



Oldman Watershed Council

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Overview

Alberta Coalition for Watershed Security

Interim Report Period: Jan 2025–Jan 2026

Initiative Overview

Through this initiative, Alberta Ecotrust developed its internal capacity to lead the formation of the Alberta Coalition for Watershed Security, support advocacy efforts to sustain Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP) funding, engage key interest holders, and lay the groundwork for a long-term sustainable Watershed Security Fund. These efforts aim to strengthen the province’s water stewardship, helping protect our communities from droughts and floods for generations.

Impact and Progress to Date

The Coalition set out to achieve three core outcomes during the first year: advocacy efforts related to restoring and sustaining funding for the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP), establishing a provincial water Coalition, and strengthening government relations capacity within Alberta’s environmental sector. Meaningful progress has been made across all three areas.

Sustaining WRRP Investment

Project funding enabled Alberta Ecotrust to retain Counsel Public Affairs to support a coordinated and strategic government relations approach for WRRP advocacy. Throughout 2025, biweekly strategy meetings guided sustained engagement with decision-makers and ensured advocacy efforts were responsive to evolving government and fiscal contexts.

As a result, the Coalition met with 11 Ministers, MLAs, MPs, and senior government staff, positioning the organization as a trusted advisor on watershed resilience. Two pre-budget submissions were submitted to the Government of Alberta recommending continued WRRP investment. Engagement with municipalities, industry, and other partners resulted in seven letters of support advocating for WRRP renewal.

Funding for WRRP was maintained in the 2024–2025 fiscal year. Allocations for the upcoming fiscal year will be announced in February 2026, efforts have helped sustain momentum and

visibility for the program and reinforced its value as a cornerstone of watershed resilience in Alberta.

Establishing the Alberta Coalition for Watershed Security

In May 2025, Alberta Ecotrust convened a facilitated visioning session with water, watershed, and land-focused organizations to define a shared vision and priorities for a provincial Coalition. This session, along with ongoing guidance from an advisory committee, shaped a clear agenda and governance pathway for the Coalition.

In November 2025, the Coalition website was launched to publicly communicate the Coalition's purpose and begin broader engagement. Since the launch, we've received 21 inquiries and we are working to connect with these organizations, as well as others we've identified as key to the effort. The Coalition currently includes five confirmed steering committee members, five committed members, and additional organizations interested in engaging at various levels. Engagement efforts include Indigenous collaborators, such as First Nations and Métis communities and Indigenous-led organizations, ENGOs, Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs), municipalities, academia, and industry stakeholders aligned around watershed security goals.

Enhancing Advocacy Capacity in the Environmental Sector

To strengthen sector-wide government relations capacity, Alberta Ecotrust delivered three government relations training sessions in 2025. One session was delivered in person at the Environmental Gathering in May, followed by two virtual sessions in October and November.

Post-session surveys demonstrate strong outcomes. Eighty percent of participants reported increased confidence in applying at least one new government engagement tool, and 80 percent reported greater confidence communicating key messages to decision-makers. These results indicate improved readiness across the sector to engage in coordinated, effective government relations for watershed security.

Adaptive Learning

Several unanticipated developments strengthened the project's adaptability and focus. Changes in advisory committee member availability due to job transitions required flexibility in engagement approaches, reinforcing the importance of adaptive Coalition processes.

In our efforts to position the Coalition as a trusted advisor to the government, we actively engaged government officials and staff to better understand the current and evolving context of the WRRP. While the initial advocacy goal focused on doubling program investment, feedback from government partners led to a refined strategy emphasizing program continuity and stability. This shift reflects our collaborative and responsive advocacy

approach grounded in relationship-building.

Following the Coalition website launch, we received a high volume of meeting requests from communities and organizations across the province. This response revealed strong interest in coordinated action and increased investment in nature-based solutions to address Alberta's water challenges.

This project has reinforced that Coalition-building is as much about process as outcomes. We've learned that successful coordinated government relations are dependent on sustained and intentional relationship building, clear communication, shared understanding, and cannot solely function on the basis of shared policy goals. There is a strong appetite within Alberta's water sector for coordinated, system-level advocacy grounded in diplomatic, long-term engagement with government.

Partnerships and Organizational Impact

This project has strengthened existing relationships and fostered new partnerships among organizations committed to collaborative, long-term water solutions. These partnerships have expanded the Coalition's reach and reinforced the value of coordinated action and funding for watershed security.

For Alberta Ecotrust, your contribution has been transformative. It has enhanced government relations capacity, policy literacy, and sector leadership. Increased staff capacity has supported stronger cross-sector mobilization and more effective engagement on complex, system-level challenges. Collectively, these gains have elevated the organization's credibility and effectiveness as a convener in Alberta's water landscape, and contribute more proactively and meaningfully to provincial and federal conversations on watershed security.

Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

The impact of this project will be sustained through a focus on long-term funding mechanisms, capacity building, and strategic planning. A central objective is to move beyond fragmented, short-term funding by laying the groundwork for a sustainable water fund in Alberta, alongside continued advocacy for WRRP renewal.

Sector capacity building will further sustain impact. Our Government relations training helped equip organizations with lasting skills and tools to advocate effectively for watershed security beyond the life of this project.

Looking ahead, a Sustainability Planning phase scheduled for late 2026 will develop a roadmap for the Coalition's long-term viability, including exploring future funding mechanisms to allow the Coalition to become an independent or enduring entity.



Next Steps

Over the coming months, Alberta Ecotrust will continue to focus on building a strong and representative Alberta Coalition for Watershed Security. This includes ongoing external engagement with watershed organizations, Indigenous partners, municipalities, industry, and other aligned interest holders to populate the Coalition, confirm governance roles, and ensure broad provincial representation. These relationship-building efforts will help solidify the Coalition's foundation and readiness for coordinated action.

Concurrently, we will launch the development of three complementary research resources focused on watershed security and natural infrastructure in Alberta. This work will build on existing knowledge, experience, and outcomes from across Alberta's watershed community. The intent is to synthesize and elevate the collective impact of watershed and natural infrastructure investments to date, help articulate the case for sustained, long-term support, and guide the Coalition's long-term strategy.

Together, these resources will:

- Highlight the environmental, economic, social, climate benefits, and advancements related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of watershed and natural infrastructure investments in Alberta;
- Draw on existing research and on-the-ground experience from across the province; and
- Support a shared narrative that strengthens future funding and policy conversations.

Collectively, these next steps will position the Coalition to move from foundational development toward coordinated, long-term action that advances watershed security and resilient water investment across Alberta.