

Headwaters Alliance 2019 River Tour

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dignitaries and Headwater Alliance representatives took a paddle down the North Saskatchewan River.

On August 8th 30 intrepid paddlers (including MLA Mark Smith, municipal reps from Clearwater County, Leduc County, Parkland County, Drayton Valley, Devon, Rocky Mountain House, as well as staff from North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance – NSWA, Alberta Water Council, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, Eagle Point-Blue Rapids Parks, EPCOR and Alberta Environment and Parks) left Willey West Campground, Drayton Valley for a day on the river.

The tour was initiated by the Headwaters Alliance, a subcommittee of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA). This watershed planning organization of elected officials from nine municipalities has combined jurisdictions that cover the headwaters and upstream regions of the North Saskatchewan River watershed in Alberta.

After paddling about an hour and half, the group stopped for coffee and listened to Mary Ellen Shain (NSWA) and Andre Asselin (Alberta Water Council) talk about Water for Life (a provincial program) and how the Alberta Water Council and Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (of which NSWA is one of 11) work together to meet provincial goals.

Municipalities, provincially designated land use planning authorities, play an important role in watershed planning. Mary Ellen explained how the NSWA collaborates with municipalities, many of which have jurisdictions that span more than one watershed.

After another paddle, this time to the Berrymore Bridge, the group stopped for lunch where they listened to Dr. Marian Weber talk about the economic value of wetlands and other natural infrastructures. Krista Quesnel, from Parkland County, told the group about programs that encourage landowners to restore or conserve their natural assets. These programs include: ALUS, Clearwater LandCare, Green Acreages, the provincial CAP program, and WRRP.

The third and final stop on the river tour was at Modeste Creek where the EPCOR Creek Monitoring Station monitors water quantity and quality. Modeste Creek is one of few creeks in Alberta monitored this way. The information collected helps us understand how landscape change impacts the quality of water downstream.

After that full day of river adventure and watershed information sharing, the group boarded a bus to return to the Willey West Campground. As Town of Drayton Valley councillor, Tom McGee put it, *"What a wonderful opportunity to paddle the North Saskatchewan River, our most important resource! I was so pleased to meet and hear from so many experts who are working with our community to maintain and enhance this beautiful river! Pulling together we can make such a difference!"*