



Updating the Guide for Building Resiliency to Multi-year Drought in Alberta Project Terms of Reference

Approved by the Alberta Water Council on: October 23, 2025

CONTEXT

Drought is a natural phenomenon in Alberta, and multi-year droughts have been recurrent events throughout the province's history. Climate models predict droughts of greater intensity and longer duration are likely to occur in the future. The impacts of multi-year droughts on the environment, economy, and society are cumulative and can be long-lasting, and they are multiplied every year by management decisions made during previous years.

The Alberta Water Council (AWC) began the Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought Project in 2018. The project's goal was to assist Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) as they engage municipalities and communities within their watershed to better plan for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from multi-year droughts. The project's main outcome was the *Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta Guide* (the Guide), which documented lessons learned from previous droughts in Alberta and brought together information, tools, and resources as a reference for communities before, during, and after multi-year droughts. The project deliverables include workshop materials to assist WPACs in their delivery of the guide's contents.

Several areas of Alberta experienced severe drought conditions in 2023-2024, and WPACs held workshops throughout the province using the Guide to support drought management within their watersheds. Over 500 people participated in the six workshops, and they found the Guide to be a valuable resource that supported their drought mitigation efforts.

The Guide and its associated workshop materials were compiled between 2018 and 2020, and in many cases, references, roles, responsibilities, and other information have since changed. Alberta's recent drought resulted in the establishment of many new information sources and resources to support Albertan's drought mitigation efforts and agreements to share water among several major water users in four sub-watersheds. The lessons learned from this drought will

result in a continued evolution of Alberta's drought response so we may be better prepared for ongoing or future droughts. For the Guide to remain a valuable resource for continued planning, response and recovery for Albertans during times of drought, it should be revised to reflect these changes and to include any new resources and tools that have been developed.

STRATEGIC INTENT (GOAL)

The goal of this project is for AWC members and partners to renew the Guide and its associated workshop materials by updating any out-of-date information and including any new information, resources, or tools that have been developed since the original release of the Guide in early 2021, including lessons learned from the 2023-2024 drought.

The Guide and its accompanying workshop materials are designed to help municipalities and communities implement drought resilience planning. WPACs can play a key role in supporting this work by using the Guide as a resource to engage and assist their partners. At the same time, the Guide is broadly accessible and can be applied directly by municipalities, communities, or other organizations, and this project will explore ways to encourage its use across a range of audiences and delivery approaches.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROJECT TEAM

The success of this project depends on the active engagement and contribution of all project team members. Each project team member is expected to:

- represent a particular stakeholder organization or sector and report back regularly
- come prepared for meetings, including reading pre-meeting material, completing tasks as assigned, and being able to negotiate on behalf of their sector
- make constructive contributions that advance the team's goals and objectives, and help others do the same
- as appropriate, participate in briefing directors and alternates in their sector groups
- liaise with their sector's participants on the board and other AWC teams to maximize synergy, ensure coordination, and prevent duplication
- follow the rules and principles of consensus decision making

More information can be found in the [AWC Process Guidelines](#).

OBJECTIVES AND KEY TASKS

This project will use a mix of internal project team resources and engagement with external groups and subject matter experts to renew the Guide and its associated workshop materials. The input will be gathered in stages and then merged into a final document towards the end of the project.

Objective 1: Gain a common understanding of the Guide and workshop materials, and any available documentation resulting from the 2023-2024 drought in Alberta.

Key Task 1.1: Review the Guide and its associated workshop materials so project team members are familiar with the Guide's structure and content.

Key Task 1.2: Review and compile any documentation related to drought management that has been developed since the release of the Guide in 2021. It could include but is not limited to:

- outcomes from AWC projects related to drought (e.g., the Improving Drought Resilience in Alberta Through a Simulation Project, and the Drought Mutual Support Committee)
- a post-assessment report on Alberta's 2023-2024 drought
- summaries from the drought workshops hosted by WPACs in 2023-2024
- documentation relating to the water sharing memorandums of understanding that were developed for some Alberta watersheds in 2024
- new drought management or resiliency plans (e.g., the [Edmonton Drought Resiliency Plan](#) released in 2024, Calgary's [Drought Resilience Plan](#))

Objective 2: Assess the Guide and workshop materials for outdated information or information gaps.

Key Task 2.1: Review the Guide and identify content that is outdated, including broken weblinks, changes to roles and responsibilities, changes in bylaws or regulations, and others.

Key Task 2.2: Identify information gaps in the Guide based on the information gathered in objective 1 and potential information sources to address them. The gaps should include at minimum:

- information relevant to Indigenous communities and their perspectives on water, including governance differences
- templates to support development of drought management plans
- information on different types of droughts and how they are impacted by climate change
- federal resources
- long-term planning and examples from municipalities on water resource management
- infrastructure considerations (e.g., fire suppression)
- lessons learned from the 2023-2024 drought in Alberta

Key Task 2.3: Document the results of key tasks 2.1 and 2.2 in an interim report that includes the identified gaps, methods to address them, and the people or organizations who have

experience with drought management in the province and experiences to share that could be in an updated Guide. This should include people from all sectors, including Indigenous communities impacted by drought.

Objective 3: Engage people, organizations, or communities who should be involved in updating the Guide and workshop materials.

Key Task 3.1: Engage with the people from key task 2.3 and determine how or if they are able to participate in the project. Participation could take the form of joining the project as a consistent contributor or providing information for objective #4 via interviews or surveys. Project team members may leverage existing connections and networks to identify potential participants or contributors who can provide Indigenous perspectives on drought resilience, lessons learned, or tools and resources available to all communities to support drought management and response.

Objective 4: Gather new and updated information on drought management approaches, processes, and actions, new tools or resources, and lessons learned.

Key Task 4.1: Survey the people identified in objectives 2 and 3 to gather information on identified gaps, which could include the following:

- new drought management plans or changes to existing plans
- collaboration between communities or stakeholders on drought mitigation efforts during the 2023-2024 drought
- new tools or resources related to drought management that have been developed since 2021
- new or updated roles and responsibilities related to drought management
- lessons learned from the water sharing memorandums of understanding
- principles, tools, and best practices of low-impact development

Key Task 4.2: Conduct interviews with people who were involved in drought management activities during the 2023-2024 drought about their experiences and lessons learned.

Objective 5: Renewed Guide and workshop materials to reflect any changes in drought management that have occurred since the Guide's original release in 2021 and develop a companion report detailing the work of the project team.

Key Task 5.1: Correct any outdated information in the guide and develop new material that addresses the gaps identified in Objective 3, where possible, and includes the information gathered in Objective 4. The new material could include but is not limited to:

- a new theme on drought simulations and how communities can use them to build and test drought management plans (e.g., practical desktop exercises that can be integrated into a workshop)
- case studies based on the interviews conducted with people involved in drought management for Alberta's 2023-2024 drought
- information on climate change and how it impacts different types of droughts (e.g., soil moisture drought)
- lessons learned from municipalities on water resource management (e.g., long-term planning)
- templates to assist communities in the process of building drought management plans
- new material highlighting the importance of proactive measures and long-term planning

Key Task 5.2: Develop a companion report that documents the work of the project team and any recommendations from the project team on future work related to drought or the Guide.

Objective 6: Develop and implement a strategy and action plan for communicating the work of the project team. This objective will need to be considered at the project outset and on an ongoing basis as the work progresses.

Key Task 6.1: Develop a communication plan that includes the following elements:

- The information to be communicated, including key messages on drought management and how to use the Guide and workshop materials.
- Methods of communicating on the Guide and workshop materials with potential users who may or may not have access to WPAC support.
- The appropriate audience, how the material will be communicated to them, and when.
- Existing communication channels that can be leveraged to share project information.
- Communication tools such as message maps, factsheets, or presentations.
- Messaging on the outcomes of each project objective for project team members to communicate relevant information to their networks.

DELIVERABLES

The project deliverables are:

- Interim report on the results of the gap analysis (objective 2)
- a renewed *Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta Guide* (objective 5)
- updated workshop materials that reflect the renewed Guide (objective 5)
- a companion report summarizing the work of the project team and any recommendations for future work (objective 5)

- a communications plan outlining the project team’s approach to communicating about the work and its outcomes (objective 6)

PROJECT SCHEDULE

The project is expected to start in October 2025 and be complete by February 2027. The Gantt chart below shows the timeline broken down by objective.

Objectives and Milestones	2025			2026												2027	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
1. Common understanding of the Guide and workshop materials, and any available documentation from the 2023-2024 drought																	
2. Assess the Guide and workshop materials for outdated information or information gaps.																	
3. Engage people, organizations, or communities who should be involved in updating the Guide and workshop materials.																	
4. Gather new and updated information on drought management approaches, processes, and actions, new tools or resources, and lessons learned.																	
5. Renew the Guide and workshop materials and develop a companion report																	
6. Communications Plan																	
Sector Review of Project Deliverables																	
Board Decision																	

BUDGET

The project is estimated at \$21,500 in core funding, with no anticipated additional project costs. The table below includes a breakdown of the estimated costs.

Item	Estimated Cost
Core Funds	
Stakeholder support and travel/accommodation*	\$15,000
Hosting	\$1,500
Communications (final report preparation)	\$5,000
Total Estimated Costs	\$21,500

*Based on 12 meetings, where one is held in person and the remaining 11 are held remotely, and four team members are eligible for stakeholder support.

MEMBERSHIP

The working group has identified the following groups who could be engaged in the project in some manner, either as a project team member or through targeted engagement:

- AWC members and partners
 - In particular those sectors directly involved in drought management and response (e.g., Alberta WPACs, irrigation, large urban, small urban, rural, and Environment and Protected Areas)
- Indigenous communities impacted by drought
- Alberta Low Impact Development Group