



Hybrid Board of Directors Meeting Minutes March 20, 2025
Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District office and on zoom

Directors present: Doug Kaupp, Brad Sclossberger, Henk De Vlieger, Errol Kutcher, Linda Cerney, Kristen Dykstra, Mark Svenson, Andy Hurly, Erik Cline, Allan Garbutt, Cheryl Dash, Megan Andre, Rick Cooke

Staff present: Shannon Frank

Doug called the meeting to order at 1:10pm. A land acknowledgement was given.

Motion: Brad moved, seconded by Linda, to approve the agenda as amended. 9 in favour. Carried.

Motion: Henk moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the minutes from the February 13, 2025 meeting as presented. 9 in favour. Carried.

Executive Director report

- Board Nominations
 - Shannon will let you know if your two year term is up so you can decide if you would like to run again.
 - A call for nominations will go out in April and if needed elections will be held in May.
 - Bill MacMillan is no longer with Lethbridge County. He will be missed and we thank him for his valuable insights and contributions.
 - The agriculture seat is now vacant.
- Finances and fund development
 - Receiving a Watershed Resiliency and Restoration (WRRP) grant for \$123,000 over 2 years to develop an open source tool to quickly calculate the economic value of ecosystem services on a per hectare basis. This will be instrumental for our engagement efforts to raise support for and investments in nature-based solutions. We are exploring potential partnerships with ALUS and ESSA who are also working on parallel projects.
 - Submitted an Alberta Ecotrust grant application for \$50,000 over 2 years on March 10 and working on an RBC application for \$100,000 over 2 years that is due March 21. Both grants are focused on enhancing relationships with elected officials, senior staff at all levels of government (including Indigenous governments) and community leaders. Revolves around raising support for and investments in OWC and nature-based solutions. Critical right now with federal and municipal elections this year, Kainai Nation election in November, provincial and Piikani Nation elections in 2027.
 - Waiting to hear back from 5 grants so the budget will change when we are successful with some or all of them.

- 2024-25 budget
 - Staff secured a record setting 18 grants this year and we received our largest ever personal donation from Kim Sturgess. This has put us in a good position for next fiscal year and we have unrestricted funds to allocate.
 - Balance Sheet sent out before the meeting shows OWC's GICs, Emergency Operations Reserve and Dissolution Reserve.
 - Profit and Loss Statement sent out before the meeting includes estimates for deferred and surplus but we will not have exact numbers until the audit is complete.

- 2025-26 budget
 - A draft budget was sent out prior to the meeting. It will be amended as new funding is secured and once we know exactly how much we are deferring from the previous year.
 - The budget includes the cost of 2 storage units that we currently have but no office.
 - The budget includes a 3% increase for all staff, pending performance evaluations.
 - Changes since the last meeting include adding additional funds to consultants, meals and beverages, supplies, truck maintenance, and IT and Technology.
 - Once the grant funds for our ~12 current grant agreements are deposited we will be in a strong position for the year. Until then there is a small chance grant agreements could be cancelled with 90 days notice.
 - Where to allocate unrestricted funds was discussed.
 - Our next large project is a State of the Watershed (SoW) Assessment. This is a difficult project to fundraise for but there are 3-4 grants coming up this fall/winter we could apply for, totalling about \$100,000. Other watershed councils have spent about \$250,000 on a SoW, so we would need another \$150,000. Recognizing this difficulty, staff have been working very hard to secure grants to cover all other expenses to free up unrestricted funds for a SoW. Shannon is not comfortable spending that much unrestricted funds unless it is something that is repeatable, that we can keep up to date and does not sit on a shelf. We need more time to explore what's feasible but can earmark funding, with the intention to approve a project plan later on after we determine the best path forward and see what grant funds we can secure. A rough timeline would look like this:
 - Year 1: Determine best path forward to meet our needs and fundraise.
 - Year 2: Hire consultant or staff person to lead project, coordinate a committee of interested partners, secure data and start analysis.
 - Year 3: Complete assessment and create an online tool. Share results, develop communications assets, integrate into other projects.

- Adding more funds to our Emergency Operating Reserve is always a good idea to give staff security and encourage staff retention, especially given government fiscal challenges. Right now we have enough for about 6 months of operations at current capacity.
 - Opportunity to add capacity quickly by job sharing with Living Lakes Canada (included in budget).
- Director suggests splitting unrestricted funds between SoW and Emergency Operating Reserve.
- Directors would like to see fundraising efforts to bring in funds for SoW, even if it takes longer to complete the project.

Motion: Brad moves, seconded by Andy, to approve the 2025-26 budget as amended and add \$137,500 to OWC's Emergency Operating Reserve. 10 in favour. Carried.

- Government relations
 - Water Coalition led by Alberta Ecotrust continues to advocate for increased provincial funding for the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program grant program.
 - Jana and I met with MLA Chelsae Petrovic to request her support for our coalition budget request. She has provided a letter of support and said she will speak to Minister Schulz directly to indicate her support.
 - The Coalition has a meeting coming up with Minister Schow and the UCP South Caucus.
 - We heard more details about EPA's budget at the budget estimates meetings.
 - Aquatic invasive species budget was increased to purchase additional washing units and increase border checks.
 - Funding for Watershed Councils and the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program was not reduced.
 - Budget for the Landuse Secretariat was reduced, which will likely impact regional planning.
 - Land Conservation Program to purchase land or add easements to land was announced:
 - [Increasing land conservation in Alberta | alberta.ca](https://www.alberta.ca/increasing-land-conservation-in-alberta)
 - [4M announced to conserve Southern Alberta's landscapes | Lethbridge News Now](https://www.lethbridge.com/news/4M-announced-to-protect-southern-alberta-landscapes)
 - Nothing to report on the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan 10 Year Review, water availability engagement or Nature Strategy since we submitted our insights. EPA is reviewing all the input and writing a summary report.
- Communications

- Coal: presented at South East Alberta Watershed Alliance Water Forum, panelist at Dry Horizons film screening event, created a postcard to give out that links to our blog.
- New blogs about the value of natural infrastructure and bumble bees in winter: <https://oldmanwatershed.ca/blog-posts/2025/3/5/natural-infrastructure-money-in-the-stream-bank>
- <https://oldmanwatershed.ca/blog-posts/2025/2/10/bumble-bees-in-winter>
- Projects
 - State of the Watershed (Andy, Linda, Cheryl, Shannon)
 - Watershed councils did not submit a Statement of Opportunity to the Alberta Water Council for a provincial State of the Watershed assessment so this initiative continues to be inactive. We will need to proceed on our own project.
 - So many reports already, a new one coming out March 26 called [Watershed Reports](#), so we need to find a way to use these existing reports.
 - Shannon will investigate what is possible within budget.
 - Committee will meet in late March or early April.
 - Supporting drought affected communities
 - A spring water supply forecast blog is underway.
 - Third natural infrastructure blog is underway.
 - Restoring natural infrastructure
 - Spring willow planting and pollinator gardens is coming up at ~5 sites and volunteers will be needed.
 - Agricultural literacy
 - 2 more industry engagement sessions were held this month, similar to the ones held in November. Jon is writing a report to summarize what we heard at the 5 events.
 - We had 652 responses to our survey, a record number. A report will be available at the end of March.
 - Youth education
 - Spring X-Stream Science Field Trips are booked for May with ~5 classes.
 - Day on the Creek and Outdoor Adventure Field Days are scheduled.
 - Sofie is training teachers how to deliver the Project WET programs.
 - Monitoring (CABIN, pesticides, groundwater)
 - Our groundwater partner, Living Lakes Canada, organized 2 town hall events and has received about 100 survey responses. The project received new funding and so we will be hosting two more events in April/May.
 - Pesticides sampling has wrapped up and will not be continuing.

- OWC is training and funding other watershed councils and watershed stewardship groups to complete CABIN sampling across the eastern slopes with federal grants we have received.

Governance Committee (need volunteers)

- Nothing to report. Topics that we will work on next include:
 - Supporting external groups policy.
 - Jana will engage with Metis Nation and develop an Indigenous Relations Policy.

External Committee Reports

- Water Supply Outlook / SSRB Interbasin Water Coordination Committee - Doug Kaupp, Shannon Frank, Chris Gallagher
 - Next meeting will be in the spring.
 - Looked at snow pillow graphs at <https://rivers.alberta.ca/>. Snowpack is on the lower end but reservoirs should still fill up because they are relatively full from last year's precipitation.
- Irrigation Districts Update - Chris Gallagher
 - Snowpack remains at or below the lower quartile in most basins.
 - As per the River Forecast Centre, we are at about 58-80% of normal for this time of year in the irrigation district headwaters.
 - Reservoir storage remains much better than last year. We have plenty of water to start the irrigation season normally.
 - The messaging on the 2025 water supply situation for irrigation remains the same. Irrigation districts are committed to managing irrigator allocations to accommodate the available water after allowing for human and livestock sustenance and WIOB downstream flow management, and we are encouraging ongoing voluntary efforts to conserve water.
 - [We do not anticipate and are not actively working on a water sharing agreement](#) (CTV News) for 2025 but continue to investigate options for a long-term framework to facilitate the irrigation districts' intent to share water during times of shortage, while simultaneously promoting strategic improvement in constructed and natural water storage and resilience solutions so that the volumes and impacts going forward on water sharing are minimized.
- Kainai Environmental Protection Association - Ninna Piiksii (Mike Bruised Head)
 - Nothing to report.
- Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent - Ninna Piiksii (Mike Bruised Head)
 - Nothing to report.
- International Joint Commission Public Advisory Group (PAG) - Cheryl Bradley
 - Nothing new to report.

- Crowsnest Forest Products / West Fraser Public Advisory Group - Rick Cooke
 - Documents are online for public input and OWC shared the link on our channels.
 - Directors are encouraged to review the documents and share their input with West Fraser:
 - <https://www.westfraser.com/sustainability/forest-management/public-involvement/west-fraser-cochrane>.
 - GoA wants more firesmart buffer zones around communities.
- Alberta Water Council (AWC)
 - WPAC seat on the Board of Directors - Doug Kaupp (alternate)
 - Met February 19-20, with a full day of strategic planning where 7 new projects were discussed, with Statements of Opportunity being developed or completed.
 - Potential projects included exploring untapped water supplies, evaluating the water license transfer system, assessing if the Water for Life Strategy and Action Plan is meeting its goal of healthy aquatic ecosystems, education and literacy planning.

Henk moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:47pm.

Next meeting: April 17, 2025 from 1pm-4:30pm on zoom or at the Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District office, 2821 - 18 Ave North, Lethbridge.

The foregoing minutes were approved by the Board of Directors on _____.

_____, Doug Kaupp, OWC Chair