom Conferencing

Executive Summary

The *Water for Life* Implementation Review Committee has completed its tasks and presented its final deliverables. The board approved the “*Water for Life* Strategy Implementation Review, 2016 – 2019” by consensus. The “*Water for Life* Implementation Review How-To Guide” and the communications plan were approved by consensus pending changes to the text on performance indicators and forest cover, for clarity.

The Source Water Protection Web Platform Working Group presented its Terms of Reference (ToR). The board approved the ToR, disbanded the working group, and struck a project team.

The Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team, the Alberta Water Futures Project Team, and the Wetland Policy Implementation Review Project Team presented status updates.

The board discussed the process for approval of deliverables from the two accelerated projects. The board decided by consensus that an expedited sector review and approval process will be used, including a three-week sector review period followed by offline approval of the deliverables for the board. The decision on the final deliverables for the projects will then be ratified during the next board meeting along with a discussion of next steps.

The board discussed potential new work and struck an ad-hoc committee to explore the potential for statements of opportunity related to watershed governance and capacity.

The meeting ended with a discussion around the Government of Alberta (GoA) update which was distributed prior to the meeting. Participants requested information on the Canada Water Agency and how the provincial government is approaching and interacting with the agency. An update on this, along with information on the budget allocated for the Wetland Fund, will be provided in the next GoA update.

The next meeting will be held remotely on June 17, 2021.

Summary of Discussion

The board meeting was convened at 9:02 a.m. Andre Asselin chaired the meeting.

1 Administration

1.1 Approve the meeting agenda

The agenda was adopted by consensus.

1.2 Review actions from last meeting

One action was noted from the November 2020 meeting. It was complete and was addressed in the GoA update distributed prior to the board meeting.

It was noted that the information report section of the agenda will also be open to updates from other sectors, and not just the GoA.

1.3 Approve the summary report from the November 5, 2020 meeting

Some minor edits on the summary report were submitted following the previous meeting and no comments were put forward by board members in the meeting. The summary was approved by consensus and will be posted to the AWC website.

Decision 56.1: The summary report for the November 5, 2020 meeting was adopted by consensus and will be posted to the website.

2 Water for Life (WFL) Implementation Review Committee Update

Committee co-chair Jason Unger provided a presentation on the committee's work. They have been working since mid-2019 and presented their final report with recommendations, an updated how-to guide, and a communications plan.

The committee approved the use of performance indicators, but noted they are an ongoing discussion. Performance indicators are important, and the best performance indicators possible need to be identified and they represent an opportunity to move work forward through different partners.

Discussion

- **Q:** Can you clarify what is meant by a water management system?
 - **A:** There are a variety of planning processes, and integration is still needed. Understanding how it works together as a water management system is important, and the different levels should be integrated and be reflected in decision making.
- Water management is complex. The goal is to have the individual pieces consistently contributing to broader outcomes, but integration is a challenge.
- So far, performance indicators have been qualitative. Going forward, there will be a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures. Approval of the deliverables today is not approval of the performance indicators, but approval of the use of performance indicators. There is a lot of work to be done in this area.
- The wording around headwaters talked about forest cover, but this should be broadened to "land cover" to be inclusive of land uses that impact water beyond forest cover and forest management.
- **Q:** Why aren't wetlands included in the recommendations?

- **A:** The GoA is working on developing wetland indicators. Wetland-specific recommendations were left for them. Wetlands are imbedded in a variety of recommendations around land cover and monitoring.
- **Q:** For performance indicators, we struggle with the landscape/land-use relationship to water quality and quantity and predictability. One of the performance indicators should be a landscape level model. Did the committee discuss anything like that?
 - **A:** A lot of that is reflected in the general approach. Some need to be developed and agreed to in the framing of indicators. Discussion on models and how to use the data we have needs to happen.
- The text in the How-To Guide should be changed to be clear that the board is approving the use of indicators, but not the indicators themselves.

Decision 56.2: The board approved the “Water for Life Strategy Implementation Review, 2016-2019” by consensus.

Decision 56.3: The board approved the “Water for Life Implementation Review How-To Guide” by consensus, pending revisions to wording for the performance indicators.

Decision 56.4: The board approved the Water for Life Implementation Review Committee’s communication plan by consensus, pending revisions to wording for the performance indicators.

Decision 56.5: The board approved disbanding the Water for Life Implementation Review Committee following their final signoff on the changes requested by the board.

Andre thanked and congratulated the committee members and staff for their efforts in completing this important work.

3 Source Water Protection Web Platform Working Group

Phil Boehme and Steph Neufeld, co-chairs of the Source Water Protection (SWP) Web Platform Working Group, presented draft Terms of Reference (ToR) to the board. The ToR represents phase 1 of a two-phase project. Resources for phase 1 are available through rollover of project funds previously raised by the board.

Phil represented Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) on the working group but was leaving the GoA to pursue another employment opportunity. The work would be carried on by Abdi Siad-Omar and Morna Hussey representing AEP on the project team.

Discussion

- **Q:** The ToR is ambitious. It includes advocacy and engagement, the web platform, and a future SWP strategy. Are those three areas achievable given the timeframe?
 - **A:** Eighty percent of the project will be platform development. Some information on what stakeholders need was obtained in the previous work, but buy-in and participation is needed as the platform is developed. Developing recommendations for a future SWP strategy is a minor component that the group did not want to overlook.
- **Q:** The ToR include an assessment of capability and limitations. What happens if the web platform isn’t feasible?

- **A:** This project is looking to enhance what is currently available, not create new data. It's unlikely there would be showstoppers. Depending on the results of the assessment, the scope of the web platform might be changed, and the project team would bring that to the board for approval.
- **Q:** How will on-going maintenance of the web platform be managed?
 - **A:** Once the platform is developed and tested, it will transition to AEP for ongoing maintenance.
- **Q:** Is the web platform meant for water utility operators or is it a public platform?
 - **A:** The goal of the project is to improve data accessibility, so it would be publicly available. The feasibility discussion will include sensitive data.
- **Q:** Is the team aware of AEP's Digital Regulatory Assurance System? It is an initiative to develop a data sharing portal for Albertans who are considering applying under the EPEA or under the *Water Act*.
 - **A:** The team is aware of this work and will consider it when designing the tool.
- **Q:** Is the Water Use Reporting System a part of this?
 - **A:** This project is a data amalgamation strategy. Water use is a big influencer on source water supply, so quantity is considered. Any data that gives an idea of how source water quantity will change in the future will be included.

Decision 56.6: The draft Source Water Protection Phase 1: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team Terms of Reference were approved by consensus.

Decision 56.7: The creation of the Source Water Protection Phase 1: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team was approved by consensus.

Decision 56.8: The Source Water Protection Web Platform Working Group was disbanded by consensus.

A call for members for the new project team will be distributed to the board.

4 Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team

Co-chair Catriona White provided an update on the work of the Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team. The project team is in the information gathering phase of their work and have recently finished a literature review to assist them in scoping a simulation or simulation(s) using a serious-game style format.

Discussion

- **Q:** Is the project team aware of the "Follow the Drop" platform?
 - **A:** The team has not discussed it, however the simulation the project team is looking at developing will be more sophisticated than the "Follow the Drop" platform. The consultant completing the literature review was involved in its development, so if it was useful for this work it would have been included in the review.
- **Q:** The Environmental Sector is not represented on the project team. How are the environmental interests being addressed?
 - **A:** There will be an opportunity to ensure environmental interests are met during the scoping of the simulation. The simulation is meant to include participation from AWC sectors and partners, and the tool selected by the team for use during the

simulation should include parameters such as ecosystem health and instream flow needs.

- The team should collaborate or at least have awareness of other mapping and modelling tools being used by GoA and other partners in the water space. For example, COSIA has a tool for surface water/groundwater interactions and climate change.

5 Alberta Water Futures Project Team

Margo Jarvis Redelback presented a status update on the project team. The project is following a novel and expedited process compared to typical AWC projects; it was initiated in November 2020 and has an expected completion date of March 31, 2021. They have completed the first three tasks of their work, including an initial SWOT analysis, design and delivery of a survey, and an analysis of the survey results. Discussions on risks and opportunities are still ongoing, and the report is in development.

Discussion

- **Q:** Is there a broader discussion happening around resourcing and capacity?
 - **A:** Sustainability of funds, capacity, and programs in an ongoing issue. It's something that won't specifically be addressed in the final report, and the report isn't making recommendations. The team is hopeful the collation of information can help stakeholders understand potential risks and how we can move forward to work with other organizations to help reduce that risk.

6 Wetland Policy Implementation Review Project Team

Keith Murray and Nissa Petterson presented a status update on the project team. Like the Alberta Water Futures Project Team, this team is also following an expedited process compared to typical AWC projects; it was initiated in November 2020 and has an expected completion date of March 31, 2021. To date, the team has completed an initial list of performance measures that is undergoing refinement. The team had also designed and delivered a survey and analyzed results.

Discussion

- **Q:** In terms of performance measures, is a distinction made between wetland area lost relative to the total amount of that type of wetland in a geographic area? This would give an idea of the intensity of the loss or restoration relative to the amount of that wetland's presence in Alberta.
 - **A:** The team has had conversations about refining performance measures to be more distinctive in catching different elements of the areas. Finding a way to capture social, cultural, and economic values of wetlands is an ongoing discussion and the team hopes to resolve it by March. Determining the appropriate scale (land-use planning regions, sub-watersheds, etc.) and where it fits in relation to other decision-making processes is a part of that discussion.
- These expedited teams aren't making recommendations, but there should be recognition of next steps. There could be some work from these groups in addressing the responses from the surveys, or in relation to continuous improvement.
- **Q:** Can we get examples of where the greatest impact to wetlands is coming from?
 - **A:** Denied applications could potentially be a performance indicator to see how wetlands are being managed on active leases. We need to have an understanding of the data collected and better communication and reporting from GoA so we

can identify gaps and where efforts can be best focused on behalf of the provincial government and wetland partners.

7 Moving Accelerated Projects to the Finish Line

Andre facilitated a discussion with the board on how to approve these teams' final reports. When the two accelerated projects were initiated, the board decided recurring discussions were required to ensure everyone was comfortable with how the teams were progressing. Both projects are scheduled to be complete prior to the next board meeting, and as a such decisions are required on the length of time required for sector engagement and whether the board will review the deliverables for decision between meetings, or at the next meeting. Considerations for the decisions include that the membership on the expedited teams is broad, the deliverables relatively short, and the teams are not making recommendations.

Discussion

- Two weeks for sector engagement is doable for some sectors, but others need three to reach key people for feedback within that timeframe.
- Offline approval of deliverables through use of a survey is okay, but there should be further discussion on next steps for these projects, such as a workshop or an in-depth discussion at the next board meeting.
 - Next steps is outside the scope of the project teams, but there should be an opportunity to engage Council members on the project outcomes. Both teams are pointing to some good things that could lead to valuable future work.
 - If this is a rubber stamp between meetings, it should go to the June meeting for approval. A full discuss or workshop is needed so the work is as meaningful as it can be, going forward.
 - The groups are enthusiastic and have had discussions around recommendations as is typical of AWC teams, but the intent of these teams under the expedited process is to gather perspectives rather than find solutions or make recommendations for next steps. That discussion can be at the board meeting or at a separate meeting supported by AWC.
- It would be a shame to lose momentum on these projects. The board needs to consider how further work from the two expedited projects can influence the other work under discussions (e.g., potential work coming from the *Water for life* Implementation Review Committee) and the existing projects. It needs to be looked at holistically.
 - We could ask the teams to provide some thoughts on next steps under separate cover and have a discussion in June about how to move forward.

Decision 56.9: The board approved by consensus a three-week timeline for sector review, offline approval of deliverables, and a next step discussion on the expedited project outcomes at the June board meeting.

Action Item 56.1: Expedited project teams to look at suggesting next steps for discussion during the June board meeting.

8 Striking New Working Groups

No Statements of Opportunity (SoO) were available for discussion, but two projects currently underway have completion dates in 2022. Work on scoping and developing new projects would need

to start soon for projects to be ready to initiate in 2022. The floor was opened to discussion on opportunities for new work.

Discussion

- An SOO about revising the Lake Stewardship Guide was previously submitted by the Association of Summer Villages of Alberta. The board rejected the SOO, and several board members met to discuss some of the issues, particularly around governance, decision-making, and policy. It evolved into an idea for a decision tree tool around lakes and land use, but government support would be required to go down that road.
 - There is a lack of integrated land and water planning and many of the recommendations from the AWC's *Recommendations for Improving Lake Watershed Management in Alberta* that weren't addressed based on the 2021 recommendation tracking updates provided by the GoA. There is a need for provincial leadership to help municipalities implement lake management recommendations. This is also an issue for source water protection.
 - A review of partnerships and gaps with respect to lake watershed governance would be timely. It might align well with work from the Alberta Water Futures Project Team.
 - Going back to the *Water for Life* Strategy, we are at a stage where we should evaluate if the watershed management has worked or not. That is a question that should be answered for the next *Water for Life* review. A project team could look at partnerships and how effectively they are carrying out that iterative and adaptive watershed planning, which would lead into governance and capacity.
 - This is a candidate for an ad hoc group to look at governance of watershed management to see if environmental outcomes are being met.
 - Resource capacity and prioritization for focused and collaborative work could be a component of the discussion.

Decision 56.10: The board approved striking an ad-hoc group to explore potential Statements of Opportunity in the area watershed governance and capacity by consensus.

9 Recommendation Tracking

Recommendation tracking information is available on the AWC website and board members were asked to reach out to AWC staff if there were any questions.

10 Information Reports

There were no discussions or questions on any information report aside from the one provided by Government of Alberta.

10.1 Government of Alberta Update

Discussion

- There are concerns from several sectors on the Canada Water Agency and its scope. Has there been a discussion within GoA on the goals of the initiative and how it interacts with areas that have traditionally been provincial jurisdiction?

- The GoA has heard that concern from several sectors and recognize there is interest. The result of some internal discussions can be shared at the June meeting; the Water Policy team is engaged, and several others are providing input, but there is further work to be done.
- Understanding the AWC's role in this would be useful, as well as how municipalities can participate.
- The current discussions and decisions happening around coal policy are a concern to many sectors and understanding the AWC's role would be useful.
 - A letter to ask GoA to engage or share findings on this is being developed through the Executive Committee.
 - Alberta Energy is leading the consultation, which is beginning at the end of March. AWC sectors will have an opportunity to participate; this process should draw in everyone who wants to play a role.
- Can we be advised on how much money is in the Wetland Fund and how it is being retained or allocated for wetland matters?
 - This information can be provided in the next update.

Action 56.2: GoA will include updates on the Canada Water Agency, coal policy consultation, and the Wetland Fund in the next GoA update.

10.1 Executive Director's Report

The 2020 audit is nearly complete. The auditors will present the financial statements for approval by the executive committee on March 9. Once they are approved by the executive committee there can no further edits, so they will be provided to the board for review prior to the executive committee meeting.

11 New or Other Business

The CWA has a discussion paper out for review, and comments are due on March 1.

The next meeting will be held remotely on June 17, 2021.

The board meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Attachment 1: Meeting #56 Attendees

AWC Directors and Alternates

Maureen Bell, NGO (Environmental)
Fiona Briody, Industry (Crop Sector Working Group)
Mark Brostrom, Government (Large Urban)
Bob Cameron, NGO (Environmental)
Che-Wei Chung, Government (Small Urban)
Deanna Cottrell, Industry (Oil and Gas)
Tom Davis, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Environment and Parks)
James Guthrie, Industry (Mining)
Jim Hackett, Industry (Power Generation)
Rob Hoffman, Industry (Chemical and Petrochemical)
Ahmed Idriss, Industry (Power Generation)
Dan Moore, Industry (Forestry)
Keith Murray, Industry (Forestry)
Morris Nesdole, NGO (WPACs)

Steph Neufeld, NGO (Lake Environment Conservation)
Tara Payment, Industry (Oil and Gas)
Nissa Petterson, NGO (Environmental)
Brett Purdy, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Science and Research)
Margo Jarvis Redelback, Industry (Irrigation)
Tracy Scott, NGO (Wetlands)
Jason Unger, NGO (Environmental)
Jay White, NGO (Lake Environment Conservation)
Jamie Wuite, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry)
Bev Yee, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Environment and Parks)
Andre Asselin, Executive Director (ex-officio)

Presenters:

Jason Unger, *Water for Life Implementation Review* (Item 2)
Phil Boehme and Steph Neufeld, *Source Water Protection Web Platform Working Group* (Item 3)
Catriona White, *Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team* (Item 4)
Margo Jarvis Redelback, *Alberta Water Futures Project Team* (Item 5)
Keith Murray and Nissa Petterson, *Wetland Policy Implementation Review Project Team* (Item 6)
Andre Asselin, *Moving Accelerated Projects to the Finish Line* (Item 7)

Guests:

Tasha Blumenthal, Rural Municipalities of Alberta
Kaylyn Buffalo, Samson Cree Nation
Pat Currie, Assembly of First Nations
Mark Donner, Alberta Innovates
Brian Free, Abdi Siad-Omar, Nicole Pysh, Alberta Environment and Parks

AWC Staff and Contractors:

Alec Carrigy, Katie Duffett, Lauren Hall, Anuja Hoddinott, Petra Rowell, Scott Millar

Absent with Regrets:

Darren Calliou, Government (Métis Settlements)
Doug Sawyer, Industry (Livestock)
Merry Turtiak, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Health)
Silvia D'Amelio, NGO (Fisheries Habitat Conservation)
Paul McLauchlin, Government (Rural)
Tanya Thorn, Government (Small Urban)

Attachment 2: Meeting #56 Decision Log and Action Items

Decisions

Decision 56.1: The summary report for the November 5, 2020 meeting was adopted by consensus and will be posted to the website.

Decision 56.2: The board approved the “Water for Life Strategy Implementation Review, 2016-2019” by consensus.

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Action Items

Action Item 56.1: Expedited project teams to look at suggesting next steps for discussion during the June board meeting.

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