



ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

MEETING #71

February 19, 2026

Remote - MS Teams

Executive Summary

The board received a presentation on the work of the Source Water Protection (SWP) project team. Through the project, the team enhanced an existing web tool (The Healthy River Ecosystem Assessment System or THREATS), presented on and collected feedback on a draft, and based on the feedback, improved user-friendliness of THREATS and prepared some communications materials. The board approved the team's final deliverables and disbanded the project team. A statement of opportunity to form a SWP engagement working group will be brought forward for the board to approve later in 2026, and terms of reference to form a SWP data committee will be brought for board approval in June 2026.

Environment and Protected Area's (EPA's) staff provided an update on the aquatic invasive species program. The presentation was recorded and will be available on the [AWC's YouTube page](#).

There was a discussion around the water licence transfer system that built on conversations during the business planning and project workshop in February 2025, the water availability engagement, and the recent Water Amendments Act. EPA will be looking for input from AWC members to help frame a workshop regarding increasing transparency on prices paid (if any) in water licence transfers while recognizing confidentiality and privacy.

Kate Rich, ADM of EPA, will continue as AWC president for a new two-year term, ending at the end of 2027.

The board received information updates on the Artificial Intelligence Applications for Water Management project, the Updating the Guide for Building Resilience to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta project, AWC sector updates, the executive director's report, and the Clean Air Strategic Alliance's projects.

The next board meeting will be held June 11, 2026, in Lethbridge, along with a field tour the day prior.

Summary of Discussion

The board meeting was convened at 9:15 a.m.

1 Convene business meeting, introductions, and approve agenda

Dan Moore chaired the meeting and quorum was confirmed. An updated agenda was distributed prior to the meeting and adopted by consensus.

Decision 71.1: The board approved the agenda by consensus.

2 Administration

2.1 Announce the President

The executive committee agreed Kate Rich should continue as president for a new two-year term, ending at the end of 2027.

There was no decision required on this item.

2.2 Approve summary report from the October 23, 2025, board meeting

The summary was included in the briefing package. Minor edits were submitted to staff and incorporated into the summary prior to distribution. There were no further questions or revisions.

Decision 71.2: The board approved the October 23, 2025, board meeting summary by consensus and it will be posted to the website.

2.3 Review actions from the last meeting

A written update on the action items was included in the briefing package. There were no questions or comments on this item.

3 Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team

Steph Neufeld from the Alberta Lake Management Society provided a presentation on the completed work of the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data Project Team along with requests to approve the final deliverables and disband the project team.

The project started in 2021. Early stages of the project involved presenting on the tool (The Healthy Rivers Ecosystem Assessment System, or THREATS) and the need for it in a general effort to gather support for the project to inform funding applications. The project was awarded a \$200,000 grant from Alberta Innovates to fund the web tool development once matching funds that were previously allocated to AWC by EPA and significant in-kind contributions were committed to the project.

The next step involved working with the consultant (Greenland) to develop the tool. The goal was to build on existing features (adding data and analytical tools) within THREATS to support risk assessment for SWP planning and expanding the tool to cover all of Alberta. Data and

features were added for watershed delineation, land use, water quality and quantity, and other areas.

Once the tools and data were added, feedback was collected through several demonstration and training sessions. The primary feedback was that the tool needed to be more user-friendly. The remaining efforts focused on improving the THREATS user interface and providing instructions and tutorials to help new users navigate THREATS. The team also prepared written content for the AWC website with general information on SWP planning and THREATS; a short summary video on these topics is also being developed and will be posted to online.

There were three recommendations focused on keeping the tool updated and supporting its continued use. In brief the recommendations were to:

- form a working group to plan and implement an education-focused project to raise awareness of THREATS and train potential users on its use
- form a data committee to meet a few times per year to compile and manage data requests for THREATS and encourage others who have water data to upload it to DataStream
- write a letter to EPA to support their initiative to connect the Water Quality Data Portal to DataStream.

Financial support for the project was provided by EPA and Alberta Innovates. EPCOR will also provide support for ongoing maintenance costs.

Discussion

- **Q:** How does THREATS differ from Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute's (ABMI) footprint tool?
 - **A:** It's similar. THREATS uses ABMI data, but THREATS doesn't do future projections but instead looks at historical scenarios of land use data.
- Over the long term, the vision should be to get the tool in front of municipalities (e.g., Alberta Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of Alberta) in every basin as these tools and data are critical for them.
- **Q:** When will the board discuss how the recommendations might proceed (i.e., when will the committee and working group be formed)?
 - **A:** We are looking at sequencing them, while also keeping in mind staff capacity with existing projects. Currently, the plan is for the data committee to be formed in June. The committee is expected to be minimal work as they would only meet a handful of times per year. The communications/engagement project would depend on when current projects are completed. The project should start sooner than later since AWC/EPA and EPCOR are paying for maintenance costs in the meantime; we are aiming for an October start if all goes well.
- **Q:** This is a province wide tool. For the engagement, is the intent to begin in a targeted geography then expand wider?
 - **A:** SWP plans are in place in various watersheds across the province. The large municipalities already have SWP plans and THREATS has been used widely within the North Saskatchewan watershed in particular. Ultimately, it's the same type of data that's needed for all watersheds, so there are no barriers

- associated with starting in one watershed or another; it's open to whoever needs to develop a SWP plan and who has the resources to undertake the work.
- There was some discussion about how the ongoing costs of the tool could be supported (e.g., grants, user fees, MOUs).
 - People are continually adding to the tool over time based on their needs. THREATS can be customized for specific purposes, and they could fund Greenland directly to add functions that they need.
 - We need to be able to show that people are using the tool to justify continued funding of it.
 - Long-term funding will need to be resolved eventually but more work and planning is needed.
 - **Q:** How long would it take to use THREATS to develop a SWP plan?
 - **A:** THREATS can be used to bring the data together and analyze it. Basic analysis could be done in a full day or so, but you would still need an expert to interpret the data (e.g., is the risk high or low, how does it compare to historical data), which would take additional time and is the more difficult step.

Decision 71.3: The board approved the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data report and recommendations, including the communications plan.

Decision 71.4: The board approved disbanding the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data project team.

As the board approved all the recommendations, a statement of opportunity to form the engagement working group will be brought forward for the board to approve later in 2026, and terms of reference to form the data committee will be brought for board approval in June 2026.

4 Information Presentation: Aquatic Invasive Species Program Update

Nicole Kimmel, Aquatic Invasive Species Specialist with EPA, provided an update on the provincial aquatic invasive species (AIS) program.

Highlights from the presentation were as follows:

- Several changes to the *Fisheries (Alberta) Act* have taken place with regards to AIS; the most recent with mandatory inspections during the summer for all watercraft upon entry from the east and south provincial borders. Fines were increased for bypassing inspection stations.
- Invasive mussels continue to be Alberta's top threat; while there are no established invasive mussels, the risk is growing. Invasive mussels have become more widespread across Canada and the USA; monitoring and inspections in Alberta are ongoing to track their presence in the province.
- An AIS Taskforce was initiated in 2024, including experts from key stakeholder groups to prevent establishment of AIS in Alberta, focused on mussels. Annual watercraft passes and proof of inspection stickers were put in place to generate revenue to support the AIS program and demonstrate inspection compliance. Other initiatives include dip tanks, mandatory inspection enhancements at the east and south borders, advocating at the federal level to increase availability of pesticides, eDNA monitoring,

implementing existing AIS response plans, and conducting invasive mussel response training exercises.

- Education and outreach on AIS have been conducted, including billboards at key locations, digital highway signs on long weekends, better signage at borders regarding mandatory watercraft inspections, and one-pagers with general information on AIS.
- EPA continues to monitor emerging AIS including mussels, invertebrates, fish, and plants.
- There are still behaviours that future efforts will be directed at for improvement including lack of or poor “Clean, Drain, Dry” practices, intentional release of AIS, live transfer of AIS, and failing to “pull the plug” in transport.

Discussion

- **Q:** Regarding the partner approach for sampling, is that supposed to be WPACs?
 - **A:** We have an existing partnership network through a project with the University of Alberta and intend to maintain that this year. We’ll hopefully build out partnerships further after this year which could include WPACs.
- **Q:** Has there been discussion around targeting retailers such as boat sellers and the aquarium industry?
 - **A:** We have been working with the Alberta Invasive Species Council, and they have been working with retailers to educate them of people releasing invasive species at time of sale. There has been success with smaller retailers, but larger retailers are an area we’re looking to make progress.
- **Q:** One challenge regarding controls for invasive species is that we read recommendations from the Government of Alberta (GoA) on what to use and then we get challenged federally or by the public and there is uncertainty as to whether we can proceed with those controls or not. Technicians read the directions on the GoA website, and they assume there are no repercussions with following them. Is there a way we can get a more consistent answer on what controls should be used for different species?
 - **A:** Management is very site-specific. We can lay out best management practices, but nuance can happen that changes the practices. Our general suggestion is to contact GoA staff to assist where possible.
- **Q:** How is whirling disease doing – is it spreading or is it contained? And, have there been any recent economic assessments on the costs of its management? There was an old estimate of \$75 million per year.
 - **A:** There is more information coming soon on the state of whirling disease. The \$75 million came from a 2013 provincial assessment. There was an assessment done for Lake McGregor specifically around the time of the pandemic that estimated \$289 million for that one system (not province-wide), so the cost estimates are significantly higher now.
- **Q:** There is discussion of stations being set up at the eastern and southern borders of the province, but why not the west?
 - **A:** British Columbia has a robust inspection program, so we treat the western border as low risk.
- **Q:** Does the general population understand the risk of what we are trying to mitigate?
 - **A:** We are trying to make those connections but there is a lot of work to do. The watercraft annual pass engagement highlighted some knowledge gaps for the public that we are now working on.

- Boat licences are mostly about safety and less about risks to water sources, including AIS.
 - The federal government is overhauling the pleasure craft registry system. We are trying to get AIS included as part of when they register their watercraft.
- An AWC member has met with Premier and emphasized the importance of the recommendations from the AIS Taskforce to be implemented and that adequate funding be available to maintain monitoring and enforcement efforts moving forward. There was a suggestion by Premier that sectors who are concerned demonstrate broad support for that initiative with a letter to Minister Hunter and to cc her as the issue was not getting much attention. AWC should write a letter indicating that the threat of AIS is of concern and ensure that we have a strong prevention and enforcement, including monitoring. A second request is individuals and organizations write a similar letter to help secure AIS funding efforts.
 - **Q:** Would the letter come from the board or executive committee?
 - **A:** A letter signed by Andre would be sufficient, but it would need an explanation of what the AWC is so that it adequately represents the board and sectors.
 - **C:** Due to the nature of the letter and the intended recipients, EPA should be noted as recusing themselves.

Action 71.1: Andre to write a letter to GoA on behalf of the board noting that aquatic invasive species is an issue of concern for AWC members.

5 Water Licence Transfer System Discussion

This item was a continued discussion around the water licence transfer system that built on conversations during the business planning and project workshop in February 2025, EPA’s water availability engagement, and Water Amendment Act (formerly Bill 7). An information sheet was circulated in the supplementary package.

Bill 7 received royal assent in December 2025 and is not yet proclaimed. Once proclaimed, the amendments come into effect, including the change to disclosure of financial information for water transfers. EPA will not have a policy ready around disclosing prices paid for transfers when the amendments come into force and is looking for input to determine what the policy might look like.

EPA is planning broader engagement on the policy in the spring or early summer to help frame a workshop regarding increasing transparency on prices paid (if any) in water licence transfers. This could include what financial information could be collected, how it could be aggregated, and how could it be reported publicly, while recognizing confidentiality and privacy.

EPA will be requesting input from AWC members who have experience with water transfers on the design of an engagement forum. EPA will contact members through Andre. Due to the sensitive nature of the information that could be discussed, this initiative would not follow the AWC’s project team process nor involve use of any AWC funds or staff.

Discussion

- **Q:** For the public review, what is the objective? Is the intent to reduce transaction costs, or are there other objectives that might drive how this discussion goes?

- **A:** The main purpose is to improve overall water availability and streamline the water licence transfer process. We are seeking feedback on what information should be collected by EPA to inform policy design.
- **Q:** AWC is a good place to start with scoping but guardrails around what the ideal outcome is would be helpful so that sectors have the right people participate (e.g., financial disclosure versus access to infrastructure).
 - **A:** We are focused on financial elements which may not be strictly cash-based.
- **Q:** The idea is that through financial disclosure there is more water availability?
 - **A:** The amendments coming are to enhance water availability, including providing information publicly that would inform the decisions of water licence holders.
 - Water licences are becoming a commodity in certain areas. The transfers are something that licence holders have lots of interest in.
- Members of the industry caucus and government caucus expressed support and desire to participate, as there is a need to understand and navigate the water licence transfer system, and interest in helping increase the transparency and ability to work in that system to support water availability moving forward.

6 Information Reports and Opportunity for Questions

6.1 Executive Director's Report

The executive director's report was included in the briefing package.

There were no questions or comments on this item.

6.2 AWC Sector Updates

The AWC sector update report was provided in the briefing package and posted on the AWC's SharePoint.

There were no questions or comments on this item.

6.3 Updating the Guide for Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought in Alberta Project Team Update

The update report was provided in the briefing package.

Discussion

- **Q:** Prior to approving the Terms of Reference, the board had asked that more inclusive wording be used in the scope to ensure other users such as Indigenous communities are included. Is that reflected in the group's work?
 - **A:** This is something the WPACs raised early on, and we intend to fulfill the expanded scope as laid out in the terms of reference by working with existing connections to Indigenous communities and others. The Guide is also not intended for exclusive WPAC delivery which is guiding the team to ensure it is a broadly accessible document.

6.4 Artificial Intelligence Applications for Water Management Project Team Update

The update report was provided in the briefing package.

There were no questions or comments on this item.

6.5 Clean Air Strategic Alliance Project Updates for the AWC Board

The update report was provided in the briefing package.

There were no questions or comments on this item.

New or other business

Discussion

- The Land Stewardship Centre grant program was recently defunded.
 - There are many other stewardship groups still active and funded; GoA maintains a list of organizations involved in stewardship and intends to champion and support them. That list can be shared if there is interest.
- The board agreed with a plan to have the June field tour be limited to the afternoon instead of a full day to allow for travel, and to hold the evening event in Edmonton this fall.

An evaluation survey will be sent to board members following the meeting.

The next board meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2026, in Lethbridge, along with a field tour the day prior. There will be an option for board members to attend the board meeting virtually via MS Teams.

The board meeting adjourned at 11:43 p.m.

Attachment 1: Meeting #71 Attendees

In Attendance (all on Teams)

Italics indicate the representative is an alternate for their sector when the director was present.

AWC Directors and Alternates

Bill Chapman, Government (Small Urban)
Brian Deheer, NGO (Environmental)
Dan Moore, Industry (Forestry)
Doug Kaupp, NGO (WPACs)
Emily Jobson, Industry (Oil and Gas)
Jamie Wuite, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation)
Janelle Sandboe, Government (Small Urban)
Jason Unger, NGO (Environmental)
Jay White, NGO (Lake Environment
Conservation)
Jeff Shipton, Industry (Forestry)
Josh Bishop, Government (Rural)
Kate Rich, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Environment and Protected Areas)
(arrived at 11:00)

Lesley Peterson, NGO (Fisheries Habitat
Conservation)
Margo Jarvis Redelback, Industry (Irrigation)
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)
Robyn Saude, GoA and Provincial Authorities
(Environment and Protected Areas)
Stephanie Neufeld, NGO (Lake Environment
Conservation)
Andre Asselin, Executive Director (ex-officio)

Presenters:

Stephanie Neufeld, Alberta Lake Management Society (Item 3.0)
Nicole Kimmel, Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (Item 4.0)

Observers:

Bianca Vong, Canada Water Agency

AWC Staff:

Alec Carrigy, Katie Duffett, Katrina Calon

Absent with Regrets:

Janice Linehan, Industry (Mining)
Jeanette Sarac, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Health)
John Conrad, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation)
Lindsay McBlane, NGO (Wetlands Conservation)
Vicki Lightbown, GoA and Provincial Authorities (Science and Research)

Attachment 2: Meeting #71 Decision Log and Action Items

Decisions

Decision 71.1: The board approved the agenda by consensus.

Decision 71.2: The board approved the October 23, 2025, board meeting summary by consensus and it will be posted to the website.

Decision 71.3: The board approved the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data report and recommendations, including the communications plan.

Decision 71.4: The board approved disbanding the Source Water Protection Phase I: Risk Assessment Tools and Data project team.

Action Items

Action 71.1: Andre to write a letter to GoA on behalf of the board noting that aquatic invasive species is an issue of concern for AWC members.