

North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

1999 Annual Report (DRAFT)

1.0 Introduction

It is the purpose of this report to describe the activities of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) undertaken during 1999. The report consists of four sections. Section Two highlights the historical activities leading up to the development of the NSWA in 1999. This section sets the basic principles upon which subsequent stakeholder contact and involvement as well as community based environmental initiatives have been and continue to be undertaken. Section Three highlights what was accomplished during 1999 and Section Four identifies and describes future opportunities and tasks that the NSWA is considering.

2.0 History of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA or Alliance) was started by a few "leading" stakeholders: EPCOR and Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC) with their funding partners Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), TransAlta and the City of Edmonton Drainage Branch.

The Alliance was formed out of two separate initiatives. EPCOR initiated the North Saskatchewan River Basin Group (NSRB) in 1997. TUC and their partners initiated the WATER Group in January 1999. The following describes the history of the two initiatives/groups that were formally merged in June 1999.

2.1 The EPCOR Initiative

In 1997, EPCOR's Watershed Protection Coordinator, retained consultants to assist the company in the development of a network of North Saskatchewan River stakeholders to encourage co-operative efforts and a buy-in for watershed protection. In particular, the consultants were asked to:

- "identify who may have a stake in the present and future state of the North Saskatchewan river watershed;
- contact these stakeholders and determine their attitudes, concerns, and potential position regarding watershed protection;
- document details of the meetings;

- assess EPCOR's reputation [and that of its subsidiary company of the time Aqualta] and how they would be perceived as leaders of watershed protection efforts in the North Saskatchewan watershed;
- develop a communication strategy for EPCOR's contact with these stakeholders in the future, with a goal towards their willing and enthusiastic involvement in watershed protection efforts;
- evaluate the potential (and associated timeline) for establishing a voluntary watershed partnership of all impacted stakeholders, including EPCOR [and its subsidiary at the time, Aqualta]; and
- help establish a positive reputation for EPCOR for all future communications and dealings with the stakeholders." (EPCOR, Request For Proposals, December, 1996.)

The incentive for this work grew from three main factors. These factors continue to influence the current and ongoing work of the NSWA. EPCOR believes that "protection of a water source is far more economical and effective than allowing development to occur and then relying upon mitigation, including water treatment, which is at best only partially successful." (EPCOR, December, 1996). EPCOR further believes that "the first step is to develop a network of North Saskatchewan River stakeholders to encourage cooperative efforts and buy-in for watershed protection." (EPCOR, December, 1996.)

These beliefs, coupled with the downsizing of Alberta Environment and subsequent reduction of the Department's capabilities to undertake river basin planning, the encouragement of the Department of other corporate entities to take a more active role in realizing their environmental responsibilities, and the responsibility of EPCOR Water Services to protect the source of potable water for the City of Edmonton and surrounding 40 communities, provided the basis for EPCOR to undertake the community relations initiative North Saskatchewan River Basin.

The initiative was not and is not meant to minimize the need for the City of Edmonton to continue to take steps to continue to improve its water management capabilities. In fact the initiative is a way in which EPCOR and the City of Edmonton's Drainage Branch can coordinate their respective responsibilities relative to the North Saskatchewan River.

EPCOR's interest in the North Saskatchewan Basin is not recent. Prior to the incorporation of EPCOR and the formation of its subsidiary Aqualta in 1996, its predecessor the Water Branch of the City of Edmonton's Public works, was undertaking monitoring work during the mid to late 1980's in the stretches of the North Saskatchewan Basin upstream of Edmonton. As well, during the 1970's and 1980's the City maintained contact with Alberta Environment's Planning Branch and its initiatives for river basin planning throughout the North Saskatchewan River Basin.

From February 1997 to December 1997, contact was made with stakeholders identified in the North Saskatchewan Basin. This initiative described in Appendix--- of this report, identifies the stakeholders and their interests in and

concerns associated with the North Saskatchewan River. All of these concerns and interests are intertwined with water quality management issues.

The results of the meetings with stakeholders individually and as a group in Drayton Valley in December 1997, indicated that the majority of them wanted to share information among themselves about what their concerns were relative to the North Saskatchewan River and the various steps they were taking to address these concerns. There was agreement among the stakeholders that the sharing of this information in an informal manner would contribute to better decisions being made about activities in the NSRB and hence improve the management of water quality in the river and its tributaries.

The stakeholders who were involved in this original initiative represented a cross section of interests – federal, provincial and municipal government agencies, agricultural and industrial activities and community based non-government organizations active in the preservation of cultural, recreational, and environmentally significant features of the NSRB. They did and continue to share an active interest in addressing the management of the North Saskatchewan's River water quality through a collaborative effort.

2.2 The Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC) Initiative

WATER (a Watershed Approach To Environmental Responsibility) was initiated by TUC and their partners in January 1999 as a means of addressing individual and cumulative impacts on the NSRB. The project aimed to promote public ownership and community stewardship of watershed resources in Alberta's portion of the basin by promoting awareness of existing stewardship activities, augmenting community-level program coordination and encouraging participation of key stakeholders in stewardship. The program is funded by PFRA, TransAlta Utilities and through the in-kind donations of the City of Edmonton Drainage Branch.

Several stakeholder groups formed a "Steering Committee" and met in December 1998 and March and May 1999. The WATER initiative hosted a conference that attracted 69 organizations and individuals interested in the NSRB in April 1999. After several presentations about watershed based programs, smaller groups discussed what other initiatives are active within the NSRB, measures of successful river basin initiatives, promotion of river basin stewardship and ways to improve stewardship efforts.

2.3 Group Merger and Result

In May and June of 1999 it became apparent that there were two similar groups of stakeholders in the NSRB who were starting to develop a collaborative approach to river basin stewardship and management. The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance was formed out of these two separate initiatives (described above). The two initiatives/groups were merged in June 1999 to increase efficiencies and networks in the NSRB and decrease overlapping of effort and subsequently for the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance.

The NSWA is an association of stakeholders from Alberta's portion of the NSRB who share a concern for the health of the land and water. The NSWA provides a forum for sharing information and experience about issues affecting the NSRB, and supports and initiates activities that positively impact river basin health.

In taking a river basin approach, the NSWA strives to involve the broadest possible range of stakeholders who share concern for the health of the NSRB. As of February 2000, the NSWA consists of 78 individuals from 60 different partner organizations across the NSRB in Alberta including municipal, provincial and federal governments, First Nations, special interest groups and industries. The NSWA has no membership fee; involvement is based on interest.

3.0 1999 Accomplishments

3.1 Group meetings

Five meetings were held from January 1999 to January 2000 as follows:

- January 1999 in Drayton Valley
- May 1999 in Devon
- June 1999 in Leduc
- September 1999 in Camrose
- January 2000 in Drayton Valley and Two Hills

The notes from these meetings are attached. During the meetings a number of the members shared information about the projects in which they were involved in their part of the North Saskatchewan River watershed and elsewhere for example, Stephen Stanley from the University of Alberta shared information about the Cryptosporidium/Giardia study currently underway in the NSRB, Kim Nielson shared information about the Rocky Riparian Group in Rocky Mountain House, Menno Homan shared information about the Bow River Basin Water Quality Council in the Bow River Basin in southern Alberta and Paul Hunt and Charles Labatiuk shared information about the River Water Quality Task force in the City of Edmonton. This information was also shared to give examples of how other similar groups are organized to manage water resources and issues in Alberta.

Other items discussed in the NSWA meetings included the implications of merging with the WATER and NSRB groups, and the development of the Basin Management Strategy that was adopted in principle by the NSWA in January 2000. Other items discussed included activities that should be implemented by the group, the need for a new group identity/name, group governance and the development of fact sheets, group member profiles and a NSWA website.

3.2 Group Membership

Through earlier meetings of the group in 1999, it became apparent that the Group wished to start involving other stakeholders that were located farther

downstream of Edmonton to establish a Basin-wide appreciation of issues and interests. In the spring and summer of 1999 a concentrated effort was given to contacting new “downstream” stakeholder representatives to build the group membership.

The following groups were contacted about the NSWA in this time period. Meeting notes recorded are appended.

Initial members:

- Alberta Environment
- Banff National Park
- Bow River Basin Water Council
- County of Leduc
- Energy and Utilities Board
- EPCOR
- Icefields Interpretive Centre
- M. D. Clearwater
- M.D. Brazeau
- Parkland County
- Pembina Institute
- Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site
- Town of Drayton Valley
- Town of Drayton Valley
- TransAlta Utilities
- Trout Unlimited Canada
- University of Alberta
- Weyerhaeuser

New stakeholder groups contacted:

- Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
- Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development*
- Alberta Cattle Commission*
- Alberta Conservation Association *
- Alberta Environment – other contacts in Parkland, Prairie, NE Boreal and NE Slopes regions
- Alberta Fish and Game Association*
- Alberta Lake Management Society*
- Alberta Municipal Affairs
- Alberta Recreation Canoe Association*
- Alberta Research Council*
- Alberta Urban Municipality Association
- Alexis First Nation
- AquaScience
- Beyond Books Institute (River Watch)
- Bow River Project
- Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers
- Capital Health Authority*
- Capital Region Sewage Commission*
- City of Camrose
- City of Edmonton Drainage Services*
- City of Edmonton, Planning Department*
- City of Lloyminster

- County of Camrose
- County of Ponoka
- County of Smoky Lake
- County of St. Paul*
- County of Thorhild*
- County of Two Hills*
- County of Vermillion River*
- County of Wetaskiwin*
- Cows & Fish Program
- Dixon Fish and Game Association*
- Ducks Unlimited*
- East Central Regional Health Authority*
- Edmonton Catholic Schools
- EduTransfer Design Association Inc.
- Energy Efficiency Association*
- Enoch First Nation*
- EnviroMak
- Environmental Law Centre
- Ermineskin Band
- Federation of Alberta Naturalists*
- FEESA*
- Fort Saskatchewan Regional Industrial Association
- Girl Guides of Canada
- Golder Associates
- Intensive Livestock Working Group
- Lakeland Regional Health Authority*
- Lamont County*
- Land Stewardship Centre*
- Northwest Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club*
- Nova Chemicals
- Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin
- Paul Band*
- River Valley Alliance*
- River Valley Rangers*
- RL&L Environmental Services
- Saddle Lake Tribal Administration*
- Samson Cree Nation
- Shell Canada
- Sierra Club of Canada*
- Soil and Water Conservation Association (Alberta)
- St. Mary's Irrigation District
- Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas*
- Strathcona County Environmental Operations*
- Sturgeon County*
- Sunchild First Nation
- Sundance Forest Products
- Sunpine Forest Products*
- Toxic Watch Society*
- Voyageur Ventures

In all cases the stakeholder groups contacted were interested and supportive of the initiative. Some of these groups however are unable to attend regular NSWA meetings. These groups requested that they receive meeting notes and project information only. These stakeholder groups are called the "outreach group." The main or primary group of stakeholders are those who regularly attend meetings and received information about the initiative on a regular basis. Primary stakeholders are marked with an asterisk (*).

3.3 Fact Sheets

To provide information about other watershed activities and programs available and/or taking place in the NSRB, the NSWA determined that fact sheets about these programs should be developed and made available to group members and other interested citizens. In 1999, 69 fact sheets about different watershed initiatives have been developed. A listing of these fact sheets is provided in the appendix.

The fact sheets are currently available to group members in hard or electronic copy and will be placed on the NSWA website when it is completed. This is an on-going activity of the NSWA and new programs are added as members become aware of them.

3.4 Profiles of group members

Several group members indicated that they needed to know more about who other members of the NSWA were and what their interests in the NSRB initiative might be. To respond to this need, the group decided to develop a listing of stakeholder group profiles which are brief paragraphs outlining the purpose and characteristics of the participating organizations and their interests in the NSRB initiative. To date several profiles have been collected from group members – a listing of organizations for which a profile exists is contained in the appendix. Like the fact sheets, this is an on-going activity as new groups become involved. Currently other member group profiles are being developed and collected. This information will also be available to other members and interested citizens in hardcopy format or may be accessed from the website.

3.5 NSWA Strategy Development

It was important to group members that a document be developed that would outline their mission and include specific goals, objectives and activities that would guide the group over the long term. This “Strategy” document was developed in consultation with group members in the September 1999 meeting and was adopted in principle in the January 2000 meeting. It is intended that this document remain flexible to respond to changes in the long term and is contained in the appendix. The following mission statement and goals are contained in the Strategy.

NSWA Mission:

The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance is dedicated to the encouragement of community-based stewardship activities in the NSRB in Alberta.

NSWA Goals:

- To provide a forum for collaborative dialogue and information exchange among stakeholders promoting understanding about activities that affect the protection and enhancement of the watersheds in the NSRB.
- To share information and promote understanding among the public at large about activities that affect the protection and enhancement of the watersheds in the NSRB.
- To foster wise use and integrated management of land and water resources in NSRB watersheds to ensure their protection and enhancement.

- To coordinate information about river basin protection and enhancement initiatives occurring in the NSRB.

3.6 Website Development

In December 1999 the NSWA website draft format and contents were developed. A preliminary layout of the website was presented to and discussed with Group members at the January 2000 meetings. It was intended that the first “menu” page of the website would show in graphic form the NSRB with its sub-watersheds. Anyone visiting the website could then click on their sub-watershed and learn more about its characteristics including geography, local initiatives, water supply and quality, vegetation, etc. The website would also include information about the NSWA, its members and its activities. A copy of the information presented and discussed at the January 2000 meeting is appended and discussion comments are recorded in the January 2000 meeting notes.

4.0 NSWA Activities for 2000

Six main tasks have been identified for the NWSA to pursue in 2000. Project plans for these activities with the exception of the NSWA Management Strategy will be prepared in the early Spring 2000 and reviewed by the NSWA members in April 2000. The activities are:

- NSWA Management Strategy – facilitation, outreach and coordination
- NSR Basin Management Plan
- NSR Basin Handbook for Municipalities
- State of the Basin Report
- Community Based Action Guides and
- North Saskatchewan River Recreation User Guide

4.1 NWSA Management Strategy

The NWSA Management Strategy provides the umbrella for the other NSWA activities. It provides the framework within which they can be accomplished. The strategy contains the goals and objectives identified by the NSWA members to be realized and the ways in which this can be done. The NSWA Management Strategy remains flexible and will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that NSWA activities are consistent with the established goals and objectives. If they are not, the NSWA may decide to revise the Strategy accordingly.

There are three components to the implementation of the Management Strategy: NSWA meeting facilitation, outreach and coordination.

NSWA meeting facilitation requires time to prepare, conduct and report on the meetings. Given the size of the NSRB and the desire of members to meet in areas as close as possible to home, the Alliance has agreed to hold meetings in “sets”. Rather than having one meeting location for all members to attend, there

will be two locations. These locations will include one site upstream and one downstream from Edmonton. Both meetings will follow the same agenda and a combined set of meeting notes will be distributed at the end of the meetings.

The Alliance has agreed to hold two meetings throughout the year, in appropriate locations, where all members can congregate and participate in shared decision-making.

NSWA meetings are prepared and facilitated by consultants working closely with the NSWA Coordinator. During the meetings, the facilitators ensure that the concerns and interests of the members are appropriately defined, readily understood by other members of the Alliance and effectively addressed in the meetings. As the facilitative style of the Alliance is collaborative, the facilitators work to ensure that members' contributions are dealt with in a comprehensive manner. Everyone in the Alliance is able to appreciate how the interests of one member can influence those of others active in the NSRB – and primarily from a perspective of reinforcement and support.

The consultants and the NSWA Coordinator are also responsible for NSWA outreach. This involves identifying with Alliance members individuals, groups and agencies that should be invited to participate in the initiative. This outreach involves contacting and meeting with these potentially interested representatives, describing the Alliance to them and inviting them to participate. This outreach not only helps maintain and build the base of the Alliance, it also helps ensure that Alliance members are given the opportunity to remain aware of the many opportunities and issues facing the NSRB.

Coordination of the NSWA Management Strategy is the responsibility of the NSWA Coordinator working with the consultants. This includes coordination of the various activities outlined in the NSWA Management Strategy and the continued maintenance and implementation of activities previously established and underway (i.e., factsheets, profiles and the website). For example the development and operation of the website is managed by the NSWA Coordinator. The Coordinator in addition to overseeing the website is instrumental in ensuring that information is distributed to Alliance members about activities particular to water quality management in the NSRB and its sub-watersheds as well similar initiatives being undertaken by other groups and individuals elsewhere within Canada and the United States. To this end the NSWA Coordinator is also involved in developing and maintaining a current information base.

4.2 NSR Basin Management Plan

Members of the Alliance have expressed a desire to develop a Basin Management Plan that will provide a framework in which their current and proposed activities can be effectively coordinated with the intent of contributing to the preservation and enhancement of the NSRB. The Basin Management Plan provides such a vehicle. It will be structured so that the knowledge and the activities of the NSWA members undertaken in the respective sub-watersheds of

the NSRB is compiled to provide a description of the NSRB's biophysical and socio-economic characteristics. The Plan also allows for the definition of opportunities based on an assessment and analysis of the information provided. This information in turn, when combined with an identification of the regulatory context in which the framework is being prepared and the resources available to realize it, helps establish the manner in which the Alliance can champion the Plan's implementation and subsequent activities for the NSRB as a whole.

4.3 NSR Basin Handbook for Municipalities

The members of the Alliance have suggested that a handbook for municipalities is a tool, which can be prepared for municipalities whose geographic jurisdictions lie within the NSRB. This handbook will provide rural and urban municipalities with a source of information for the coordinated management of land and water. It would serve as a point of reference, indicating how components of the Basin Management Plan can be implemented and maintained. In doing so, it would educate municipal representatives about potential sources of water pollution and outline ways in which municipalities can manage their impacts upon water quality within the NSRB.

4.4 State of the Basin Report

The suggestion for the preparation of a State of the Basin Report by Alliance members is meant as a way in which the health of the NSRB can be monitored. Parameters used to describe the current health of the NSRB might include: water quality, water quantity, presence of measurable chemicals, impacts and/or presence of river-based recreational activities and drinking water standards. This information could come from current sources and be compiled by Alliance members. It could be supplemented by the collection of information originally prepared by Alliance members. The overall purpose would be to trace the improving or declining health of the watershed. It would provide data that could be used to justify the definition of activities to be undertaken to enhance and preserve the watershed – specific goals and objectives of the Basin Management Plan.

4.5 Community-Based Watershed Action Guides

Members of the NSWA are interested in developing an Alberta-specific tool kit that would assist individuals and groups implement sub-watershed, community-based watershed plans. This tool kit could also be used in the development of the overall Basin Management Plan currently being considered by the NSWA. The tool kit would be adapted from similar materials that are currently available such as is available on the "Know Your Watershed" website and the "Watershed Action Guide."

4.6 North Saskatchewan River Recreation User Guide

The NSWA members are interested in developing a guide for various NSRB river reaches for river-based recreation groups and interested citizens that would document significant historic, geographic and other information about each river reach. Information that could be incorporated may include river access points, campsites, presence of sport fishing species and other services.