

FEBRUARY, 2017

# Annual *Water For Life* Partnerships Newsletter

ISSUE SIX - 2017



## About this newsletter

The [AWC](#)'s annual newsletter highlights the successes of *Water for Life* partners over the past year. Building on the work of the [Moving from Words to Actions Project Team](#), the annual partnerships newsletter helps to increase awareness of the *Water for Life* partnerships and the work being done in water management across Alberta.



*Special thanks to the contributors to this issue: Government of Alberta, Highway Two Conservation, Medicine Hat Interpretive Program staff, the Oldman Watershed Council, South East Alberta Watershed Alliance and the Battle River Watershed Alliance.*

## In this issue:

- Message from Honourable Shannon Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks
- Highway Two Conservation
- We know water is wet, but what else can you tell us?
- Medicine Hat Riparian Study
- Riparian Restoration in Alberta Protects Drinking Water and Threatened Fish
- How well is your well working? Alberta's *Working Well* program celebrates nine years of raising awareness
- A Growing South East Alberta Watershed Alliance
- Protecting Camrose's Drinking Water at the Source
- Ponoka County Landowners Help Improve River Health
- Responding to Increased Fish Disease and Aquatic Invasive Species Threats in Alberta Waters

## About the *Water for Life* Partnerships

[Water for Life](#): a strategy for sustainability is the Government of Alberta's (GoA) guidance document for water management. The strategy was launched in 2003 and renewed in 2008, with an associated action plan released in 2009.

The renewed strategy continues to identify partnerships as a key mechanism for achieving goals and outcomes. Three types of

partnerships were identified in the strategy: local [Watershed Stewardship Groups](#) (WSGs), regional [Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils](#) (WPACs), and the [Alberta Water Council](#) (AWC). The AWC provides a forum for sectors and *Water for Life* partners to come together to discuss and find innovative solutions for water management issues. The *Water for Life* partnership system is composed of the AWC, 11 WPACs and approximately 140 WSGs. Partnerships typically include stakeholders representing governments, industries, and non-government organizations. At present, more than 1000 Albertans are working directly under the banner of *Water for Life*.

water for life



## Message from Honourable Minister of Environment and Parks, Shannon Phillips

Alberta is fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources. Fresh, clean water may be our most valuable resource, but it's one we often take for granted. Sustainable management of water resources for aspects of water quantity, water quality and water use, enables our province to continue to prosper and is a key priority for Albertans and this government. The [AWC](#) and its membership are valuable contributors towards this priority and the GoA values the commitment and partnership of the AWC.

The AWC's work to raise awareness of the threat of aquatic invasive species contributed directly to the enhancement of Alberta's aquatic invasive species program. The Council's recent work on the [Water for Life](#) Implementation Report makes high-level recommendations to the Alberta government and its partners to advance and support the goals of the *Water for Life* strategy. Complementing this work are the WPACs and the many watershed stewardship groups who have and will continue to play a key role in developing and implementing Alberta's future water management, stewardship, and awareness initiatives.

I was pleased to recently announce funding commitments to the AWC, the province's 11 WPACs, and the Land Stewardship Centre in

## Highway Two Conservation

Barrhead, Westlock and Athabasca and Sturgeon Counties are working collaboratively through [Highway Two Conservation](#) (H2C). They recognize that diffuse pollution, sedimentation and habitat degradation stemming from cropping practices lower the water storage capability of land, reduce the biodiversity of riparian areas and negatively affect water quality. H2C's Riparian Improvement Project focuses on increasing and restoring riparian buffer zones along agricultural land in the four partner municipalities. H2C worked with Cows and Fish to complete six riparian health inventories on five of their project sites.

One of H2C's seven Riparian Improvement Sites is shown in the photo below. This site in Athabasca County had been severely degraded by cattle having free access to the creek. Under new management the cattle have been removed from the area and in 2016 the riparian zone on the east side of the creek was reclaimed with native shrubs and seedlings. The west side will be replanted in 2017.

Since 2014 H2C has planted over 7000 trees and reclaimed over 32 acres of riparian area and forest buffer zones within the Athabasca Watershed.

They have also:

- educated over 1700 local elementary students on the importance of riparian health and water quality during Pond Days that have run since 2013,
- organized a Himalayan Balsam weed pull at

support of its WSG grant program. This commitment is a reflection of our confidence in these organizations and the great work that they do in developing and recommending solutions to complex water management issues for the benefit of all Albertans.

I look forward to continuing work with the AWC and our many *Water for Life* partners on ensuring Alberta's water resources are well managed for current and future generations. Thank you for your ongoing leadership and efforts. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,  
Shannon Phillips  
[Minister of Environment and Parks](#)

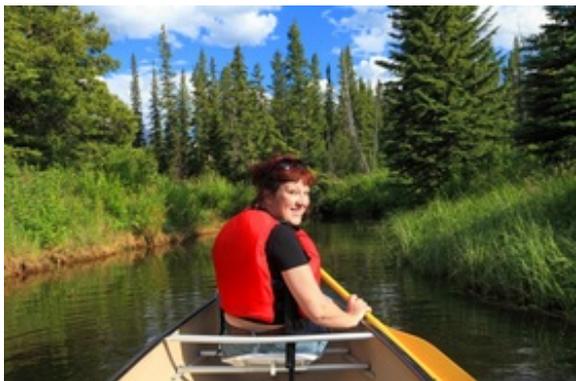
*Article by: Government of Alberta*

---

## **We know water is wet, but what else can you tell us?**

Albertans don't always think about the water they drink, play in and rely on every day – it is often taken for granted. Last year, the Alberta Water Council published [Recommendations to Improve Water Literacy in Alberta](#) and identified some opportunities to better communicate, collaborate and strengthen water literacy.

To be “water literate” means having an understanding of the significance of water in life, an understanding of where water comes from and an understanding of how we can use it sustainably. It helps answer questions such as, “Why does it matter if I drive through a stream in the headwaters?” or “What happens to the water I use after it disappears down the drain?” For many, once it's out of sight, it's out of mind and this is what we are looking to change.



*Girl Canoeing. Photo by the GoA.*

Peanut Lake, and

- completed many other projects focusing on riparian habitat throughout the summer seasons.

In the spring of 2016, H2C completed an aerial survey of the Paddle River and Pembina River and identified problem areas to focus on for next season. Partners involved in this initiative include County of Barrhead, Athabasca County, Westlock County, Sturgeon County, Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, Alberta Conservation Association, the Land Stewardship Center, Klondike Trail Search and Rescue, Jarvie Community Council, Lac La Nonne Seniors Group, Alberta Lake Management Society and the Junior Forest Wardens. For more information on H2C go to <http://www.highway2conservation.com/> or contact Lisa Card at [lisa.card@hwy2conservation.com](mailto:lisa.card@hwy2conservation.com)

*Article by: Lisa Card, B.Sc, Conservation Coordinator for Highway Two Conservation*

---

## **Medicine Hat Riparian Study**

The [Society of Grasslands Naturalists](#) and its educational group, the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program, completed a two-year study of the riparian area along the South Saskatchewan River within Medicine Hat in September 2016. Fifteen riparian health assessments were conducted and will become a benchmark to keep track of the health of the river for years to come.



*Berm. Photo by the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program staff.*

Part of the project was also to develop 35 permanent photo points that can be re-visited on a regular basis to monitor changes to vegetation, erosion and river health. Information gathered will soon be shared on a website, in public programs, special group and school programs and displays.

Since this report came out, we've been working to get Albertans talking about water while thinking, planning and acting with the environment in mind. Think you're already a water expert? Or are you a water novice interested in learning more? Fill out our online literacy survey to help us gauge what Albertans already know and what additional information is needed.

**Join the conversation!** With the new year comes a new course of action. We are embarking on a social media campaign, along with Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, to reach a broader and younger audience and increase awareness about Alberta's watersheds, wetlands and all things water. Keep an eye out for the #ABWater hashtag on social media – share and share often to increase the flow of information. We will be leaking fun facts leading up to World Water Day on March 22, 2017. Want to get involved? Contact Janine Higgins for more details at [janine.higgins@gov.ab.ca](mailto:janine.higgins@gov.ab.ca)

*Article by: Government of Alberta*

---

## **How well is your well working? The Working Well program celebrates nine years of raising awareness**

Over half a million Albertans rely on privately owned water wells for their drinking water. Ensuring those wells remain a safe, secure source of water was the purpose of the *Working Well* program when it was launched in 2008. The program is a province-wide, multi-agency collaborative effort that encourages Alberta's water well owners to manage and protect their wells and common groundwater supplies. Led by Alberta Environment and Parks, with the support of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Water Well Drilling Association and rural municipalities, the program has conducted over 225 workshops and reached out to over 6000 landowners across Alberta from Peace River to Milk River.

[Working Well](#) is a key part of the education and information elements that support the Water for Life goal of "Safe, Secure Drinking Water," and the program has grown substantially since its inception. Hands-on workshops, interactive activities and exhibits, information resources and

The goal of this project is to create involved, knowledgeable and caring citizens as the basis for a healthy, strong community living in a stable sustainable economy.



*Walking tour along the berm. Photo by the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program staff*

Other partners involved in this initiative include the [South East Alberta Watershed Alliance](#) and the [Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society](#). For more information on this study go to <http://www.natureline.info/gn/index.php> or contact Marty Drut at [marty.drut@natureline.info](mailto:marty.drut@natureline.info)

*Article by: Marty Drut, Park Interpreter, Medicine Hat Interpretive Program*

---

## **Riparian Restoration in Alberta Protects Drinking Water and Threatened fish**

What does it look like when a community rallies together to protect drinking water and fish habitat, forging first-hand connections with the source of our river, while simultaneously making new friends? Broad smiles, muddy boots and a gratifying sense of accomplishment, that's what! A final count of 1900 square metres restored, 613 willows planted, 131 fence posts installed, over 40 dedicated community members, and one sunny day in the backcountry adds up to a tremendously successful restoration event!

The Backcountry Restoration Event was organized by the [Oldman Watershed Council](#) (OWC) and Cows and Fish in October 2016 along Dutch Creek, located north of the Crowsnest Pass and part of the Oldman River watershed. "This is the headwaters, or birthplace, of our river—the source of our drinking water," explained Shannon Frank, Executive Director of the OWC. Volunteers picked up the torch—or rather, spades and digging bars—to give the site some much-needed TLC by

community outreach comprise the various approaches used to engage, educate and inform well owners.

Since 2011, the presenters have surveyed workshop participants to gather constructive feedback on presentations, course materials and 13 desired behaviours related to their personal water well usage. Of these behaviours, five have post-workshop implementation rates above 90% and five behaviours have seen consistent increases in adoption since 2013. Over 97% of participants agreed the workshops increased their understanding of drinking water well safety and maintenance and 100% would recommend the workshop to other well owners. Follow-up surveys showed that over 85% of participants shared what they had learned with others in the community, which is evidence that the educational value of the program extends beyond the classroom setting and into the community.

*Article by: Government of Alberta*

---

## **A Growing South East Alberta Watershed Alliance**

The [South East Alberta Watershed Alliance](#) (SEAWA) has been growing through 2016! They welcomed eight new board members and have filled 16 of 17 available seats on our Board of Directors. Many new and old SEAWA members have joined their revived Technical Committee, Finance and Fundraising Committee, Communication Committee and Policy Committee. They reconnected to their audience and network through a website ([www.seawa.ca](http://www.seawa.ca)), social media, newsletters and conversations with key stakeholders. Stakeholders are showing increasing interest in joining SEAWA.



*Urban Sustainability Forum. Photo by SEAWA.*

SEAWA now has two full-time staff—an Executive

planting willow stakes along the floodplain. “Riparian areas, those areas with water-loving vegetation, along streams, floodplains, and shores, need the right ‘stuff’ to be healthy,” explained Norine Ambrose, Executive Director for Cows and Fish. “Planting willows jumpstarts the growth of natural rebar, holding streambanks together and providing cover for the threatened westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout that live in these streams.”

The Restoration Event is an important component of OWC’s Engaging Recreationists project aimed at reducing the cumulative threats to our headwaters by supporting a stewardship ethic in motorized recreation users, and encouraging these users to adopt practices that reduce sediment in streams. To accomplish this, we are piloting numerous approaches including in-person surveys, education and outreach, social media, community-based social marketing and hands-on experiential learning through stewardship activities.

To volunteer or donate to our work, or to find out more about this and other projects, visit [www.oldmanwatershed.ca](http://www.oldmanwatershed.ca)

This work was supported by [Cows and Fish](#), [Spray Lake Sawmills](#), the [Crowsnest Pass Quad Squad](#), and Alberta Environment and Parks. Funding and in-kind support has generously been provided by: [Alberta Conservation Association](#), Alberta Government, Alberta Parks, [Alberta Ecotrust Foundation](#), [RBC Blue Water Project](#), The [Calgary Foundation](#), the [Habitat Stewardship Program](#) (Government of Canada), and our dedicated volunteers.

*Article by: Sofie Forsström, Education Program Manager, Oldman Watershed Council*

---

## **Protecting Camrose’s Drinking Water at the Source**

In spring 2015, the City of Camrose, Camrose County and the [Battle River Watershed Alliance](#) launched the [Camrose Source Water Protection Initiative](#). The goal was to create a Source Water Protection Plan for the Camrose region that would set out actions to protect and improve water quality in the Battle River and in Driedmeat Lake. A stakeholder advisory committee was formed to support the development of the plan. The first step was to conduct a Source Water Risk Assessment to identify potential risks to surface water quality. The committee then identified key actions required to address those risks and improve local water

Director and a Community Engagement Coordinator. Together committees and staff organized an Urban Sustainability Forum in Medicine Hat on November 4, 2016. This Forum helped create awareness of planning initiatives that help build sustainability in cities. A key forum theme was the need for the public to get involved in planning by lending their voices to the planning process so cities in the future reflect social, environmental and economic needs. Participants reported that they gained or enhanced their knowledge of sustainable city planning processes and were pleased with the local nature of the forum. The event was well attended by a broad audience of participants from across the watershed, including local high school students, watershed stakeholders, and local politicians – City of Medicine Hat Mayor Ted Clugston, Honourable Robert Wanner, and MLA Drew Barnes. The next forum will promote rural stewardship in the South Saskatchewan River sub-basin to balance rural and urban interests and perspectives in our watershed. Our members are excited to get their hands wet and are busy planning projects and more events for the upcoming year.

*Article by: Alyssa Roth, Community Engagement Coordinator, South East Alberta Watershed Alliance*

**Event: SEAWA would like to invite you to our free Educational Forum: Environmental Stewardship on the Farm! It will take place March 10, 2017 at Medicine Hat Lodge Hotel. To view the agenda and register: <https://seawa.eventbrite.ca>**

### **Responding to Increased Fish Disease and Aquatic Invasive Species Threats in Alberta Waters**

Whirling disease is widely known in North America as a serious fish health issue. It can affect salmonid populations including trout and whitefish, and is caused by a microscopic parasite called *Myxobolus cerebralis*. The impacts of the disease can be highly variable, depending on species susceptibility and environmental conditions, but can lead to spinal deformities, erratic swimming and death of affected fish.

In August 2016, whirling disease was reported for

quality. A diversity of stakeholders provided important feedback during the planning process.



*Driedmeat Lake, Camrose. Photo by the BRWA.*

The Camrose Source Water Protection Plan outlines recommended management actions based on the results of the risk assessment. These actions cover a number of topics, including land management, oil and gas development, urban development and construction, stormwater and wastewater management, green spaces, wetlands and more. The City of Camrose and Camrose County approved the Camrose Source Water Protection Plan in fall 2016, and discussions about plan implementation are now underway.

*Article by: Sarah Skinner, Watershed Planning Coordinator, Battle River Watershed Alliance*

### **Ponoka County Landowners Help Improve River Health**

“The cattle are getting more water and we’ve learned how to improve the quality of the river. It also showed me that I can make a big difference and that has been proven by seeing an increase in the fish that are hanging out in our section of the river.”

-Mark Stewart, MSW Farms (landowner involved in the Ponoka Riparian Restoration Program)

The Battle River Watershed Alliance initiated the [Ponoka Riparian Restoration Program](#) in spring 2015, with the goal of supporting local landowners who were interested in taking action to improve the health of the Battle River in Ponoka County. The program will wrap up in 2017, and many landowners and organizations have come together to make the program a great success!

Here are some of the highlights:

the first time in Canada, inside Banff National Park at a popular fly fishing lake. It is not known how the parasite was introduced, but research and literature suggest it is most commonly introduced by anglers or fish culture practices. The GoA took immediate action and used the Early Detection, Rapid Response Plan developed for invasive Dreissenid mussels. An Incident Command System was set up to respond to the detection, and teams were developed to address the myriad aspects needed in a response, including policy, risk assessments, mapping, communications and monitoring. Fisheries biologists province-wide were deployed to sample all susceptible waters in the province (supporting trout and whitefish), which over the course of a few months amounted to more than 200 sites in six watersheds.

Several locations in Banff National Park, as well as several locations outside the Park in the Bow River, have tested positive for whirling disease. Five private aquaculture facilities have also tested positive, all of which are under quarantine. The samples must be analyzed by external labs, so at this time we are still awaiting results of many of the wild samples, but are considering the Bow River watershed to be positive. The [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) posts positive results on its website when they are confirmed. Decontamination protocols are being developed for all government staff conducting in-water work. More information on the issue and what you can do can be found on the AEP website.

**Be part of the solution!** Fish diseases and aquatic invasive species are commonly spread by organic material (fish, plants), mud and standing water. It is imperative that anglers, boaters, aquatic ecologists, researchers and anyone coming into contact with water (particularly in positive areas) **CLEAN** all equipment, **DRAIN** any residual standing water and **DRY** watercraft, waders and equipment thoroughly before using again. This is especially important for those that are going from positive zones to susceptible waters. If possible, use hot water (90°C) to wash your gear, and ensure water does not go down a storm drain or enter surface water. If you are using a boat, the drain plug must be pulled while in transport, it's the law!

Boat inspections are mandatory for all passing watercraft when inspection stations are open. Do

- Cows & Fish conducted 18 riparian health assessments,
- the Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society planted over 10,000 trees in the Battle River valley,
- landowners installed six kilometres of riparian fencing and eight livestock watering systems, and
- the Battle River Watershed Alliance and partners hosted a number of educational events on topics such as riparian plant identification and health assessments, the health of fish populations in the Battle River, tree planting and management, and more.

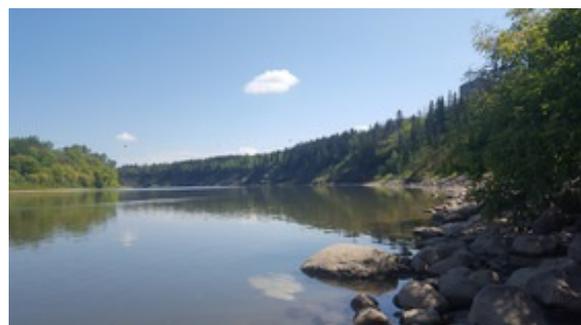


*Battle River Riparian Restoration at MSW Farms.  
Photo by BRWA.*

The Battle River Watershed Alliance appreciates the efforts of all the landowners involved in the program. Their commitment to being stewards of the Battle River watershed is an encouragement for all of us to do the same.

*Article by: Sarah Skinner, Watershed Planning Coordinator, Battle River Watershed Alliance*

**Event: Battle River Watershed Alliance 10th Anniversary Annual General Meeting**  
**Thursday, June 15th, noon-3.00 p.m., Heisler Hotel**  
**RSVP by calling Sheila at 780-672-0276 or emailing [sheila@battleriverwatershed.ca](mailto:sheila@battleriverwatershed.ca)**



your part to protect Alberta waters from aquatic invasive species and fish disease [CLEAN, DRAIN and DRY](#) your watercraft and equipment before you leave the launch or lake every time. To report suspect fish or aquatic invasive species, please call 1-855-336-BOAT (2628).

*Article by Kate Wilson, Aquatic Invasive Species Specialist with Alberta Environment & Parks*



For more information about the Alberta Water Council:

<http://albertawatercouncil.ca/>

For more information about *Water for Life*:

<http://www.waterforlife.alberta.ca/>

Tel: (780) 644-7380  
Fax: (780) 644-7382  
Email: [info@awchome.com](mailto:info@awchome.com)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

[Click here](#) to forward this email to a friend

Alberta Water Council  
#1400, 9915 -108 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2G8  
Canada

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

**vertical  
response**  
A DELUXE COMPANY  
Free Email Marketing >>