



FACT SHEET: Reviewing implementation progress of the *Water for Life* Strategy

2013 marks the 10 year anniversary of the *Water for Life* strategy which has been the mechanism for managing Alberta's water resources since 2003. The strategy was renewed in 2008, and a detailed Action Plan was published in 2009. The three goals of the strategy continue to focus on:

- Safe, secure drinking water,
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems, and
- Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

These goals are being met through three key directions: knowledge and research, partnerships and water conservation. The 2009 Action Plan outlines actions for each of the goals and key directions that contribute to achieving the goals of the strategy.

The Alberta Water Council regularly reviews implementation of the *Water for Life* (WFL) strategy and champions achievement of the three goals. The reviews are conducted at a strategic level, focusing on existing and emerging water issues and concerns in the province and the effectiveness of *WFL* in addressing them. They are done in a spirit of adaptive management in which the regular evaluation of progress highlights strengths, identifies weaknesses and recommends areas where additional focus would enable the strategy to advance more effectively. Each review assesses the status, effectiveness and progress of implementation activities and provides advice for improvement based on the assessment. The Council has completed four reviews (2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011), all of which are available at www.awchome.ca. The most recent review, published in 2012, is considered in this fact sheet.

The Council summarized implementation progress in the following table, noting that each element also has a number of sub-actions that could be evaluated. Progress to date shows a solid foundation to support further implementation.

Goals and Key Directions	Actions under review	Actions making limited progress	Actions making some progress	Actions progressing on track	Actions completed	Total number of actions for each element
Safe, secure drinking water			4	5		9
Healthy aquatic ecosystems		1	2		2	5
Reliable quality water supplies			1	3		4
Knowledge and research	1		2	1		4
Partnerships				5	1	6
Water conservation	1		1	1		
Total number (% of WFL actions in each category)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	10 (32%)	15 (48%)	3 (10%)	31

The Council envisions that the *WFL* strategy will continue to evolve and improve, building on existing accomplishments. Its recommendations encourage the Government of Alberta and other stakeholders to continue with activities where progress has occurred and to expedite efforts in areas where progress is lagging. Additionally, this review considered how *WFL* implementation could be enhanced by the Government's Cumulative Effects Management System (CEMS) and regional planning that is occurring through the Land Use Framework. *WFL* implementation and regional planning initiatives share a number of common aspects (e.g., they: consider social, economic and environmental considerations; are based on science and knowledge as well as place; are collaborative and adaptive; incorporate monitoring and reporting). As well, many of the same agencies, departments and organizations are involved in both processes. Integrating *WFL* with other initiatives offers many opportunities to enhance land and water management and identify innovative practices.

The Council notes, however, that more work is required and some gaps in the strategy do need to be filled. Assessing if we are closer to achieving the three *WFL* goals is particularly challenging because the current approach assesses whether actions have been completed, not whether outcomes have been achieved. The effectiveness of the various *WFL* partnerships is also difficult to assess and quantify and needs proper evaluation to create a higher degree of success. As well, it has been difficult to assess the extent to which policy advice provided to the Government of Alberta through partner recommendations has been implemented, although the Council does track the implementation status of its recommendations.

Finally, given the substantial amount of resources invested, we need to know if we are achieving the outcomes of the strategy. Thus a set of metrics should be developed against which *WFL* outcomes, policy and partnerships can be measured. This system should measure achievement of the targets established in the strategy as well as the resulting impacts and benefits to the watershed or aquatic system being considered.

This fact sheet is one in a series prepared by the Alberta Water Council. All fact sheets are available on the Council's website at www.awchome.ca.