



ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

MEETING #59

February 22, 2022

Remote – Zoom Conferencing

Executive Summary

Andre acknowledged several outgoing and incoming board members. Tanya Thorn representing Government (Small Urban), Tom Davis representing the Government of Alberta and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Environment and Parks), and Silvia D'Amelio representing Non-Governmental Organizations (Fisheries Habitat Conservation) left the board, and board members Angela Duncan, Jamie Curran, and Lesley Peterson filled those roles, respectively.

The board received a presentation update from the Source Water Protection Phase 1: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team. The project team is beginning an RFP process to hire a consultant to build their web platform. The contract with the consultant will include a budget for ongoing licensing and maintenance of the platform. There is also an opportunity to connect with ABMI on this work, and the project manager and co-chairs will reach out to them.

The board received a presentation on the *Water for Life* Action Plan project terms of reference. The Working Group had completed their task and were requesting the board approve the terms of reference, initiate the project team, and disband the working group. The board approved the decision requests with the caveat that the project team needs to consider concerns raised by the board, including timeline, capacity, more specific outcomes, and engagement and outreach.

There was an update on the business planning process, including results of the most recent survey of the board. The current business plan will continue to be used along with some minor revisions, but the board acknowledged that the outcomes of the *Water for Life* Action Plan project may also influence the direction of the Council's work.

The board received several information reports, including the Government of Alberta update, the Executive Director's report, and a status report from the Improving Resiliency to Drought in Alberta through a Simulation Project Team.

The next board meeting is on June 14, 2022.

Summary of Discussion

Board meeting convened at 9:02am.

1 Administration

1.1 Approve the meeting agenda

Andre Asselin chaired the meeting and reviewed the agenda. There were no blocks to adopting the agenda.

Decision 59.1: The board approved the agenda by consensus.

1.2 Review actions from last meeting

There was one action from the previous meeting. The Building Resilience to Drought in Alberta through a Simulation Project Team provided a membership update in their information report.

1.3 Approve the summary report from the November 4, 2021, meeting

AWC staff did not receive any edits to the meeting summary.

Decision 59.2: The board approved the November 2021 meeting summary by consensus, and it will be posted to the website.

2 Source Water Protection Phase 1: Risk Assessment Data and Tools Project Team

Morna Hussey, Alberta Environment and Parks, and Steph Neufeld, Alberta Lake Management Society, the co-chairs of the project team, provided a presentation update on the work of the team. The presentation provided information on the timeline, the team membership, the status of the work, and the next steps. It also acknowledged the team's challenge in choosing between available paths for the development of the web platform. They have opted to complete an RFP process. There may need to be modification to the project terms of reference based on the outcome of the RFP process, as the terms of reference indicate Service Alberta will be involved in the development and ongoing maintenance of the platform.

Discussion

- **Q:** ABMI has expressed interest in moving beyond the current work they do and would like to add water data into their platform. Their work might be compatible with this project. Has the project team thought about making that connection?
 - **A:** Many of the data layers used in the platform come from ABMI. The platform just brings existing layers into the same place. But there may be an opportunity to expand this work into cumulative effects management. The project manager and co-chairs will reach out to ABMI.
- **Q:** Has the project team considered the long-term maintenance of the web platform?
 - **A:** Ongoing support of the GIS layers is critical and has been something the team has discussed. The RFP asks for the consultant to demonstrate an ability to maintain and update the platform after it is complete so we can be more confident that the tool will be maintained in the future. If the consultant is unable to continue support for the platform, ideally there would be a mechanism for another organization to take it over.

- **Q:** This project has a significant budget. Is the annual cost of maintenance of the platform included? How will that be addressed in the future?
 - **A:** The RFP that will be posted requires the consultant to include an estimate for maintenance for 1, 5, and 10 years. During contract award, some project funds could be used to pay up front for maintenance for a few years. The cost depends on many factors (e.g., number of users) which are hard to estimate up front. The best estimate we have is from a consultant who plans to bid on the RFP who is working on a similar project in the North Saskatchewan River watershed. The team has seen their contract including maintenance costs. The scope of this project is larger (all Alberta), but the cost of maintenance from that project is low. If that project is any indication, we can expect maintenance to be somewhere around 5-10k per year. Again, the consultant will provide a cost for maintenance with their proposal which the team can consider.
- **Comment:** The cost of ongoing maintenance of the platform should be transparent. Perhaps it could be included in the AWC's annual budgets, if needed.

Action Item 59.1: The project manager and co-chairs will contact ABMI regarding the Source Water Protection Phase 1 project.

3 **Water for Life Action Plan Working Group**

Cam Lane, Alberta Environment and Parks as one of the co-chairs of the working group, provided a presentation on the terms of reference developed by the group. The presentation included information on the working group membership, the strategic intent of the project, along with the project approach, timeline, budget, and advice for project team membership. The board also tasked the working group with reviewing the Watershed Governance and Capacity statement of opportunity and determining if it could be incorporated into the *Water for Life* Action Plan project or if it should be a separate piece of work. Governance is a key area of concern for stakeholders, and AEP is working on a parallel process with the WPACs to do a deeper dive on roles and responsibilities in the water management system so there is clarity in that area going forward.

Discussion

- **Q:** This seems to be a reframing of the previous action plan away from government action on policy or policy direction. We look to the government to play a planning and proactive role around policy development to ensure the goals of *Water for Life* are met. Without a strong policy component, how do we assess the actions and ensure accountability, particularly for cross-sectoral issues?
 - **A:** This project incorporates continuous improvement. The AWC's *Water for Life* implementation review projects will help with assessment and accountability; that process can evolve and could start evaluating the action plan. That may not address all the concerns, but the Government of Alberta is taking this seriously and is doing a deep dive on our commitments going forward. This is an opportunity for us to collectively start thinking about the question of how we ensure we're achieving *Water for Life* goals.
- Industry has a few concerns with the terms of reference. The timeline is very tight and doesn't provide much flexibility or consideration of capacity concerns. The budget is basic and doesn't include any funding for education, outreach, or capacity building. The outcomes are vague and high level, and it should have clear, specific outcomes and

deliverables. If the project timeline was extended to 18 months, which is a more typical timeframe for AWC projects, it would allow us some bandwidth for participation.

- Appreciate the capacity challenges. In terms of engagement, what additional resources would sectors need, and could additional resources help address the capacity and timeline concerns? The working group considered the difficulty in creating a 10-year action plan and that one approach could be to focus on more pressing needs and concerns, followed by a review of the action plan in 3 – 5 years to refresh it. It is a collective discussion, and advancing it requires significant time and resources; it's a challenging exercise.
- **Q:** We may be heading into a drought, and when looking at the priorities in *Water for Life*, healthy aquatic ecosystems can be neglected if we focus on the economy, which tends to happen during drought. Will the different sectors have boxes to check off so that the other goals are also met?
 - **A:** In the previous action plan, we did have specific actions for each of the goals and strategic directions. This is where some of the planning guidance from the project team will come in. We are looking at collective actions, and the format of the action plan will incorporate actions for each of the goals and strategic directions.
- The approach includes what we're doing now, and the Government of Alberta has certain responsibilities to ensure they're meeting those goals, but there's also an opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration. It is an important part of the action plan and reflects that it's meant to come from a broader lens. There is an opportunity for strong NGO participation and input, particularly on healthy aquatic ecosystems. The conversations will be around what individual sectors are doing or planning on doing and how that contributes to *Water for Life*; it's not meant to be endorsed by other sectors. We will look at it through the lens of the Water Futures Report, which addresses some concerns like climate change.
- This project needs to include federal and provincial climate change policy. The landscape is shifting quickly and this project needs to reflect that.
- An 18-month timeline for the project lines up with planning cycles. The 2022 planning cycle is complete, but something could be included in the 2023 plans.
- Even the completion of the first task, which is the planning guidance document, could take the project team into the fall.
- The project could take an iterative approach where an initial draft is available in the fall and work continues to refine it into next year.
- The collaboration opportunities could be planned based on multi-sectoral issues that require more discussion, such as regional water delivery. The areas we need to address to make the action plan useful and relevant. The less polarizing issues could be looked at early in the process, with the more polarizing ones looked at on a longer timeline.
- **Q:** What would more specific outcomes for this plan look like?
 - **A:** An example would be CEP plans. Some groups will have distinct, specific actions and others might be more advisory. But this is part of the work of the project team; we may not know what the final product looks like until they've had some time to work on it. It should be a reflection of what has been committed to, along with continuous improvement.
- This project should demonstrate how we are achieving the actions collectively. There is a lot of strength in having something where we're all contributing from our respective roles to achieve a particular outcome, rather than having it be government focused.
- We can't answer some of these questions and concerns until we get started. It will start to evolve once the project team starts the discussions. The project team will have to be careful that the timeline doesn't get extended indefinitely, however. Some of the early

work of the project team can be identification of milestones needed to finish the project and a refined timeline. The project team can report on that initial work at the next board meeting.

Decision 59.3: The board approved the Water for Life Action Plan terms of reference by consensus with acknowledgement that further discussion is needed to address concerns raised by the board on timelines, capacity, outcomes, and engagement.

Decision 59.4: The board approved the creation of the Water for Life Action Plan Project Team by consensus.

Decision 59.5: The board approved disbanding the Water for Life Action Plan Working Group by consensus.

A call for members for the project team will be sent to the board with a deadline of one week for submission of names. Representatives on the working group will carry over to the project team unless the member indicates otherwise.

The first project team meeting is scheduled for March 2nd, 2022.

4 Business Planning Next Steps

Andre provided a presentation on the business planning process to date. It included the results of the second business planning survey along with next steps. The survey results indicated the current plan is high-level enough for the Council to continue using it for now, but the results of the *Water for Life* Action Plan project may influence the direction of the Council's work.

Discussion

- In the context of climate change and other *Water for Life* actions, there are a variety of issues around policy and decision-making. The Council has been stepping back from the earlier days of policy advice, and we shouldn't lose that.
- The origin of the AWC was for policy advice and there has been some drift. There will be some significant pressure going forward given the realities of climate change and its impact on water management. There's an opportunity for the AWC to provide a greater degree of advice.
- One potential area for the AWC to look at in the future is wastewater and wastewater recycling.

Action Item 59.2: Andre will make some minor changes to the business plan and send it to the executive committee for review prior to bringing it back to the board.

Decision 59.6: The board approved the business planning path-forward by consensus.

5 AWC Recommendation Tracking Update

Due to time constraints, this presentation was not provided. The recommendation tracking materials were provided in the meeting package and board members were asked to email AWC staff if there were any concerns. If staff receive questions or concerns via email that require further discussion, it can be added to the next board meeting agenda.

Discussion:

- **Q:** The Wetland Research Strategy is mentioned several times in the package. It was in development in response to some of the recommendations or gaps that were previously identified. Can we have an update on what the strategy looks like?
 - **A:** Yes, this can be provided in the GoA update for the next meeting.

Action Item 59.3: Board members to email Andre with any questions or concerns on the recommendation tracking update.

Action Item 59.4: The next GoA update to include information on the Wetland Research Strategy.

6 Information Reports and Questions

Several information reports were included in the board package, and board members were asked for any questions or feedback.

Discussion:

- Municipalities are struggling with the disconnect between departments on regional plans. We want regional plans to be comprehensive, but we're not encouraged to work regionally in areas like transportation and infrastructure. There is a silo effect. We are encouraged to work regionally, but the funding isn't structured that way.
- The disconnect between departments and regional plans has been scheduled within the Government of Alberta. The funding structure should follow the regional focus, and it could be something looked at in the *Water for Life* Action Plan project.
- **Q:** The government update talks about irrigation investment, but there's no indication of its impact on in-stream flow. How is it considered?
 - **A:** It is a commitment to further infrastructure and to modernize it and expand it. These improvements are all within the current licenses. There's no suspected impact on in-stream flow beyond what is already accounted for in the licenses, and most of the work should reduce the demand on in-stream flow because of increases in efficiency.
- **Q:** Reservoir capacity is also being increased, is that impacting in-stream flow? Given we have potentially been approaching drought, has there been an assessment on it?
 - **A:** The intent for the reservoirs is that when water is abundant early in the season, districts can take some of their allocation and it can then be used to reduce late season diversions. It's a management tool and it provides for and contributes to the healthy aquatic ecosystem component of *Water for Life*.
- In relation to the Executive Director's report, the executive committee will meet with the auditor for a presentation on the audited statements. Once the executive committee approves the statements, they are final, so they will be sent to the board for an opportunity for input or questions before the executive committee signs off on them. They will then be formally approved by the board during the AGM.
- Alberta Innovates wants to be more targeted in future grant competitions. They will reach out to board members to talk about shared priorities for this.

The next board meeting is June 14, 2022.

The board meeting adjourned at 11:57am.

Attachment 1: Meeting #59 Attendees

In Attendance

AWC Directors and Alternates

Rawnauld Axelson, Industry (Livestock)
Maureen Bell, NGO (Environmental)
Che-wei Chung, Government (Small Urban)
John Conrad, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural
Economic Development)
Deanna Cottrell, Industry (Oil and Gas)
Jamie Curran, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Alberta Environment and Parks)
Brian Deheer, NGO (Environmental)
Angela Duncan, Government (Small Urban)
James Guthrie, Industry (Mining)
Jim Hackett, Industry (Power Generation)
Jason Hale, Industry (Livestock)
Rob Hoffman, Industry (Chemical and
Petrochemical)
Ahmed Idriss, Industry (Power Generation)
Vicki Lightbown, GoA and Provincial
Authorities (Science and Research)
Paul McLauchlin, Government (Rural)
Steve Meadows, NGO (WPACs)
Dan Moore, Industry (Forestry)
Morris Nesdole, NGO (WPACs)
Steph Neufeld, NGO (Lake Environment
Conservation)

Tara Payment, Industry (Oil and Gas)
Lesley Peterson, NGO (Fisheries Habitat
Conservation)
Brett Purdy, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Science and Research)
Margo Jarvis Redelback, Industry
(Irrigation)
Nevin Rosaasen, Industry (Crop Sector
Working Group)
Tracy Scott, NGO (Wetland Conservation)
Nancy Stalker, Government (Large Urban)
Tanya Thorn, Government (Small Urban)
Merry Turtiak, GoA and Provincial
Authorities (Alberta Health)
Jason Unger, NGO (Environmental)
Craig Werner, Industry (Forestry)
Jamie Wuite, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and
Rural Economic Development)
Bev Yee, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Alberta Environment and Parks)
Andre Asselin, Executive Director (ex-
officio)

Guests:

Brian Free, Martina Krieger, Morna Hussey, Cam Lane, John Orwin, and Steve Wallace; AEP
Lieserl Woods, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Ruth Mitchell, Alberta Health

AWC Staff and Contractors:

Alec Carrigy, Katie Duffett, Anuja Hoddinott, Scott Millar, Jacqueline Noga

Absent with Regrets:

Darren Calliou, Government (Métis Settlements)
Jaime Davies, NGO (Environmental)
Alain Richard, NGO (Wetland Conservation)
Jay White, NGO (Lake Environment Conservation)

Attachment 2: Meeting #59 Decision Log and Action Items

Decisions

Decision 59.1: The board approved the agenda by consensus.

Decision 59.2: The board approved the November 2021 meeting summary by consensus, and it will be posted to the website.

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Decision 59.6: The board approved the business planning path-forward by consensus.

Action Items

Action Item 59.1: The project manager and co-chairs will contact ABMI regarding the Source Water Protection Phase 1 project.

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