

ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT 2004 – 2005

About the Alberta Water Council

The Alberta Water Council (AWC) is a multi-stakeholder partnership with members from four broad categories: Government of Alberta and provincial authorities, other governments, industry, and non-government organizations. All stakeholders have a vested interest in water. The AWC reports directly to the Minister of Environment.

Using a consensus-based approach, the Council brings together the expertise and experience of its members to oversee implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy and support achievement of the strategy's outcomes, namely:

- i. safe, secure drinking water supply,
- ii. healthy aquatic ecosystems, and
- iii. reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

While the Council will provide guidance, the Government of Alberta remains accountable for the implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy, and continues to oversee water and watershed management activities throughout the province.

About this Report

Council members held their first meeting in August 2004. This annual report reviews the Council's activities and progress from then to August 2005, and describes plans and direction for the coming year. More detailed documents and other information about the Council are available online at <http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/index.html>.

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Highlights

The Alberta Water Council focused much of its attention this first year on building good working relationships among sectors, strengthening partnerships with other agencies, and identifying priority areas for Council attention and activity. This work was carried out in the context of the Council's goals and key focus areas.

Council members met six times this year, working hard to broaden their knowledge and establish a common understanding of water issues in Alberta. As part of these efforts, members participated in five tours directly related to one or more of the three goals of the *Water for Life* strategy. The tours enabled members to see first-hand some of the challenges and approaches to water use and management in various sectors. Complementing the tours, members also received ten presentations on a variety of water-related topics for Alberta.

Other highlights of the Council's first year are described in this report, and include the following:

- Production of the first review report on implementation progress of the *Water for Life* strategy. The Council views *Water For Life* as a shared responsibility and a high priority for the Province and its citizens. Progress has occurred on all elements of the strategy, and Council proposed that for the next year, fundamental components under each of the strategic directions should be identified and pursued.
- Formation of working groups and project teams to consider specific areas in detail and make recommendations to Council. In addition to the Council's Reporting Team, which oversaw production of the review report and this annual report, teams worked on wetland policy; water efficiency, productivity and conservation; and water research. Recommendations are expected in all three of these areas in the next year or so. Council expects that additional teams will be formed as new issues are identified.
- Commitment to undertake a strategic planning session in the fall of 2005 to develop a longer-term strategy and set of priorities, including the preparation of a three-year business plan.



Evolution of the Alberta Water Council

Bow River Basin Council



The *Water for Life* strategy is an opportunity to transform the province's water management challenges into world-class solutions.

Background and Mandate

Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy was released in November 2003, following extensive consultation with Albertans.¹ The strategy expresses a philosophy of shared responsibility and identifies the need to engage all Albertans in managing the province's watersheds. It lays out three goals for sustainability:

- Safe, secure drinking water supply
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems
- Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy

To help guide and measure success in achieving these three goals, the strategy described a number of short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes, as well as a range of actions. Proposed actions to meet the goals support the strategy's three key directions:

- Knowledge and research
- Partnerships
- Water conservation

The *Water for Life* strategy reflects Albertans' interest in and concern about water management, and is an opportunity to transform the province's water management challenges into world-class solutions. It also stresses the need for shared responsibility in managing and using water wisely.

The strategy identified a number of important actions for the Government of Alberta, including the formation of a multi-stakeholder provincial water board. In response, the Minister of Environment created the Alberta Water Council (AWC) in May 2004.² The Council is one of three types of partnerships that are working together to make recommendations to the government, stakeholders and the public on improving water management throughout the province.³

The AWC's primary task is to monitor and steward implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy. The Council was also directed to advise the Alberta Government, stakeholders and the public on effective water management practices and solutions to water issues, and to advise on priorities for water research. Where there is consensus, the Council may also advise on government policy and legislation. The Government of Alberta, however, remains accountable for strategy implementation, and continues to oversee water and watershed management activities throughout the province.

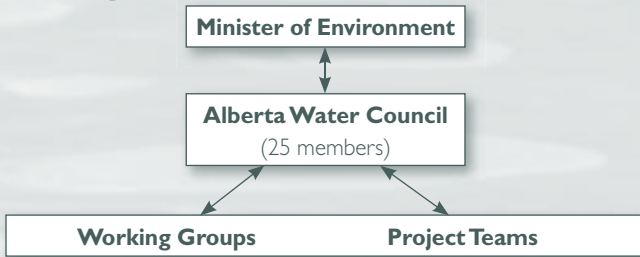
¹ The strategy is online at <http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/>.

² The AWC was created under Ministerial Order 10/2004. The Provincial Water Advisory Council proposed in the *Water for Life* strategy was renamed the Alberta Water Council.

³ The other two partnerships are Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, and Watershed Stewardship Groups.

Structure and Operations

The Alberta Water Council operates by consensus and in accordance with its terms of reference.⁴ The multi-stakeholder nature of the AWC is critical to its success. Twenty-five groups and agencies are represented on the Council, reflecting diverse interests in water use and management. The Council's structure and reporting relationships are shown below.



The Council is guided by an executive committee, which consists of the Council Chair (that is, the Deputy Minister of Alberta Environment) and one representative from each of the other three broad categories. The members in each broad category select their representative, who serves for a one-year term. The Council chair also chairs the executive committee. Working groups are formed when the Council decides that more detailed activity is needed in an area. The working group scopes the issue, recommends how it could be addressed, and prepares terms of reference for a project team. A project team then investigates the issue and prepares a report and recommendations to Council. All Council activities are supported by a secretariat based in Alberta Environment.

All sectors have agreed to work cooperatively to achieve the Council's goals, and all members have committed to a set of guiding principles. AWC members, individually and collectively, are guided in their activities by a desire to be:

- **Trustworthy:** Council will earn public trust as an independent advisory body to government, stakeholders and the public, supported by credible data and information.
- **Fair:** All types of water use are legitimate. Council will not be sector-biased.
- **Transparent:** Council will be visible and accessible with established processes to bring issues forward and to communicate Council activities.

- **Timely:** The Council will respond to priority issues in a timely fashion.
- **Innovative:** The Council will bring together expertise and experience to find the best solutions to provincial water management issues.

The AWC's working groups and project teams are guided by these principles and also use consensus to make decisions. Building consensus is the shared responsibility of all participants who work collaboratively to craft decisions that best meet their respective interests.

Although the Council operates at arm's length from Government, its activities are presently funded through Alberta Environment, and all financial management responsibilities for the Council's operations rest with the department. The intention is to establish the Council as an independent standalone organization.

Building consensus is the shared responsibility of all participants who work collaboratively to craft decisions that best meet their respective interests.

⁴ The terms of reference and other documents describing the AWC's operations are listed in the "Other Resources" section of this report.



Building a Foundation

With their varied interests and backgrounds, Council members worked hard during their first year to broaden their knowledge and establish a common understanding of water management issues in Alberta. As part of this process, several members organized and hosted field trips for Council to learn about their sector's use and management of water. A number of speakers also shared their knowledge and expertise with the Council on a wide range of topics. The tours and presentations very effectively illustrated the complexities and interrelationships among the goals and key directions in the *Water for Life* strategy, and helped members better understand the challenges involved in sustainable management and use of water resources.

Council members gained a better understanding of the goals in the *Water for Life* strategy by closer looks at wetlands, water and wastewater treatment facilities, aquatic habitats, oil sands activities and irrigation. Likewise, presentations covered a wide range of topics, from Alberta's program to protect drinking water quality to water use by the energy sector and the water management issues facing First Nations in northern Alberta. Members also heard about partnership opportunities with Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils and provincial agencies such as the Alberta Science and Research Authority.



Council Achievements and Progress

The Council focused much of its attention this first year on building good working relationships among sectors, strengthening partnerships with other agencies, and identifying priority areas for Council attention and activity. This work was carried out in the context of the goals and key focus areas.

Goals

The Council's terms of reference contain the following six goals:

1. Steward implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy.
2. Provide advice to government, stakeholders and the public on water issue priorities and policies.
3. Be an advocate for education and awareness.
4. Be an advocate for water conservation (productivity and efficiency).
5. Be a catalyst for collaboration.
6. Advise government, stakeholders and the public on provincial research priorities.

Key Focus Areas

Given the size of its task, the Council identified key focus areas that aligned with its goals and allowed members to concentrate their work in areas where early progress would be most valuable. These key focus areas are:

- Wetland policy
- Water research
- Water use efficiency, productivity and conservation
- Supporting work of the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils
- Developing a longer-term strategy and set of priorities
- Communications and marketing
- Describing Council's stewardship role and what that entails

During this first year, multi-stakeholder teams were formed to work on the first three areas: a wetland policy, water research strategy, and water use efficiency and productivity; their activities are described in more detail on pages 8 – 10. A strategic planning session in September 2005 will look at all key focus areas, with particular attention on the remaining four. This session will be Council's first step in the development of a three-year business plan.

The Council focused much of its attention this year on building good working relationships among sectors, strengthening partnerships with other agencies, and identifying priority areas for Council attention and activity.

Goals I

Progress Toward Achieving the AWC's Goals

1. Steward implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy

The AWC prepared its first annual review of implementation progress of the *Water for Life* strategy for release in the fall of 2005. This first review was general and conceptual in nature, and was intended to provide a perspective on the purpose and scope of the *Water For Life* strategy as well as reviewing implementation progress for the first year. These review reports will be more detailed in future years as specific initiatives in the strategy develop. The Council views *Water For Life* as a shared responsibility and a high priority for the Province and its citizens. The review noted that progress has been made on all elements of the strategy, and Council proposed that for the next year, fundamental components under each of the strategic directions should be identified and pursued. This will help ensure, in the midst of the many initiatives currently underway, that momentum builds over the short term.

2. Provide advice to government, stakeholders and the public on water issue priorities and policies

One of Council's first priorities was in the area of wetlands. The development of a wetland policy and implementation plan was identified as a key action in the *Water for Life* strategy to help achieve the goal of healthy aquatic ecosystems. The new wetland policy will supersede interim policies from 1993, to form a comprehensive wetland policy for the province. Council approved terms of reference for a multi-stakeholder project team to lead the development of policy recommendations and consult Albertans in the process.

3. Be an advocate for education and awareness

The *Water for Life* strategy noted the need to ensure that all Albertans are aware of water issues and have the knowledge and tools to make effective management decisions. Council members support the need for increased education and awareness about water issues and actions that individuals can take. During this first year, a number of Council members have undertaken education and outreach to their own stakeholders and other Albertans by addressing meetings and conferences, preparing articles for newsletters, and speaking to the media about the work of the Council and water issues in general. Opportunities for raising awareness will expand as the Council's work in other areas proceeds and as various products and tools are developed. At the same time, Council members recognize that other stakeholders also have considerable experience in developing and delivering education and awareness programs, and a valuable role for the Council could be to promote these programs and products.

4. Be an advocate for water conservation (productivity and efficiency)

Water conservation was one of the three key directions in the *Water for Life* strategy. Many watersheds are facing substantial water demands and associated concerns about future capacity to maintain aquatic environments and support economic activity and population growth. Albertans recognize the importance of conservation as well as the need to improve both productivity and the efficiency with which water is used. The Council advanced its work in this area by forming a working group to scope the issue and develop terms of reference for a project team.



2

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5

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5. Be a catalyst for collaboration

Although watershed issues and challenges vary from region to region, it is important to have a consistent planning structure across the province to address the management of these issues. As well, many of the same tools and approaches can be applied in search of solutions for any watershed. Alberta Water Council members encourage their stakeholder organizations to actively participate in Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) and Watershed Stewardship Groups as they form throughout the province. The Council has made supporting the work of WPACs a key focus area and will identify potential partnership opportunities and ways to effectively liaise with WPACs as part of its strategic planning process.

6. Advise government, stakeholders and the public on provincial research priorities

Knowledge and research was one of the three key directions in the *Water for Life* strategy, with information and knowledge of Alberta's water resource being identified as the most critical element in managing water effectively. The Council recognizes that sound science and a comprehensive informational database are critical elements for effective decision making and future water management programs. This area was also an early priority for the Council, as it asked the Alberta Science and Research Authority, in collaboration with Council members and Alberta Innovation and Science, to develop a water research strategy that would support the successful implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy. Council has received regular updates on preparation of the research strategy and expects to receive a draft for discussion in the fall of 2005.

Albertans recognize the importance of conservation as well as the need to improve both productivity and the efficiency with which water is used.

Since the late 1800s, Alberta has lost about 64% of its slough and marsh wetlands in the White (settled) Area due to human activity.





Working Groups and Project Teams

Working groups and project teams are where much of Council's substantive work is done. Like the Council itself, each of these multi-stakeholder bodies makes decisions by consensus.

Project teams may be established by the Council to investigate, provide information and make recommendations on particular water issues. When the AWC decides that more detailed work is needed in an area, it forms a working group to scope the issue and recommend how it could be addressed. This typically involves preparing terms of reference for a project team to investigate the issue thoroughly and come back to Council with a report and recommendations. At the end of its first year of operations, Council had working groups and project teams active in four areas:

- Council Reporting
- Wetland Policy
- Water Use Efficiency and Productivity
- Water Research

Working groups and project teams include a mix of Council members and others who have specific knowledge and experience to contribute. These other members are identified by their sector's member on the Council. The activities and progress of these groups are described below.

Council Reporting

To ensure efficiency in the reporting process, Council formed a Reporting Project Team to oversee production of two key documents: this annual report and the first review report on implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy. The Council must prepare both of these reports every year, and expects that this team will be reconvened for the same tasks in 2005 – 2006.

The review report involved a preliminary assessment by Council members of the Government's report on implementation progress; these comments were provided to Alberta Environment and, to the extent possible, were addressed in the Government's progress report.⁵ With this and other Council input, the Reporting Project Team, led by its chair, Ron Pearson, prepared a draft assessment of the Government's implementation report for discussion by the full Council. Members gave the team additional direction for incorporation into a final draft review report, which is expected to be approved at Council's September 2005 meeting and released shortly thereafter.

⁵ This report will be released in fall 2005 and available via the Council's website at <http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/index.html>.

Wetland Policy

Since the late 1800s, Alberta has lost about 64% of its slough and marsh wetlands in the White (settled) Area due to human activity. Current rate of loss is about 0.5% per year. Government and Albertans alike have expressed concern about continued wetland loss and in 1993 the provincial Cabinet approved a wetland management policy for the settled areas of Alberta. A draft policy for the non-settled areas was also released in 1993, and efforts were made to combine the policies in 1994. Following the passage of a new Water Act in 1999, work began again to develop a wetland policy. Government and other organizations have been active in wetland policy issues and this topic was a good fit with the Alberta Water Council's mandate.

The Wetland Policy Project Team was formed in May 2005. The primary task of this team is to work with other government and non-government stakeholders and, in consultation with Albertans, develop a wetland policy and implementation plan that Council can approve and recommend to the Government of Alberta.

Led by co-chairs Jonathan Thompson and Ian Rudland, the team began the first stage of its work in the summer of 2005. This involved collecting and reviewing information, legislation and policies; identifying key wetland issues; reviewing approaches to wetland conservation; and identifying outstanding information gaps. Albertans will be consulted early in the process to get their input, and again to respond to a draft policy and implementation plan. The team aims to have a draft policy and implementation plan ready for Council review by mid-2006.

Water Use Efficiency and Productivity

The *Water for Life* strategy identified the need to improve efficiency and productivity of water use by 30% from 2005 base levels by 2015. The task of confirming how provincial progress toward the target should be measured and reported on was initially assigned to the Alberta Water Council. To explore options and tools for meeting the target, the Council formed the Water Use Efficiency and Productivity Working Group.

Under the leadership of chair David Hill, this group is working to develop a provincial water management approach that incorporates supply and demand information, required research, and water management practices to achieve the desired water conservation outcome. The approach will provide a framework within which WPACs and other stakeholders can develop watershed management plans for the various basins.

To provide a solid base for future work, the group is gathering information and scoping the subject area to clarify the meaning and relationships between efficiency, productivity and conservation. Anticipated priority areas for the coming year are to:

- Better understand the value of water and its contribution to quality of life
- Understand the data and information needs relative to efficiency and productivity
- Review and assess the relevant research underway on, and the potential use of: economic, policy and regulatory instruments; performance indicators of water use; and best management practices



Water Research

The Water Research Working Group was established to develop suggestions on how the Council should identify and advise on research priorities related to implementing the *Water for Life* strategy. Based on the recommendation of the working group, the AWC asked the Alberta Science and Research Authority (ASRA) to develop a water research strategy to support the successful implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy.

Working with Alberta Innovation and Science, ASRA is preparing a draft water research strategy for review and comment by the Alberta Water Council, Alberta Environment and other partners involved in implementing *Water for Life*. Linda Van Gastel, who represents ASRA on the AWC, is leading the group preparing the research strategy.

Developing a draft research strategy has involved:

- Establishing an ASRA steering committee to direct the strategy development process. Committee members were drawn from ASRA, AWC and other agencies with experience in water research and water management.
- Commissioning a study of the Alberta water research system. This study resulted in a high-level description of Alberta's water research capacity and activity and an analysis of its relationship to existing strategic approaches to water and water research (as described in *Water for Life* and government's other research strategies as they relate to water).
- Identifying immediate opportunities for advancing water research.
- Consulting with key water and research stakeholders to test and refine the assumptions and directions of the preliminary draft.

An Alberta Water Council priority will be review of the draft strategy in the fall of 2005, following which a final strategy will be prepared for recommendation to government.

Sound science and a comprehensive informational database are critical elements for effective decision making and future water management programs.



Irrigation Branch, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

Future Directions

The Council recognizes the high expectations that its stakeholders and Albertans have. The six overall goals in the AWC's terms of reference will continue to guide the Council's future work, as will the key focus areas, all of which contribute to advancing the primary goals of the *Water for Life* strategy. The Council's role is to monitor and steward implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy rather than become immersed in actual implementation, which is the role of others.

In addition to continuing its activities in the areas of wetland policy, and water efficiency, productivity and conservation, an early priority for the 2005 – 2006 year will be reviewing and finalizing a water research strategy to support the successful implementation of *Water for Life*.

As well, the Council will:

- Develop a longer-term strategy and set of priorities. The first step will be a strategic planning session in the fall of 2005, with the intent of creating a three-year business plan. As part of its strategic planning activities, Council will look at communications and marketing, including how the AWC can better communicate what is happening with respect to water use and management in Alberta through its electronic communications and its website.

- Encourage and support the formation of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, and develop closer working relationships with the existing WPACs. This will include leveraging sector involvement in the various WPACs. The Council will continue its efforts to develop tools (e.g., economic instruments) that support watershed planning for use by WPACs across the province.
- Provide advice on performance measures to evaluate implementation success of the *Water for Life* strategy.



Members of the Alberta Water Council and Its Teams

Members gave generously of their time and expertise to advance the Council's work during this foundational year. The following were Council members as of August 2005:

Broad category: Industry

Chemical and Petrochemical
Forestry
Irrigation
Livestock
Mining
Oil and Gas
Power Generation

Broad category: Non-Government Organization

Environmental
Fishery Habitat Conservation
Lake Environment Conservation
Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils
Wetland Conservation

Broad category: Government

Federal
First Nations
Large Urban
Metis Settlements
Rural
Small Urban

Broad category: Government of Alberta and Provincial Authorities

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Alberta Economic Development Authority
Alberta Energy
Alberta Environment
Alberta Health and Wellness
Alberta Science and Research Authority
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Representative⁶

Al Kennedy
Rick Denton
David Hill
Larry Nolan
Judy Smith
Kevin Stashin
Mike Kelly

Representative

Margaret Reine
Ron Pearson
Jay White
Bill Berzins
Jonathan Thompson

Representative

Jim Vollmershausen
Lisa King
Al Maurer
Gerald Cunningham (Ray Wanuch)
Bob Barss (Bart Guyon)
Richard Quail

Representative

John Knapp
(Tom Daniels)
Joe Miller (Ken Smith)
Peter Watson (Ron Hicks, Paul Pellis)
Nicholas Bayliss
Linda Van Gastel
Brad Pickering (Bob Fessenden)

The following people, in addition to a number of Council members, offered their time, effort and expertise in support of the Council's working groups and project teams during this first year; their contribution and that of their organizations is deeply appreciated.

Wendy Aupers, Bow River Basin Council
Brenda Austin, Alberta Energy and Utilities Board
Ron Bennett, Environment Canada
Diana Boylen, Natural Resources Canada
Richard Casey, Alberta Environment
Wally Chinn, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development
Wendy Devent, Oldman Watershed Council
Paul Fesko, City of Calgary
Bill Hunter, Alberta Science and Research Authority

Terry Kosinski, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Grant McIntyre, Alberta Science and Research Authority Secretariat
George Murphy, Alberta Environment
Grant Pearsell, City of Edmonton
Ian Rudland, Alberta Environment
Sherwin Shih, First Nations
Eldon Smith, Alberta Science and Research Authority
David Trew, Alberta Environment
Kevin Williams, Alberta Energy

The Council is grateful to several Alberta Environment staff who were instrumental in getting us started, in particular Bev Yee, Robert Harrison, and Sheri–Dawn Annett. Finally, the Council expresses its thanks to the secretariat, and others, who also helped launch and advance our work this year: Terry Sly, Kate Rich, Neil Wandler, Petra Rowell, Carol Mak, and Erin Gregg, all with Alberta Environment; Kim Sanderson with Green Planet Communications; and Bill McMillan, Equus Consulting Group.

⁶ Names in parentheses are individuals who stepped down during the year.

Other Resources

Many of the following resources are available online through the indicated websites. All other documents are available on request to the Council secretariat.

AWC operating documents (<http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/about.html>)

- Terms of Reference
- Consensus Decision-Making Process
- List of Council Members

AWC publications (<http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/publications.html>)

- Alberta Water Council Review Report: Implementation of Alberta's *Water For Life* Strategy, 2004/2005

Water for Life Strategy and Related Documents (<http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/index.html>)

- *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*
- *Report on Implementation Progress of Water for Life*
- *Enabling Partnerships: A Framework in Support of Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability.*
- *Framework for Water Management Planning*

Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Documents and Websites

- *The 2005 Report on the State of the Bow River Basin*, <http://www.brbc.ab.ca/issues2.asp>
- *State of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Report 2005*, <http://www.nswa.ab.ca/iwmp.html>
- Oldman Watershed Council website: <http://www.oldmanbasin.org/>

Other Alberta Resources and Websites

- *Balancing Act: Water Conservation and Economic Growth*, Canada West Foundation; http://www.cwf.ca/abcalcwf/doc.nsf/doc/news_012005.cm?Open
- *Irrigation in the 21st Century*, Alberta Irrigation Projects Association; http://www.aipa.org/21st_Century.html
- *South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan*; <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water/regions/ssrb/index.asp>
- *Watershed Stewardship Alberta: A Directory of Stewardship Groups, Support Agencies and Resources*; Alberta Stewardship Network; <http://www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca/>

Other Agencies and Websites

- Environment Canada; http://www.ec.gc.ca/water_e.html
- National Water Research Institute (Environment Canada), <http://www.nwri.ca/about-e.html>

Alberta Water Council

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