

FEBRUARY 2018

Annual *Water for Life* Partnerships Newsletter

ISSUE SEVEN



About this Newsletter

The Alberta Water Council (AWC)'s annual partnership newsletter highlights the successes of *Water for Life* partners over the past year. Building on the work of the Moving from Words to Actions Project Team, the newsletter helps increase awareness of *Water for Life* partnerships and the work being done in water management across Alberta.

Special thanks to the contributors: Government of Alberta, Land Stewardship Centre of Canada, Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society, Stewards of the Lac La Biche Watershed Society, the Elbow River Watershed Partnership, and the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition.

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About the *Water for Life* Partnerships

Water for Life: a strategy for sustainability is the Government of Alberta's guidance document for water management. The strategy was launched in 2003 and renewed in 2008, with an associated action plan released in 2009. The renewed strategy continues to identify partnerships as a key mechanism for achieving desired outcomes. Three types of partnerships were identified, at the local, regional, and provincial levels; these are [Watershed Stewardship Groups \(WSGs\)](#), [Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils \(WPACs\)](#), and the Alberta Water Council (AWC). The AWC provides a forum for sectors and *Water for Life* partners to discuss and find innovative solutions for water management issues. The *Water for Life* partnership system is composed of the AWC, 11 WPACs and approximately 140 WSGs. Partnerships typically include stakeholders representing governments, industries, and non-government organizations. At present, more than 1000 Albertans are working directly under the banner of *Water for Life*.



Message from Honourable Shannon Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks

Alberta is fortunate to have an abundance of fresh, clean water. However, many of us don't give much thought to the source of the water flowing through our taps and the competing demands on this valuable resource.

Population and economic growth are increasing our water demand, and factors such as pollution, drought, and climate change can affect the amount and quality of water available.

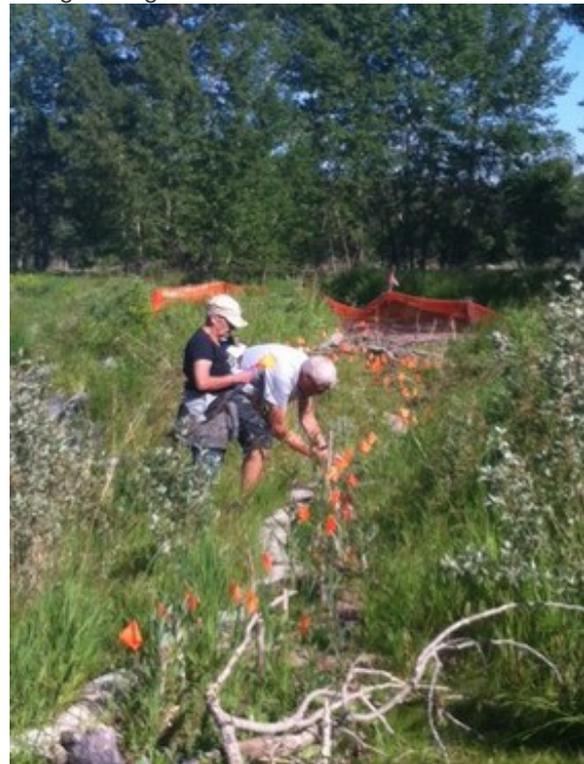
Last March, I announced \$750,000 per year in operational grant funding for three years to support the ongoing efforts of the Alberta Water Council to monitor and steward implementation of Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy.

With the release of three major reports over the last year, the Alberta Water Council continues to demonstrate that results are best achieved through effective partnerships and collaboration. We are seeing these results in the form of improved water use efficiency and productivity, better water literacy among Albertans, and stronger monitoring, planning, and management support for lake watersheds.

2018 may present its own unique water challenges. Whether these challenges are related to water quantity, water quality or ensuring the highest value use, we all must continue to make wise water choices with long-term sustainability in mind.

Friends of Fish Creek Seeking Partnerships to improve Restoration Project Success

Three million people visit [Fish Creek Provincial Park](#) each year and many of these visitors unintentionally damage streambanks by creating "desire trails" through riparian areas to access the creek. Since 2014, the Friends of Fish Creek have been working to improve riparian health by engaging volunteers and partner organizations in restoration and stewardship along damaged sections of streambank Fish Creek.



Restoration Monitoring Pilot (Photo by Friends of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Society)

Through this work, we have learned two big lessons,

Our government will do its part by working with the Alberta Water Council and our many *Water for Life* partners to help Albertans understand the importance of water to our communities, our ecosystems, and our economy. This is something I'm proud to champion as Minister of Environment and Parks.

Thank you for all that you do. May 2018 be another year of strong collaboration as we work to ensure Alberta's water resources are well managed for current and future generations.

Sincerely,
Shannon Phillips
Minister of Environment and Parks

Photo Credit: Alberta Water Council

Stewards of Lac La Biche Watershed Society

The vision for the [Stewards of Lac La Biche Watershed](#) (SLLBWS) was created in partnership with Living Lakes Canada and the Keepers of the Athabasca. The SLLBWS built its capacity by becoming a legal entity, created a representative membership, increased its profile in the community through outreach projects, and used this membership and presence to begin implementing the recommendations set out in the 2009 Lac La Biche Watershed Management plan, which contains a set of established, measurable goals for the stewardship of the watershed. This project addressed priority gaps in implementation of the Watershed Management Plan, focusing on the health of riparian areas and wetlands, water quality and water quantity data collection, and influencing the management of fisheries and wildlife. The group distributed 500 brochures and fact sheets, had 53 attendees at a workshop, and completed a shoreline clean-up. For more information go to <http://www.landstewardship.org/>



Sir Winston Churchill Park (Photo by the AWC)

both of which we are hoping to work towards by fostering future partnerships:

First, we learned that monitoring and maintenance of restoration sites is critical for the newly planted vegetation to take root and improve flood resiliency of riparian areas.

We are actively working with [Cows & Fish](#) to involve volunteers in the use of a riparian health assessment tool, allowing them to take a lead role in assessing riparian health and helping to prioritize future sites needing restoration support. If you have plant ID skills and are interested in getting involved with monitoring riparian projects in Fish Creek Provincial Park, please get in touch!



Restoration Monitoring-Hulls Wood (Photo by Friends of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Society)

Second, we have discovered that it is essential to provide durable access points where park visitors can safely access the creek without causing additional damage to the streambanks or to newly planted vegetation. If creek access is not officially provided, people will create their own paths, even if it means trampling through a signed restoration site.

In terms of integrating "durable creek access points" in each riparian restoration project, we are currently looking to make connections with individuals and organizations who have experience designing and building these structures as part of riparian bioengineering projects. Please get in touch with us if you have any experience with this or can connect us with someone who does!

Elbow River Watershed Partnership

To increase people's awareness and understanding of the watershed, [Elbow River Watershed Partnership](#) (ERWP) is continuing to provide the Freshwater Field Study Program. This partnership comprises of Kananaskis Region Environmental Education, the City of Calgary, and Rocky View County. The program is designed to increase watershed literacy, and give students hands on learning opportunities, such as learning how to measure water quality in a professional and scientific way, and to directly experience the headwaters of the Elbow and Bow rivers. Biology 20 students as well as students from grades 8, 9, school teachers, volunteers and program interns all learned how minimizing negative impacts on land uses help maintain water quality and quantity. During 2015 ERWP delivered their largest program in 11 years with over 2200 students and 284 volunteers participating, and 74 field programs being delivered to 27 schools including some First Nations schools. For more information go to <https://erwp.org/>

Beavers in Healthy Watersheds

Are you curious about the role beavers play in healthy watersheds? Recently, Alberta Environment and Parks' [Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program](#) (WRRP) hosted a webinar with Cows and Fish to share best practices in working with beavers to manage floods and droughts.

Some beaver basic's as presented by Cows and Fish include:

- 1) They modify channel geomorphology and hydrology
- 2) Increase retention of sediment and organic material
- 3) Create and maintain wetlands
- 4) Modify nutrient cycling
- 5) Modify and increase the riparian zone
- 6) Influence water quality downstream
- 7) Modify habitat



Beavers in Healthy Watersheds Webinar Cover

Article by Katie Baken, Friends of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Society

Photo Credits: Friends of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Society

Moving Beyond Mussels--the sky's the limit for the Aquatic Invasive Sp

Invasive mussels have been the poster child for Alberta's [Aquatic Invasive Species \(AIS\) program](#) since 2013. They continue to be a focus since an infestation would cost the province an estimated \$75 million annually, but they are just one of many invasive species that are a threat to Alberta's waters.

Goldfish, although cute as pets, can grow to the size of a dinner plate in stormwater ponds. These little fish can survive the winters in ponds with extremely poor water quality. Feeding on snails, fish eggs and anything else they can fit in their mouth, they are both a competitor and a predator to our native fish. These bottom feeders stir up mud, creating murky waters, which affect aquatic plant growth. In 2016 and 2017, projects to eradicate or control goldfish – especially in high risk ponds with connectivity to flowing water – were completed.



Goldfish removed from a stormwater pond in Okotoks, Alberta (Photo by the Government of Alberta)

Let's not forget about invasive plants, like flowering rush and Phragmites. Both overtake native plant habitat, reduce biodiversity and affect irrigation. In 2016, Phragmites was reported for the first time in Alberta, and was removed by hand until approved herbicides could be applied in 2017. Flowering rush has proven to be a different beast, with almost 5,000 new waypoints (patch or individual plant) found in 2017. We have been exploring control measures, both chemical and non-chemical, ever since it was discovered in 2011.

(Photo by the Government of Alberta)

Norine Ambrose, Executive Director with Cows and Fish shared some of the tools to help us understand and live with beavers.

The tools used to help landowners and managers work with beavers to enhance flood and drought resiliency include: pond levelers to maintain the water at a level that works for beavers and the landowner, beaver dam analog to encourage them to build dams in specific places and beaver exclusion fences so that they don't plug culverts. You can learn more about these tools and others by viewing the webinar: <https://youtu.be/TOHYFv3u5B0>

Stay tuned for WRRP's webinars in 2018 about natural approaches to flood and drought resiliency. If you want to learn about more contact Monique Dietrich with Alberta Environment and Parks at Monique.deitrich@gov.ab.ca

Article by Ruth DeSantis of the Government of Alberta.



Johnston Canyon, Banff (Photo by the AWC)



Invasive phragmites growing along the railway close to Brooks, Alberta (Photo by the Government of Alberta)

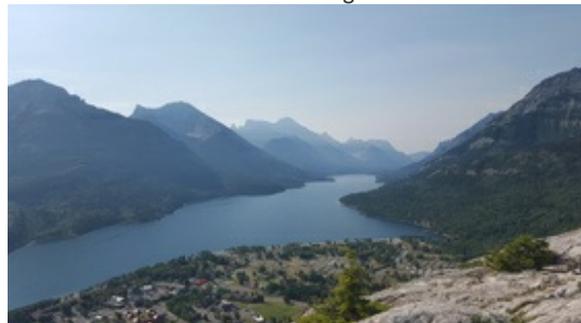
Although hard-to-see mussels on watercraft have been sniffed out by our conservation canines since 2015 and monitored by our AIS inspection team, our focus has been diversified to address additional threats to Alberta's waters. With the continuous threat of AIS introductions, management and control of invasive species will have to move beyond mussels.

Find more information on AIS in Alberta search "Aquatic Invasive Species Alberta".

Article by Janine Higgins, Government of Alberta

Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition

With a focus on the health and restoration of the Castle Wilderness, the [Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition](#) (CCWC) built on work done in previous years. CCWC continued with invasive plant removal in recognized areas of high use while continuing to reach new areas for monitoring and reclamation.



Waterton Lakes (Photo by the AWC)

The coalition's partnership is made up of Alberta Environment and Parks, Oldman Watershed Council, Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, Waterton Lakes National Park, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. The group removed 329 bags of weeds, and eight bags of garbage, and reported items that were too large to move to the MD of Pincher Creek, and Alberta Environment and Parks. They also participated in and hosted stewardship events and

hikes, engaging more than 750 people, encouraging a stewardship ethic and creating awareness on how to maintain a healthy watershed to sustain the headwaters and land. CCWC also attended forums on the West Slope Cutthroat Trout Recovery Plan, Crown of the Continent Roundtable, Aquatic Invasive Species, and Holding the Reins among others to share information and create new partnerships. For more information go to <http://ccwc.ab.ca/>

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