

FEBRUARY, 2015

Annual *Water For Life* Partnerships Newsletter

ISSUE FOUR



About this newsletter

The [AWC](#)'s special 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 of our this issue: Government of Alberta, Land Stewardship Centre of Canada, Oldman Watershed Council, and Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society.

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About the *WFL* Partnerships

[Water for Life](#): a strategy for sustainability is the Government of Alberta's guidance document for water management in the province. 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 the Strategy's 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 provincial [Alberta Water Council](#) (AWC). The AWC provides a forum for sectors and *Water for Life* (WFL) partners to come together to discuss and find innovative solutions for water management issues. The *WFL* partnership system is composed of the provincial AWC, 11 WPACs and approximately 140 WSGs. The partnerships typically include stakeholders representing governments, industries, and non-government organizations. At present, more than 1,000 Albertans are working directly under the banner of *WFL*.

water for life

Message from Honourable Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development Kyle Fawcett



Water plays a vital role in our lives by sustaining agriculture, supporting healthy aquatic ecosystems, providing ample recreational opportunities and aiding in the responsible development of our natural resources is an important priority of the Government of Alberta.

In its ten years of operation, the AWC has significantly advanced Alberta's [Water for Life](#) goals and addresses emerging water management issues. Our government relies on the AWC's ability to undertake these projects and appreciates its agility, breadth of expertise, and commitment to support sound water management in Alberta.

The government recently released [Our Water, Our Future: A Plan for Action to Albertans](#) to address immediate priorities related to healthy lakes, hydraulic fracturing, drinking water and wastewater, and overall water management. The AWC played a key role in this initiative by improving understanding of water management issues and enhancing the collaborative efforts needed to find solutions.

I want to thank you for your passion and your commitment to protecting Alberta's water resources. I am looking forward to future conversations as we work together to develop made-in-Alberta solutions to our shared water management challenges.

Kyle Fawcett
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

Photo credit: Government of Alberta

Linear Features in the Oldman Watershed: Necessity and Risk

Our Water, Our Future: A Conversation with Albertans

Alberta's resources are important and their development contributes to the prosperity and high quality of life Albertans enjoy. But we know none of this would be possible without water to develop these resources, grow, and raise the food we eat-it is the essence of life.

Last year, the Government of Alberta held a [Water Conversation](#) with Albertans, including members of the AWC. Details of those discussions are available in the report [Our Water, Our Future: A Conversation with Albertans, Summary of Discussions](#).

The Government of Alberta is taking action twenty actions in fact to protect, conserve and enhance Alberta's water resources. [Our Water, Our Future: A Plan for Action](#) addresses Albertan's immediate priorities related to healthy lakes, hydraulic fracturing, drinking water and wastewater, and overall water management.



For lakes, actions include improving lake governance, identifying gaps for monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and enhancing public awareness regarding lake stewardship. Hydraulic fracturing actions include encouraging industry to use alternatives to freshwater and implementing science-based standards for baseline water well testing. Under drinking water and wastewater, actions include supporting research for and developing a common approach to source water protection plans for all watersheds. Water management actions include ensuring major water using sectors make concrete improvements in conservation, efficiency, and productivity, exploring approaches for established protected water and working to approve a framework to reduce existing tailings ponds. The actions will be implemented over the next two to four years and will support five longer-term actions which are more complex and will require further engagement with Albertans as they are pursued.



In releasing the documents, [Environment and Sustainable Resource Development Minister Kyle Fawcett](#) stated that: "Alberta has managed its resources prudently for more than a century and these short and long-term actions will help ensure that we will continue to effectively manage our water to benefit all Albertans".

Minister Fawcett also praised the AWC for supporting the [Water Conversation](#) engagement initiative and playing a key role in Alberta's

The [Oldman Watershed Council \(OWC\)](#) has worked to complete watershed health assessments and to engage and work with the public, stakeholders, and government to develop an [Integrated Watershed Management Plan \(IWMP\)](#). An important goal of the IWMP is to address the need to maintain and protect the headwaters and source waters in the Oldman watershed, and to this end, the OWC completed the first iteration of the [Headwaters Action Plan \(HAP\)](#) in 2014.

The HAP process addressed fourth Strathler order sub-watershed assessment of headwaters integrity, and found that a majority of sub-watersheds in the Oldman were at moderate to high risk from high density of linear features. How to address the cumulative impacts of linear features on headwaters integrity has subsequently been a focus of a multi-stakeholder Headwaters Action Team, leading to the initiation of the Dutch Creek Pilot Project in the upper Oldman headwaters. A Linear Features Classification Project was completed in the Dutch Creek sub-watershed in 2014, and was provided as information to the Linear Footprint Management Plan a sub-watershed plan of the [South Saskatchewan Regional Plan \(\(SSRP\)](#). Moving forward, the Dutch Creek Pilot Project will align with the SSRP to determine priorities for reclamation, and will assist with public recreation user education and awareness of the risk to watershed health from the proliferation of linear features and the intensity and type of use they engender.

Linear Features- necessity and risk

What do roads, seismic lines, power lines, pipelines, railroads, cut lines, and recreation trails have to do with a healthy watershed? Simply put, high density of linear features (LF), where they are placed and used can be a risk to the watershed. All the water coming out of the sky eventually runs over the watershed, along ditches, culverts, clear cuts, quad trails, roads, and power line right of ways and flows into the Oldman River. Depending on how and where they are developed and the way they are used, LF proliferation is shown to have adverse impacts on water hydrology affecting ground water recharge and surface run-off, erosion and sedimentation in streams, impacts on aquatic ecosystem health and extra cost to public water utilities to address water quality needs got our growing communities.

Necessity

Over the last century, Albertans have been busy building communities and infrastructure to support people who live, work, and play in this region of Alberta. All this development has depended on building and maintaining LF. While this development was accepted as a necessity for continued economic well-being, scientific assessments and the

overarching *Water for Life* strategy, which was release in 2003.

The Water Conversation focused on potential water management options that could help Alberta respond to future demands for water to support growing communities, healthy aquatic ecosystems and a strong economy the three goals of the [Water for Life](#) strategy. The input from the Water Conversation will help inform a renewal of the *Water for Life* Action Plan.

A total of twenty community conversations were held across Alberta, along with a series of in-person conversations with stakeholder groups. A series of dedicated conversations were held for Alberta First Nations and Metis organizations, recognizing their special relationship with water and land.

Love the Lake

At the recent Association of Summer Villages of Alberta (ASVA) Annual Conference, I had the pleasure of meeting Don Davidson, a driving force behind Love the Lake, an informal group of concerned, passionate lakeshore residents who have pledged to be stewards and implement best practices around Pigeon Lake. Within minutes of speaking with Don, and learning more about their efforts, I knew the story of his group's good work should be shared to inspire others.

An Aggressive Intruder

On Alberta's list of prohibited noxious weeds, [Himalayan balsam](#) is an aggressive invader of wetlands, streams, and moist woodlands. Many places in Alberta, including Pigeon Lake, have been invaded and overcome by this deceptively beautiful weed. Concerned by the abundance of the Himalayan balsam, infesting the North Shore of Pigeon Lake, residents knew something had to be done. Love the Lake decided to take action to eradicate it.

"Our goal was to ensure the weed did not reach the Battle River, where eradication would be virtually impossible", explains Don. Ultimately, their actions resulted in the eradication of the Himalayan balsam along the shoreline of Pigeon Lake, and by doing so prevented the weed from infesting the Battle River.



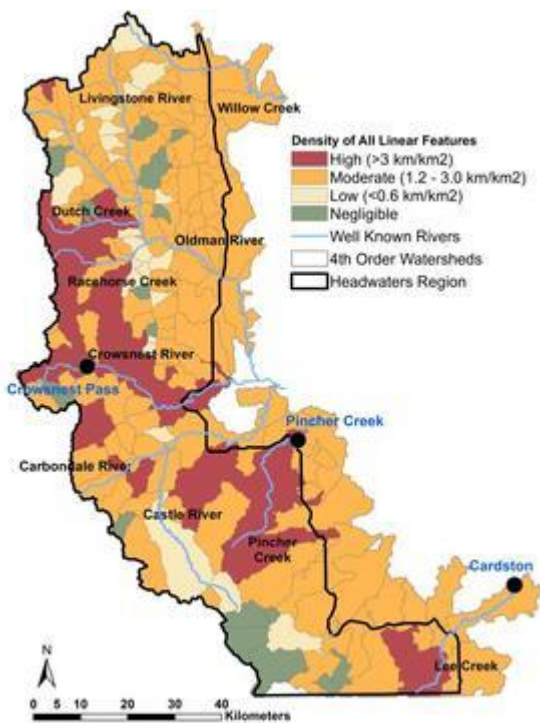
A Successful Approach

After five years, Don is confident in proclaiming the project a success. "In the last three years we've seen the re-establishment of native plants on the shoreline that used to be dominated by Himalayan balsam," he adds. "To see native plants begin to flourish again is a definite success in my

concerns of the local communities have flagged the increase of LF and intensity/type of their use as a problem. This has also raised the need to do something about this growing concern for watershed health, particularly in the headwaters area of the Oldman.

Risk

Headwaters of the Oldman watershed provide approximately 90% of the water for the Oldman River it is a critical water tower for southwestern Alberta. Linear feature proliferation has been evaluated in the headwaters region, and 77% of the sub-watershed are at moderate to high risk from this type of development.



Dutch Creek in the Oldman headwaters area. Map of Linear Features Density Risk Rating (ESRD, 2012 Data)

The OWC provided the Government of Alberta (GOA) the HAP 2013-2014 plan, and reviewed it through a public process. The plan addressed the need to have no net increase of LF, and rollback/reclaim LF where there is high risk to watershed health. The HAP is a good start, but it is only a plan. There is a need to act on it. The HAP was provided as advice to the SSRP and also the SSRP's Linear Footprint Management Plan (LFMP). The LFMP is integrating multiple data and information sources to analyze, plan, and eventually implement actions that address LF proliferation in the Oldman headwaters and elsewhere in the SSRP region. The OWC's Headwater's Action Team is

eyes." The secret behind the Love the Lake's success is in the method they used. The literature regarding Himalayan balsam directs people to collect and bag the weed. "We found that bagging wasn't actually working well," explains Don. "So we came up with the 'pull, break, and drop' method which was proven to be 100% effective." This unique approach, one that Don and his group devised themselves, involves pulling the weed to remove it, breaking it to kill it, and then dropping it in a dry area to ensure it does not regrow. "This method has worked so well we are urging others to adopt it," adds Don.

Value of Collaboration

Don recognizes the value of collaboration, warmly acknowledging the contributions of residents, volunteers, and others who helped ensure the project's success. "We are appreciative of the support [Land Stewardship Centre](#) has provided to Love the Lake through the Watershed Stewardship Grant Program." Eradicating noxious weeds that spread like wild-fire can seem like a daunting task. But this successful project serves as a lesson to others who are also trying to initiate change. "The first years were hard," admits Don. "But we kept at it and each year there was less to be found." Through their hard work and dedication, Love the Lake has shown us that it is possible to transform awareness into action.

Article by: Alexandra Fredrickson, Land Stewardship Centre

Photo credit: A. Hill

The Oldman goes to Hollywood!

The [OWC](#) is producing a film that will become a signature communication piece for southwest Alberta with the core message being: "We are all downstream." This movie will create a space for people to have an experience and draw their own conclusions through presentation of the story. The goal of the film is to communicate where water comes from, where it goes, and what happens in between. To see a short video about the movie, click on: <http://globalnews.ca/video/1619447/oldman-river-movie>

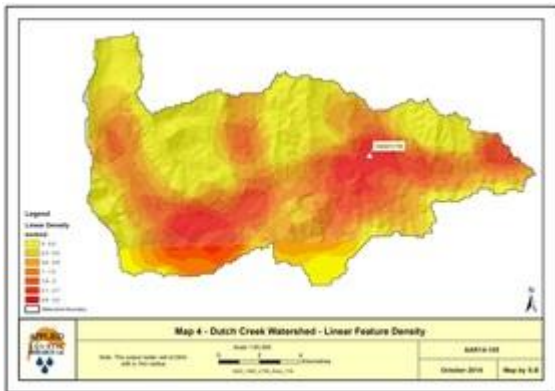


This film will be shown to audiences throughout the watershed and beyond with the intent to educate, inspire, and contribute to a stronger sense of community. The OWC is inviting decision-makers, thinkers, community builders, and supporters to be a part of this exciting project! For more information on how you can help please go to:

http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1103565212340-1445/OWCMovieBrochure_ForPrinterOct2014.pdf

keen to work with the SSRP as it is a key priority of the Headwaters Action Plan-and we have made progress with this already with a 'Linear Features Classification' project in the Dutch Creek sub-watershed.

Historically, the Dutch Creek has been mined, logged, grazed, and has multiple LF to attest to this history. The majority of LF continues to be used for other purposes other than their original intended use. The risk to water and watershed health that supports all who live and work downstream needs careful attention, and that includes education and social willingness to address the issues.



**Dutch Creek Watershed Linear Features Classification Project
December, 2014**

Trade-offs

The iconic west has been a place of opportunity, and we have taken advantage of this richness over time. As we reach limits to how much can be done on the landscape without compromising future opportunities and losing important headwaters, we need greater wisdom and community understanding. Is water and watershed health important? The OWC has heard a resounding "YES" to this question from both public and stakeholders.

What to do about LF?

The Headwaters Action Team has completed the Dutch Creek Linear Classification Project, and provided this information to GOA planners who are working on the Linear Footprint Management Plan. This information will also be used by the planners to lay out the Recreation Management Plan. That is why the OWC's Headwater's Action Team is now working towards bringing the science and social need (we all live downstream!) for water and watershed health to Dutch Creek this summer. Our first step will be to work on awareness and education programs with stakeholders and other user groups around the need to reclaim some problematic linear features, and to encourage greater awareness of impacts of use on water and

Photo credit: OWC

The Riparian Area that was almost Loved to Death

No visit to the [Fish Creek Provincial Park](#) is complete without spending some time near the water. Visitors are naturally drawn to the banks, sometimes venturing off the durable surfaces of paved pathways and bridges to get a little closer. Although the intentions of connecting with the creek is fundamentally good, off trail traffic can compact the soil and damage riparian vegetation, seriously affecting riparian health. This was certainly true of the south side of Fish Creek downstream of Bridge 11, which was effectively being 'loved to death'.



Stream bank Restoration

In an effort to save the area from further damage, the [Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society](#) coordinated the 2014 Fish Creek Riparian Restoration Project that engaged the public in the scarification of compact areas, planting of willow stakes and polar seedlings, and installation of woody debris and trail closure signs to discourage future off-trail use.



Thanks to the support of [Alberta Parks](#), the [Venturers Society](#), [Cows and Fish](#), [Trout Unlimited](#), the [Alberta Conservation Association](#), the [Land Stewardship Centre of Canada](#), and the amazing volunteers who collectively dedicated over 300 hours to foster the natural regeneration of six hundred metres of stream bank. This is would not have been possible without your support.

To get involved in future restoration initiatives in Fish Creek Provincial Park please visit:

<http://friendsoffishcreek.org/>

Photo credits: Friends of the Fish Creek

watershed values. With increased understanding, we hope that some measure of behaviour change will result.

So what can you do?

If you are a recreationist or other user of the headwaters area-for whatever purpose, the big ask is to understand why better linear feature management is needed, support, and adhere to a designate trail and access system, and allow reclamation of some linear features to happen without undoing that good work. We all think it is the other person who is responsible for the issues, but reality is we are all responsible and we all need to take action!



Avoid the muck! Help stop erosion and loss of ecologically important wet areas.

Through the Dutch Creek Pilot Project, the Headwaters Action Team hopes to have a success story that can be used as an inspiration and a guide for community and watershed stewardship groups to address linear features. For more information about the OWC: www.oldmanbasin.org or join the OWC's blog spot at: <http://oldmanwatershed.blogspot.ca/>

Article by: *Connie Simmons, OWC*

Photo credits: OWC



For more information about *Water for Life*:
<http://www.waterforlife.alberta.ca/>

For more information about the Alberta Water Council:
<http://albertawatercouncil.ca/>

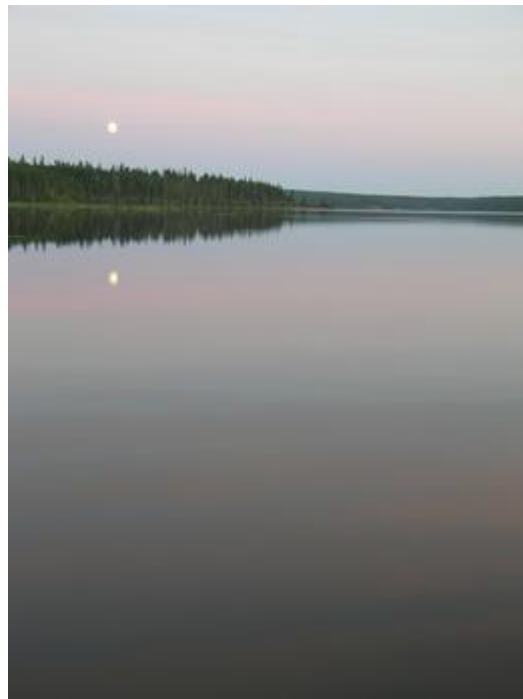


Photo Credit: *L. Wagner*

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