



ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

MEETING #63

June 15, 2023

Remote – Zoom Conferencing

Executive Summary

The board meeting began after the 2023 AGM was adjourned.

The Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team provided an update and requested an extension to their timeline. Although an offline approval date of April 2023 was approved at the previous board meeting, capacity constraints from some sectors led to the team needing an extension for the review process. The project was extended until October 2023.

The board received an update from the *Water for Life* Action Plan Project Team. The team made good progress but has been stalled since fall 2022. The team requested, and received, a timeline extension until June 2024. The board approved the decision request and asked the team to consider whether other factors like the newly announced Canada Water Agency warrant a review of the current terms of reference (ToR).

The board received an update from the Source Water Protection Phase 1: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team. The project team's funding application to develop a web tool was conditionally approved by Alberta Innovates (AI). Since the team kicked off, its initial scope and in turn budget were refined. As such, the team requested the board approve a revised budget to help finalize its application. The board approved the decision request.

A presentation was delivered by Alberta Innovates (AI) on the Water Innovation Program (WIP). The WIP recently approved a slate of new projects through their call for proposals and continuous intake process. More information about the program and the projects can be obtained by getting in touch with a project advisor or by visiting the Clean Resources Programs on the AI website.

The board received a presentation on the history and background of the AWC's involvement in water conservation, efficiency, and productivity (CEP) efforts in Alberta. To date, there have been four project teams that have successively built a foundation for major water-using sectors to advance water CEP efforts. Sectors remain committed to advancing the CEP initiatives and are preparing to provide reporting updates in October.

The board received the executive director's report and Government of Alberta update.

The next board meeting is planned for October 26, 2023, with the annual evening event to take place on October 25, 2023.

Summary of Discussion

The board meeting was convened at 9:28 a.m.

1 Administration

1.1 Approve meeting agenda

Members were welcomed and the meeting was confirmed to have quorum. Jay White chaired the meeting. A supplementary package, which included an updated agenda and a decision request from the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Data and Tools Project Team, was distributed to the board two days prior to the meeting. The updated agenda was approved by consensus.

Decision 63.1: The board approved the updated agenda by consensus.

1.2 Approve Summary Report from February 28, 2023, meeting

Staff received minor clarifying edits which were incorporated. There were no further questions or comments on the summary.

Decision 63.2: The board approved the February 2023 meeting summary by consensus, and it will be posted to the website.

1.3 Review actions from last meeting

There were three actions from the previous meeting. Updates for all actions were provided in the briefing package. There were no questions or comments on the actions.

2 Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project Team

Co-chair Nicole Pysh, of Environment and Protected Areas, provided an update on the team's status and requested approval to extend the project's timeline.

Since the last board meeting, broad sector review of the team's draft final report began. This review was originally meant to be expedited with an offline approval date of April 2023. However, capacity constraints from some sectors extended the review process which is expected to wrap up by the end of summer.

The project team requested a change to the ToR to extend the project's timeline to October 2023. This extension will allow the team time to review, discuss, and incorporate feedback from the broad sector review.

Discussion

- Some environmental groups that participated in the simulation did not get a chance to review the copy of the simulation report, nor were they noted as participants in the report. Participants should have an opportunity to comment on the experience they had at the simulation.
 - There were changes in participants because of delays in delivering exercise simulation, however the groups that participated were listed in consultant report. Surveys were distributed to the participants after the exercise, and the consultant incorporated the results in their report to the team. The project team members

ensure consultants meet the requirements of the contract prior to approval of a report.

- Nicole will follow up with the member who raised the concern offline.

Decision: The board approved to amend the Terms of Reference and extend the project's timeline to October 2023.

3 Water for Life Action Plan Project Team

Andre Asselin, co-chair of the project team, provided an update on the team's work and requested the board extend the project's timeline.

The team's project goal is for partners to identify actions their community or sector is committed to undertaking to address risks and opportunities and advance the goals and directions of *Water for Life*.

While the team has made a considerable progress in achieving its first two objectives and developing draft actions, the project has been stalled since fall 2022 for several reasons:

- The Government of Alberta (GoA) requires executive approval on the strategic objectives and draft actions before they can be shared, and there were changes at the GoA executive level in late 2022.
- There is a need to confirm linkages between the draft actions and ongoing and planned land-use planning priorities.
- The GoA actions should align with the new Ministerial priorities following the election.

There is value in the AWC developing the action plan, however the timeline is unknown until further details emerge. The project team requested a change to the project ToR to extend the project timeline to June 2024.

Discussion

- **Q:** Is there any thought to revisiting the ToR to see if they is still relevant?
 - **A:** Many sectors have put a lot of work into the project so far and are supportive of a new action plan, so this work should continue. However, it has been several months, and it may be worth revisiting the ToR to evaluate new information.
- The extension of another year could be concerning with the federal government's move to establish the Canada Water Agency (CWA). This project's report would be a way to strengthen water management in the province and collaborate on relevant priorities with the federal government. Project delays might mean being left behind when it comes to asks or opportunities for collaboration with the CWA.
- This may be an opportunity to elevate policy and governance issues as action planning is driven by the GoA. As there are policies that need to be worked out, linking these to the CWA is an opportunity that should be taken advantage of.
- It would be beneficial to reach out to the GoA to understand what intergovernmental communication is happening regarding the CWA and how the AWC can be a part of these evolving conversations.
- Staff will reach out to Environment and Climate Change Canada to pursue the discussion about linkages to this project, but also participation or membership on the AWC as per AGM item 1.6.

Action: Staff will connect with Environment and Climate Change Canada to pursue a discussion about linkages between the CWA and AWC.

Decision: The board approved the amended Terms of Reference of the Water for Life Action Plan Project Team to extend the project timeline to June 2024, and asked the team to consider whether other factors like the newly announced Canada Water Agency warrant a review of the current terms of reference (ToR).

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

Co-chairs Steph Neufeld, of the Alberta Lake Management Society, and Kris Samraj, of Alberta Municipalities presented an update on the project's status and requested a decision on the budget.

Since the last board meeting, the team has worked with AI to develop a funding proposal for the webtool by refining the project scope, changing some tasks, and changing the budget. AWC staff have received conditional approval for a grant from AI to develop the web tool, however confirmation of the AWC's financial contributions to the project is required.

To avoid further delays, the project team requested approval of a change to the budget in the project ToR.

Discussion

- **Q:** Is the money originally allocated for developing the web tool flowing to maintenance?
 - **A:** Maintenance costs are budgeted for two years. The team has grants lined up and are exploring other ways to cover maintenance costs over the long term. The original funding intended for development will be reallocated.
- **Q:** Will maintenance costs be reduced after development or are they likely to change?
 - **A:** Maintenance costs are difficult to estimate as they are based on how many users are on the platform. It will be more apparent how much maintenance will continue to cost at the end of the two-year period covered by the AWC.
- This project was a good learning opportunity for the AWC as it is the biggest project funded by the Council to date.

Decision: The board approved to amend the terms of reference and adjust the budget change.

5 Alberta Innovates Water Innovation Program Update

Vicki Lightbown, alternate director on the board for AI, provided an update on the Water Innovation Program (WIP), a flagship program focused on advancing knowledge and innovation to support the *Water for Life* Strategy and Alberta's Water Research and Innovation Strategy.

Through the WIP, there have been 45 completed projects and 38 ongoing projects as of March 2022. Projects are funded under four key themes:

- future water supply and watershed management
- healthy aquatic ecosystems
- water use conservation, efficiency, and productivity
- water quality protection

A total of 23 new projects were approved for the 2022/2023 WIP intake, either through a call for proposals or continuous intake. Past and current projects supported by the WIP were reviewed. Additional WIP project information can be found in the Project Library on the AI website.

More information on funding can be obtained by contacting a project advisor or visiting the Clean Resources Technologies page on the AI website. The website also hosts WIP's annual magazine and contains information on the Water Innovation Connect Series, webinars that highlight the state of water innovation in Alberta.

The WIP Forum is scheduled to be an in-person event in spring 2024.

Discussion

- **Q:** Will there be a new call for projects as half of the projects reach completion?
 - **A:** The program just completed a round of project approvals, so there will be a new call for proposals in another three years. The continuous intake application process allows for flexibility in additional project approvals.

6 History of AWC's Water Conservation, Efficiency, and Productivity Work

Andre Asselin provided a presentation on the history and background of this signature AWC project which began in 2007.

In 2003, *Water for Life* stated a long-term outcome for overall efficiency and productivity of water use in Alberta to improve 30 percent from 2005 levels by 2015. To achieve this goal, seven major water-using sectors voluntarily developed sector-level plans that identify opportunities and actions that members of their sector can adopt to:

- improve water conservation, efficiency, and productivity (CEP)
- contribute to other desired outcomes, the goals of *Water for Life*, and other targets

While the AWC serves as the platform to pursue CEP, it is noteworthy that sectors volunteered to lead the development and implementation of their own CEP plans.

The first CEP team developed principles that would guide the process and incorporated the notion of “conservation” into the plans, as this was not mentioned in original *Water for Life* target. The second team helped sectors with consistency in planning and reporting, by developing a framework and annotated table of contents. The third team involved sectors developing their plans and providing support as they created their plans. The fourth CEP team evaluated and reported on the individual and collection contributions of sectors and assessed the overall AWC CEP process.

Key takeaways from the first reporting period (~2011-2017) included the following:

- Among the major water-using sectors, efficiency and productivity of water use increased by 32% while net water decreased by 25%.
- Most sectors achieved their individual targets and increased productivity output.
- Data collection, availability, and usability was a challenge that should be addressed.

Sectors are due for a reporting update and will be reporting on:

- criteria for success

- sector contributions in efficiency and productivity
- sector contributions to the *Water for Life* goals
- implementation and reporting successes and barriers

Written updates will be shared and compiled into a report. AWC staff are working with sectors to prepare their updates for presentation at an event in October.

Discussion

- Understanding criteria in evaluating healthy aquatic ecosystems (HAE) is key, but some of the underlying systemic issues surrounding HAE have remained unresolved. For instance, understanding efficiency and productivity impacts on HAE have always been qualitatively assessed. Water use data may improve this understanding, but access is limited which increases uncertainty.
 - The fourth project team made a recommendation to improve access to water use data. The AWC receives an annual update on this work from EPA through our recommendation tracking update.

7 Information Reports and Opportunity for Questions

7.1 Executive director's report

This report was included in the board package. There was no discussion on this item.

7.2 Government of Alberta update

The Government of Alberta (GoA) update was included in the supplementary package.

Discussion

- **Q:** Has the GoA taken any steps to participate in discussions about the federal government's desire to establish the Canada Water Agency (CWA)?
 - **A:** This item is on the GoA's agenda, but next steps are dependent on more information from the federal government. There is an expectation from the provincial government that the federal government will engage with the provinces and territories in how roles and functions will be determined.
- **Q:** Did the AWC provide any input when ECCC was seeking stakeholder and public engagement?
 - **A:** AWC did not provide input as a whole, as it would have had to have consensus to represent all the members views. However, individual sectors from around our table did participate.
- Once established, the CWA could be a fundamental partner in funding models for watershed resilience and HAE. The Council should discuss how we can be linked to this.

7.3 Other sector updates

Board members shared updates from their sectors:

- Livestock:
 - There are challenges with infrastructure in irrigation. The sector will be looking at long-term infrastructure to continue work that has been completed and resources that have been developed over multiple decades.
- Environmental:

- Review of the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) has started and there is an online survey that is open to the public. On the Athabasca Watershed Council, there is interest in creating a regional plan for the Upper Athabasca region for which a surface water quality framework was recently released.
- Lake Environment Conservation
 - Difficulties in procuring a chemical agent by the provincial government may have an impact on control aquatic invasive species this summer. Additionally, phosphorus binding chemicals (e.g., Phoslock) which have been successfully used to control phosphate in water systems, have been deemed as pesticides and put on a moratorium.
- Large Urban:
 - This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the 2013 Alberta floods. Since then, there has been a lot of work completed to reduce flood risks which can be attributed to investments and communities working together to prevent this kind of damage in the future.
- Mining:
 - There's work currently being completed at the provincial and federal levels on the potential release of treated wastewater from oil sands operations. A federal paper is expected to be released in June, which will formally kickstart the federal government's oil sands effluent release guidelines.
- Forestry
 - The Fort Assiniboine Bicentennial Voyageur Canoe Brigade from Whitecourt to Athabasca will be taking place in July. The event is meant to celebrate the natural and historical aspects of the Athabasca River. More information can be found on voyageurbrigade.org.

Discussion

- There is a discussion to be had on efficient restoration work in the wetlands. Efficiencies in economic developments is often assessed, but looking at efficiencies in restorative developments is something the Council could investigate.
- On process improvement, the board and partners should consider doing written updates which may help focus discussions.
 - Sectors will be asked to provide a written update leading up to the October meeting to further facilitate and streamline this meeting.
- **Q:** Is there anything the Council should be exploring in terms of wildfires, given that the province will be facing more of them in the future?
 - **A:** There is an opportunity to investigate the impacts of wildfires on land and water disturbance.

Other Business

- The field tour and evening event planned for June 14 were postponed. The next board meeting is in Edmonton on October 26, 2023, and is expected to be in-person. Staff are planning an afternoon session for the major water-using sectors to provide updates on their water conservation, efficiency, and productivity progress, followed by the annual evening event planned for October 25, 2023.
- Participants were thanked for joining the meeting. Evaluation forms will be sent out by email after the meeting.

- A survey requesting sector feedback on revising the AWC's Multi-Year Communications Strategy will be shared with the board in the coming weeks.

The board meeting adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Attachment 1: Meeting #63 Attendees

In Attendance

AWC Directors and Alternates

Alan Corbett, NGO (WPACs)	Authorities (Environment and Protected Areas)
Amber Link, Government (Rural)	Lesley Peterson, NGO (Fisheries Habitat Conservation)
Angela Duncan, Government (Small Urban)	Margo Jarvis Redelback, Industry (Irrigation)
Anna Kauffman, Industry (Forestry)	Maureen Bell, NGO (Environmental)
Brian Deheer, NGO (Environmental)	Nancy Mackay, Government (Large Urban)
Dan Moore, Industry (Forestry)	Nevin Rosaasen, Industry (Cropping)
Deanna Cottrell, Industry (Oil & Gas)	Rawnauld Axelson, Industry (Livestock)
Jamie Curran, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Environment and Protected Areas)	Reg Warkentin, Industry (Cropping)
Jamie Wuite, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation)	Rob Hoffman, Industry (Chemical and Petrochemical)
Janice Linehan, Industry (Mining)	Rob van Diemen, Industry (Livestock)
Jason Unger, NGO (Environmental)	Steph Neufeld, NGO (Lake Environment Conservation)
Jay White, NGO (Lake Environment Conservation)	Vicki Lightbown, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Science and Research)
Jim Hackett, Industry (Power Generation)	Andre Asselin, Executive Director (ex-officio)
Kai Horsfield, Industry (Chemical)	
Kasha Piquette, GoA and Provincial	

Guests:

Curt Horning, Environment and Protected Areas
Marilea Pattison-Perry, Environment and Protected Areas
Martina Krieger, Environment and Protected Areas
Lieserl Woods, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Olusegun Motajo, Health
Shanelle Sinclair, Heartland Generation

AWC Staff:

Alec Carrigy, Katie Duffett, Anuja Hoddinott, Mariem Oloroso

Absent with Regrets:

Ahmed Idriss, Industry (Power Generation)
Brett Purdy, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Science and Research)
Darren Calliou, Government (Métis Settlements)
John Conrad, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation)
Paul McLauchlin, Government (Rural)
Ruth Mitchell, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Health)
Steve Meadows, NGO (WPACs)
Tracy Scott, NGO (Wetlands Conservation)

Attachment 2: Meeting #63 Decision Log and Action Items

Decisions

Decision 63.1: The board approved the updated agenda by consensus

Decision 63.2: The board approved the February 2023 meeting summary by consensus, and it will be posted to the website.

Decision: The board approved to amend the Terms of Reference and extend the project's timeline to October 2023.

Decision: The board approved the amended Terms of Reference of the Water for Life Action Plan Project Team to extend the project timeline to June 2024, and asked the team to consider whether other factors like the newly announced Canada Water Agency warrant a review of the current terms of reference (ToR).

Decision: The board approved to amend the terms of reference and adjust the budget change.

Action Items

Action: Staff will connect with Environment and Climate Change Canada to pursue a discussion about linkages between the CWA and AWC.