

Water for Life Action Plan Project

Terms of Reference

Approved by Alberta Water Council on February 22, 2022.

Amended June 15, 2023.

Amended June 13, 2024.

Note to readers: Despite the project team's best efforts they determined that they could not complete all this project's objectives and produce its deliverables. Rather than amend this ToR to match what the team accomplished, these amendments provide information on changes to the final deliverables and rationale.

TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this document, the term **Partner** is used to represent any Indigenous community or any Alberta Water Council (AWC) member organization(s) (or 'sector') who chooses to contribute to the *Water for Life* Action Plan Project (Action Plan).

BACKGROUND

In June 2021, Alberta Environment and Parks brought forward a Statement of Opportunity outlining a request for the Alberta Water Council (AWC) to create a new 10-year **Water for Life Action Plan** for the *Water for Life* strategy. The request integrated a recommendation for a new action plan from the recent *Water for Life* Implementation Review (2016-2019), and the consideration of potential risks and opportunities for Alberta's water management that were described in the AWC's recently completed Alberta Water Futures project report.

FRAMING THE PROJECT

Water for Life identifies three goals and three key directions for water management in Alberta.

Goals

1. **Safe, secure drinking water:** Albertans are assured their drinking water is safe.
2. **Healthy aquatic ecosystems:** Albertans are assured that aquatic ecosystems are maintained and protected.
3. **Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy:** Albertans will be assured that water is managed effectively to support sustainable economic development.

Key Directions

4. **Knowledge and research:** Albertans will have access to the knowledge needed to achieve safe drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.
5. **Partnerships:** *Water for Life* partnerships are empowered, informed, and fully engaged in watershed stewardship.
6. **Water conservation:** All sectors understand how their behaviours impact water quality, quantity, and the health of aquatic ecosystems; they adopt a water conservation ethic and take action.

[Alberta Water Futures](#) initiated a dialogue with a First Nation and AWC sectors about the potential risks confronting water management in Alberta and explored the readiness of the water management system in the face of those risks. At a broad system-level perspective, the project identified four risks likely to put pressure on Alberta's water management system:

1. **Climate:** Fluctuations in water resources and hydrology caused by changes in climate.
2. **Growth:** Increasing the demand for a limited water resource from population and economic growth.
3. **Governance and Trust:** Governance is not dynamic enough to adapt to changing conditions and maintain trust in decision-making.
4. **Knowledge:** The understanding of environmental, social, and economic conditions is not robust enough to make well-informed decisions.

Alberta Water Futures also outlined four key questions (with descriptions and additional considerations) to spark a renewed dialogue about Alberta's water management system, leadership, and cross-Partner collaboration:

1. How might we renew our water management system so that it can adapt quickly to changing conditions AND enhance the abilities of those advancing the *Water for Life* strategy to collaborate within the system to achieve *Water for Life* goals?
2. How might we improve our understanding of place-based conditions AND be broadly inclusive of all *Water for Life* perspectives in effective planning?
3. How might we optimize the ability to monitor, evaluate, and report on environmental, social, and economic conditions AND broaden the accessibility of this information?
4. How might we develop our forecasting abilities AND improve how foresight supports decision-making across all *Water for Life* partners?

"In alignment with the ethos of Water for Life, an ethos of shared responsibility and cross-sector participation, it is time for a new conversation about water management in Alberta. This project discovered a growing appetite by key partners to consider the next evolution of Alberta's water management system, one that builds on our positive legacy and Water for Life partnerships, while ensuring a proactive and coordinated approach to tackling key risks." (Alberta Water Futures)

STRATEGIC INTENT

The goal of the WFL Action Plan project (Action Plan project) is for Partners to **identify actions their community or sector is committed to undertaking to address risks and opportunities¹, and advance the goals and directions of *Water for Life*.**

The project will develop a written Action Plan for the AWC that provides a clear set of short (1-3 years), medium (4–7 years), and long-term (7-10 years) actions from across participating Indigenous communities and AWC sectors that further the implementation of the *Water for Life* goals and key directions. An objective of the project team is to harmonize and sequence the actions from across Partners so that potential collaboration opportunities might be identified in the Action Plan.

¹ See Alberta Water Futures: Risks and Opportunities for Water Management – Perspectives Report, June 2021

The new Action Plan project will not recommend actions that should be taken, but instead will reflect what communities and sectors have self-identified as the strategic actions they are committed to undertaking to advance Water for Life.

While the Action Plan will consolidate the actions and potential collaboration taken by Partners to advance *Water for Life*, it will not necessarily reflect endorsement of one Partners actions by another.

OUR VALUES

In addition to the AWC Process Guidelines, these five values are suggested as a means to shape the culture of the project and guide the project team throughout their work.

1. Create Ethical Space²
 - Reflect an understanding of our various worldviews, perspectives and values in a way that does not diminish any, and that honours all.
2. Build Open and Honest Relationships with Communication
 - It is critical for relationship-building to have effective, open, and honest communication.
3. Embrace and Drive Change
 - Plan and prepare for constant change so that we can respond quickly and adapt.
4. Be Courageous, Creative, and Open-Minded
 - Take risks that align with the project's purpose, think bigger, be willing to experiment.
5. Seek Reciprocity
 - Work to build upon the contributions of others for the mutual gain of everyone.

PROJECT APPROACH

The Action Plan Project is a combination of work to be completed by the project team and work to be completed within communities or sectors. To map out work of the project team for this Terms of Reference, an overall project approach was devised (Figure 1) to illustrate the general sequence of activity for both the project team and Partners throughout the project. It is recognized that individual communities or sectors may choose alternate ways to identify their actions.

² [Voices of Understanding – Looking Through the Window](#), Alberta Energy Regulator, November 2017

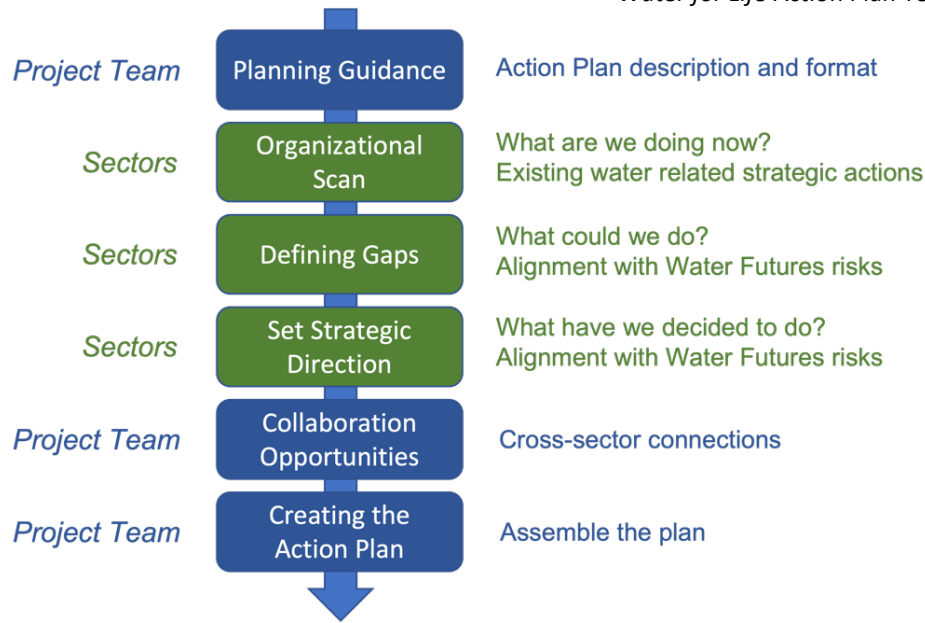


Figure 1 Project Tasks Schematic

The overall Action Plan project approach includes six steps:

1. **Planning Guidance** [*Project Team*]: The project team develops guidance for the Action Plan project including definitions for actions, collaborative actions, and implementation timelines, as well as laying out a template for the Action Plan itself.
2. **Organizational Scan** [*Partners*]: Using the guidance provided by the Project Team, Partners may identify those actions their organizations are taking today and intending to take in the future to further *Water for Life*.
3. **Defining Gaps** [*Partners*]: Partners may then weigh their current and future actions against the potential future risks identified in the Water Futures report to determine if their actions sufficiently address the risks, or if new actions are needed.
4. **Setting Strategic Direction** [*Partners*]: Partners may then decide which of the existing and/or new actions they wish to bring forward into the new Action Plan.
5. **Collaboration Opportunities** [*Project Team*]: The project team can discuss the variety of actions brought forward by Partners to ensure clarity and explore the potential for collaboration between Partners on some actions.
6. **Creating the Action Plan** [*Project Team*]: The final step is to create the Action Plan document with the project team ensuring the actions are appropriately sequenced and described.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. **Provide Planning Guidance**
 - The project team establishes guidance and templates for the Action Plan.
2. **Guide and Coordinate Partners**
 - Provide a venue for Partners to discuss challenges, share ideas, and provide feedback if necessary to ensure successful identification of Partner actions for the Action Plan.
3. **Describe Collaboration Opportunities**

- Explore potential collaborative actions among Partners for the Action Plan.

4. ~~Present a new Action Plan~~

- ~~Collate a new Action Plan from Partner and Project Team input.~~

5. Alternate Deliverables that Document and Communicate the successes and challenges with this Project and Process

- Develop a brief external communications document to share information with AWC members about the progress that was made by the team, acknowledging the efforts of those involved, and how the work could still contribute to a similar project in the future.
- Develop an internal communications document that summarizes the successes and challenges this project faced as a “lessons learned” document to inform future projects.

TIMELINES AND DELIVERABLES

After several months of pauses in 2022 and a year-long extension from June 2023 until June 2024, the final deliverable should change from being an Action Plan to the Alternate Deliverables described above, and the team should take a few months to complete those prior to board approval in October 2024.

- ***Approval of the Terms of Reference* Feb 2022**
- ***Complete Planning Guidance* Mar 2022**
- ***Coordination and Collaboration Opportunities* Mar 2022– Jan 2024**
- ***Preliminary Action Plan* Feb 2024**
- ***Review and Approval by Partners* Feb – Jun 2024**
- ~~***Final Action Plan* Jun 2024**~~
- ***Alternative Deliverables* Oct 2024**

PROJECT TEAM OPERATIONS

Membership

The Action Plan project seeks to consolidate actions of all the Partners, which means all communities and sectors have the potential to bring forward their sector’s actions for the Action Plan.

AWC sectors whose decisions and actions directly affect water use, water quality, or aquatic ecosystems are considered particularly important to the new Action Plan, and these AWC sectors are encouraged to participate in the Project Team. These sectors are:

- *Government of Alberta and Provincial Authorities*: Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Health, Science and Research.
- *Local Government*: Rural, Large Urban, and Small Urban municipal governments.
- *Industry*: Chemical and Petrochemical, Irrigation, Cropping, Mining, Oil and Gas, Forestry, Livestock, and Power Generation.

- Non-governmental Organizations: Lake Environment Conservation, Wetland Conservation, Fisheries Habitat Conservation, and Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils. The Alberta Water Council itself should also be represented on the team as a potential contributor to the action plan.

Indigenous communities and the Métis Settlements General Council are not actively represented on the AWC. It is felt that participation from Indigenous communities in any form will serve to further the understanding of Indigenous worldviews and key Indigenous water issues by all *Water for Life* partners. It is understood that participating Indigenous communities will represent the perspectives of their individual Nations and do not speak for the perspectives of other Nations or communities.

Team Member Responsibilities

Project team members are expected to:

1. Engage deeply enough to be able to represent their organizations perspectives in the project team's discussions and work.
2. Engage deeply enough to be able to bring forward actions for the Action Plan and/or project team decisions to which their organization can commit.
3. Regularly attend meetings and provide relevant, timely and accurate information for the team.

Team members may send an alternate team member in their place if they are unable to attend a meeting. The team member named as the formal designate to the team is responsible to remain informed about current discussions.

The Project Team Co-Chairs will coordinate with the project managers to ensure the team delivers on time and budget, by helping set agendas and deliver team meetings. Beyond representing their own communities or sectors, co-chairs ensure that all team members are afforded the opportunity to contribute.

To support the project co-chairs, the project manager will prepare agendas, coordinate meetings, record discussions and develop progress and final reports that reflect the teams' direction in a succinct and unbiased manner. A record of meeting discussions will be prepared, including Action Items.

Consensus decisions

The project team will operate in a manner that is consistent with the rules, policies and procedures adopted by the AWC, including the use of consensus to make decisions.

Expected time commitments

It is expected that the project team will demand a significant amount of time on the part of Partner representatives, although it is likely to be distributed unevenly over the course of the project. The early planning and guidance portion of the project is likely to require concentrated efforts, as will the latter stages where the plan is being put together. There may be lower project team efforts required during the middle stages where Partners are working to put together their specific actions.

Project team process

Initial thinking regarding how the project team will operate and effectively engage their respective communities or sectors was premised on these groups working independently to determine what actions they may wish to bring forward for the Action Plan. The project team will likely explore, as part of the preliminary planning guidance stage, methods that can capitalize on virtual tools and techniques so that deeper engagement, and potentially cross-Partner engagement is supported.

BUDGET

The working group anticipates that the Action Plan project can be completed using an estimated \$24,000 of Alberta Water Council core funds identified to support project teamwork. No additional project-specific funding is required at this time.

Type	Amount
Stakeholder support	\$ 10,000
Hosting (meetings and workshop support)	\$ 6,000
Communications (design, layout, printing, etc.)	\$ 8,000
Total	\$ 24,000

PRELIMINARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

The first task of the project team is to develop planning guidance to support all Partners to shape their selection of actions for the Action Plan. The working group offers the following preliminary planning guidance as a starting point for the project team discussions.

The following preliminary definitions are proposed to support development of the Action Plan:

Action An activity that results in demonstrable progress in achieving *Water for Life* goals.

Examples include:

- *A Partner develops practices that reduce water use by 15%.*
- *A Partner establishes procedures that reduce the impacts of road crossing construction on aquatic habitat.*
- *A Partner develops and delivers educational programming on riparian areas.*

Advice Expertise, guidance, perspectives, or recommendations offered to support or influence *Water for Life* actions. *Examples include:*

- *A Partner provides a constructive review and input into the development of habitat protection measures.*
- *Partners develop a consensus-based plan for water quality monitoring.*

Action Plan Describes those actions (as defined above) to which Partners are willing to publicly commit. It does not include all the actions that are being or could be taken by a community or sector. For example:

- *A Partner routinely monitors water quality parameters as part of their regular operations, but wants to expand monitoring of certain parameters to align with an Integrated Watershed Management Plan. The expanded monitoring could be added to the Action Plan, while the routine monitoring would not be listed.*