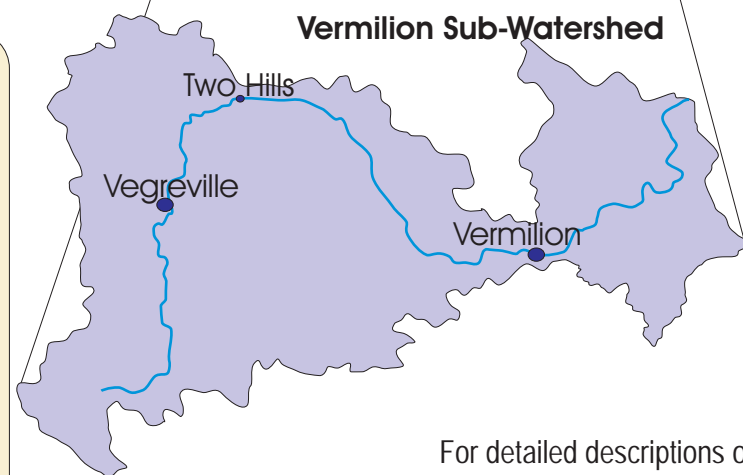


The North Saskatchewan River in Alberta receives water from 12 sub-watersheds



The Vermilion subwatershed encompasses 782,642 ha including 35,995 ha of water bodies. It includes the municipal boundaries of Beaver, Lamont, Minburn, Two Hills, St. Paul and Vermilion River Counties and the towns of Beauvallon, Clandonald, Dewberry, Hairy Hill, Holden, Innisfree, Islay, Kitscoty, Mannville, Marwayne, Minburn, Mundare, Musidora, Ranfurly, Two Hills, Vermilion, Vegreville and Willingdon.

As of 1999, riparian health along the Vermilion River was assessed as: 54% percent of the sites as 'unhealthy', 30% as 'healthy, but with problems' and 16% as 'healthy'.

Water bodies cover 5% of the subwatershed. About 0.2% of the subwatershed is covered in trees. No published assessment of aquatic macrophytes was found for the waterbodies in the Vermilion Subwatershed: this data gap could be addressed by future research within the Vermilion subwatershed.

For detailed descriptions of all the NSR sub-watersheds, consult the State of the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Report 2005 [www.nswa.ab.ca](http://www.nswa.ab.ca)

## NSWA Information Bulletin

# NSWA RURAL MUNICIPAL FORUM

February 10, 2009

Ninety people attended the NSWA rural municipal watershed planning forum in Nisku, Alberta. Representatives from 14 of the 19 counties and one Municipal District in the North Saskatchewan River (NSR) watershed participated in three discussion panels.

The conversation focused on the challenges and successes experienced by rural municipalities when dealing with watershed issues. The general response to the forum was positive and there appears to be a willingness on the part of rural municipalities to continue the conversation with NSWA about their role in the integrated watershed management planning process (IWMP). Some counties expressed a need for more information about watershed function and about watershed management in general.

Counties with planning departments indicated their willingness to receive information and direction from their planners who would attend future NSWA IWMP discussions. Other counties without planning departments felt that participation by elected officials and/or agricultural service staff would be acceptable.

Municipal Forum participants suggested a wide range of topics to be included in future information bulletins:

- Watershed function
- Groundwater/potable water
- Water distribution & storage options
- Discussion around the many planning processes
- Sub-watersheds
- Fish in rivers and tributaries
- Indicator species (What are they? Where are they? What do they tell us?)
- Wetlands, including suggestions for ways to encourage wetland conservation and ways to understand the concept of wetland water storage
- Wastewater
- The notion of *sustainability* (What does it mean? How can a practice be assessed for sustainability?)
- More information to help understand the implications of NSWA technical reports and studies

*56% of the municipal attendees at the forum filled out a feed back survey.*





**DISCUSSION FORMAT**

The discussion panel format worked well, but several counties who were involved with earlier Municipal Guide focus groups and the original IWMP community café meetings suggested NSWA return to those formats for future discussions.

To make the discussions about NSWA technical studies and reports more meaningful, it was suggested that charts and graphs be presented in the context of geography - e.g. using maps, simplified diagrams and other visuals.

There seemed to be a general agreement that future forums encourage practical discussion rather than focusing on abstract processes. There also was a strong desire to avoid the use of jargon and acronyms, both in policy and technical discussions.

Many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to talk about watershed issues county to county. County representatives interact with each other in other venues; however watershed topics are not often part of those discussions.

**Suggestions for future workshops and presentations:**

- Nuts & bolts of the *Water Act* and the draft Wetland Policy
- Jurisdictional overlap and responsibility in watershed management
- Information on groundwater
- Wetland function: dynamics and identification of 'recharge' areas
- Options for water storage & water distribution
- Opportunity for dialogue among NSWA, counties and the Land-use Secretariat
- Opportunity for dialogue between counties and urban recreation users
- Issues around potable water
- Issues around re-cycling waste water

**RURAL MUNICIPALITIES with a land-base within THE NSR WATERSHED:**

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| CLEARWATER    | WESTLOCK        |
| BRAZEAU       | LAMONT          |
| YELLOWHEAD    | TWO HILLS       |
| PARKLAND      | MINBURN         |
| STURGEON      | BEAVER          |
| LAC STE. ANNE | CAMROSE         |
| THORHILD      | SMOKY LAKE      |
| LEDUC         | ST. PAUL        |
| WETASKIWIN    | VERMILION RIVER |
| STRATHCONA    | BONNYVILLE      |



**Municipal Forum - WHAT WE HEARD**

**Obstacles/Opportunities**

- More information needed about NSWA and the watershed in general
- Confusion around interjurisdictional responsibilities for watershed planning
- Skepticism about the accuracy and efficacy of the 'science'
- Technical information is complex
- Too many acronyms / too much ever-changing jargon
- Not all rural municipalities were represented at the forum
- Disparity in knowledge of watershed issues among counties
- Not enough is known about the state of the sub-basins
- Not enough opportunities to pose watershed questions
- Mixed reaction about county role in watershed planning process
- Diversity of issues



**Resources/Strengths**

- Rural municipalities are generally interested in participating in the IWMP
- Many rural municipalities have planning and agricultural service staff available to participate in further workshops.
- Rural municipalities are interested in results of NSWA studies
- NSWA Information Bulletins were well received.
- New website is more accessible
- People are generally more informed about the environment
- NSWA staff have broad skill sets and strong interest in strengthening partnerships

**Strategies Suggested for More Effective Engagement**

- Future workshops (3 or 6 month intervals)
- Find more ways to translate technical information
- Make more use of maps to explain watershed issues at sub-basin level
- NSWA to bring information to regional conferences and events
- Keep counties up to date with results of NSWA studies as information becomes available
- Invite county planning and agriculture services personnel to participate in the next stage of developing the IWMP. They would be the liaison with their counties, until such time that NSWA has a draft plan for counties to review.