



# FISH(ING) LINES

with Duane Radford

## Citizen Science and Volunteerism



"NSWA 2019 field tour on the upper North Saskatchewan River."

Citizen science is defined as "the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists." Nowadays, at least some of these members of the general public may be just as highly trained and experienced as professional scientists who have retired from their old day jobs, so they're well qualified to collect and analyze data relating to the natural world. The practice of citizen science was coined in the mid-1990s. Usually, members of the public are volunteers and do not get paid for their work.

Volunteerism is "the use or involvement

of volunteer labour, especially in community services." Members of the Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) have set the bar as the longest serving conservation advocates dating back to 1908. Other organizations have become active in this regard too.

Some of my old colleagues from the (former) Fish and Wildlife Division have been involved with citizen science activities and conservation volunteerism for many years. Personally, I served on the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) "Conservation, Community and Education Grant Funding Committee," the "Grant Eligible Conservation Committee" and on the "Retention, Recruitment and Education Grant Committee". These

committees reviewed applications for funding from a wide range of volunteers and not-for-profit organizations. I also represent the AFGA on the Antelope Creek Ranch Management Committee.

Ken Crutchfield, President of the Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society has been a member of the Board of Directors for the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) since 2013, which he now chairs.

"The strength of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance is the commitment to partnerships. NSWA fosters work to better understand water management issues, share knowledge and support decision makers in achieving integrated watershed management," he said.

Under the Government of Alberta's Water for Life Strategy, the NSWA became one of 11 Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) in Alberta in 2005. The first order of business for a WPAC was to initiate a State of the Watershed Report that the NSWA completed in 2005. Following the recommendations of that report, the NSWA developed an Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) that was released in 2012.

Ray Makowecki, who heads up Alberta's Next Step Team and Fish Habitat Restoration Project Committee says these groups are trying to increase fishing opportunities in northeastern Alberta.

"Our volunteers for the Fish Habitat Restoration Project Committee and the Next Step Team are suggesting that more fish habitat should be restored or developed to increase fishing opportunities for Albertans," said Makowecki.

Fish Habitat Restoration Project volunteers studied overwinter fish habitat in 13 waterbodies in northeast Alberta last year.

"Some of the lakes tested could support fish now. We're asking the fish managers to implement fish habitat restoration, fish stocking and fish transplanting in the waters that are suitable."

Makowecki believes there are a number of 1 to 2 hectare ponds along Hwy 63 and Hwy 43 that would be good perch ponds, or stocked overwintering trout ponds.

Don Meredith (until recently) was a member of the Wabamun Watershed Management Council (WWMC) and served as its communication chair. One of the main purposes of the WWMC was to prepare a watershed management plan. Meredith said, "It has taken the council 14 years to do so but we finally have a draft plan that has been reviewed and approved

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by the provincial and relevant municipal governments, as well as other major stakeholders (industry, residents, cottage owners, etc.). They rolled that plan out for public input in July 2020 prior to a final draft being released in the fall.”

If you're interested check out the details online at <https://www.wvmc.ca/watershed-management-plan>.

Lorne Fitch, Lethbridge conservationist, commented, “Congratulations to the Council for the herculean task of preparing a watershed management plan. If you have never been involved in the preparation of one you will never understand how much time and energy it takes to bring people together, involve all the stakeholders, get government on side, reach consensus, develop the wording, and prepare a plan.”

Fitch also said that previous governments empowered local residents to help solve some of the seemingly intractable problems found in a watershed.

“Of course, little in the way of resources were offered, there was little or no technical assistance, and there has been foot-dragging to implement a plan once the local community and interested stakeholders came to terms. It is a classic case of providing responsibility but no authority. Current and future governments might well pay attention,” he lamented.

Meredith said it's important to stress the burnout that occurs when volunteers are frustrated by government inaction and unwillingness to move forward.

“We have had a large turnover of WWMC board members, mainly related to the fact that nothing gets done right away. This has ended up in a small core group of mostly shoreline cottage owners who understand how the deterioration of the lake will affect them, both aesthetically/ environmentally and economically,” he said. “They are good folk but their experience does not foster a lot of motivation for others to follow. I hang in there because I know what the lake used-to-be and believe with a little government help, it could be again. But money talks.”

The ACA committees I sat on were responsible for reviewing conservation applications, many of which pertained to Alberta's fisheries. ACA Conservation, Community, and Education Grants applications will next be accepted from January 1 until January 22, 2021. Application forms and guidelines can be found online. The 2021/22 Funding Guidelines and Application forms were



- photo Lorne Fitch

“Citizen science bank restoration at Hidden Creek.”

posted in September 2020. Following is a list of just some of the amazing fisheries projects approved by the ACA for 2020/21 that deal with all manner of activities:

- Implementing Riparian Habitat Management Improvements for Westslope Cutthroat Trout – Cows and Fish
- ANSN Hunting and Fishing Knowledge Transfer Youth Project - Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation
- Bow River Policeman's Flats River Access Update - Bow River Trout Foundation
- Meadow Creek Trail Rehabilitation Project - Calgary ATV Riders Association (CARA)
- Beginner Fly Tying and Tying in the Community - Calgary Hook and Hackle
- Evaluation of Parr Reservoir (Castor Creek) for Fish Stocking Suitability - Castor Fish and Game Club
- Jim Nelson Memorial Trout Pond Dock Replacement - Devon Fish and Game Club
- Watershed Education, Literacy, and Restoration Project - Ghost Watershed Alliance Society

- Sherburne Reservoir Boat Launch Rehabilitation - Grassy Lake Recreation Association
- Kids Can Catch Family Day 2021 Event - Lesser Slave Watershed Council
- Riparian & Ecological Enhancement Program - Mountain View County
- Aeration of Hasse Lake - Northern Lights Chapter/ Trout Unlimited Canada
- Dogpound Riparian Protection - Mader Property - Northern Lights Chapter/ Trout Unlimited Canada
- Skwarik Riparian Enhancement Project – Northern Sunrise County
- Measuring Success of Oldman Headwater Education and Restoration Effort – Oldman Watershed Council
- Walleye - Pike Fishing – Southern Alberta Bible Camp

It's encouraging to see that there's an interest in conservation of Alberta's fisheries and that so many groups are collaborating to make a difference. You can do your part by volunteering to serve on one of Alberta's many citizen science groups and conservation volunteer committees. ■

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