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The Waterfall

Director Profile: Jason Unger, Environmental Law Centre



Water law and policy has been Jason Unger's career focus for some time, having been called to the Alberta Bar in 2002 and then joining the Environmental Law

Centre not long after in 2005. Since then, he has focused his work on issues within the Water Act and related policy.

Joining the Alberta Water Council (AWC) as an environmental delegate for the Alberta Environmental Network was a natural fit for Jason. "Participation in the AWC allows one to bridge the silos we all typically work in and to forge relationships with others with interests in water policy and water management. From the start, it was apparent that there are many divergent perspectives and goals for managing water but without the forum that the AWC provides the potential to find mutually agreeable solutions becomes very unlikely."

There needs to be a voice for environmental policy deliberation, which is why Jason believes it is important to be involved in the work of the AWC. Consensus decision making is not a perfect solution, the "consensus models can go both ways." Consensus tables are often faced with difficult problems that can require bold and unpopular stances from participants. Those who have the final decision on the issue and are responsible for the implementation of policy are often not at the table, which can make reaching consensus difficult. But, when consensus is reached on an issue by all sectors, there is less of a political risk if the advice is implemented.

The need for effective water policy is also central to Jason's participation. "Our laws are typically very discretionary when it comes to protecting the environment and one way of addressing this discretion and the potential adverse effects resulting from decisions is to have effective policy," says Jason. If reaching consensus can lead to less risk, it can also lead to more action, as well as opening up discussions that are not likely to take place in more adversarial processes.

"The AWC has effectively changed the narrative around some water issues, including the need to measure, and monitor the productivity we get from water diversions and use." By joining the AWC, Jason is able to be part of the change, while bringing his interest and knowledge in the legal aspect of water conservation and preservation of the aquatic environment to the table. Through his work, and others who participate in the AWC board, project teams, and committees, the AWC has also been effective at highlighting some of the gaps in the regulatory system for effective protection of the aquatic environment.

For people who are joining the AWC for the first time, Jason's advice is to "Jump into it with both feet and be prepared to do some additional legwork in the process. Many issues dealt with by AWC committees are complicated and required significant amounts of deliberation by well-informed participants. They can be and are often

venues of tremendous learning. Something we all can benefit from."

Being proactive with water management can be a struggle, and in Jason's view, Alberta hasn't been proactive enough in with water quality, or quantity. "Whether from water quality or water quantity front, we tend to continue on an easy path of approving activities that degrade our environment until we have a problem. We are forced into a position of reacting rather than getting ahead of the problem." Going forward, Jason hopes to see this issue change. If the idea of sharing responsibilities of water resources is to be true, Alberta will need to ensure there is monitoring and planning capacity in place, and more importantly, a legal basis for shared governance of water resources.

The Confluence

Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought



The goal of the Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought project team is to develop a guide that will assist Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils to engage with municipalities and communities within their watershed. The guide will help plan, mitigate, respond to, and recover from multi-year droughts.

The project team has been meeting regularly since 2018 and has completed work on documenting lessons learned from previous droughts, impacts, and expected changes from climate change. They have also compiled existing drought management resources available in Alberta. Additionally, they completed 13 interviews with sector and stakeholder groups and compiled case studies from other jurisdictions.

The guide has completed the first round of sector engagement and is currently undergoing revisions and edits based on sector feedback. Discussions are underway about the pilot workshop to launch the guide with Battle River Watershed Alliance. More information will be available when the date of the workshop is confirmed.

Protecting Sources of Drinking Water



During the June meeting, an update was provided to the board by Phil Boehme from Alberta Environment and Parks. The team has synthesized source water protection (SWP) practices, processes, and risks for drinking water in Alberta and documented complementary source water-related initiatives. A jurisdictional scan has also been completed.

A guidance document has been developed and includes key factors for success. Successes, gaps, barriers, redundancies, best practices, and lessons learned that have been gathered from surveys, questionnaires, and literature reviews are also included

in a separate companion report.

Following sector engagement, the team is working to incorporate and address the feedback provided. A communications plan has been developed, and the team is looking to present the final guide to the board at the end of the year.

The team is looking at recommending a subsequent project to develop a toolkit and offer workshops to introduce the tools and provide training. A statement of opportunity is expected to come forward from the Government of Alberta to the board at the November meeting.

Water for Life Implementation Review Committee



Jason Unger from Environmental Law Center and Nancy Stalker from the City of Calgary presented an update to the board on the work of the committee. A minor change to the Terms of Reference was made to better align an objective to the committee's goal.

Round tables will be conducted with specific Government of Alberta staff, and with the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils. Additionally, an online survey was developed and distributed amongst AWC stakeholders from July to August to collect

sector input on the *Water for Life* implementation progress.

Water Pipes

AWC Launches a New Working Group

At the June 25 board meeting directors confirmed by consensus to establish a working group to develop terms of reference for a new project on Improving Resilience to Drought in Alberta Through a Simulation. In conjunction with the Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought nearing completion, the board voted on Drought Simulation to begin in the fall of 2019. The working group will present terms of reference to the board in November.

Upcoming Events

Interest-Based Conflict Resolution Training - October 8 and 9, 2019

AWC Board of Directors Evening Event - November 7, 2019

AWC Board of Directors Meeting - November 8, 2019

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