

Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

Description of project/program:

The Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance (MPWA) is the local stakeholder partnership that provides leadership, and expertise to engage and empower governments, industry, non-governmental organizations, and indigenous communities to achieve the outcomes of 'Water for Life' (WFL) in the Peace River and Slave River watersheds. The operational funding grant is essential for the effective operation of the Alliance by providing the necessary support to the board of directors, MPWA committees and staff. This funding supports training, governance, staffing, office maintenance and delivery of programs (policy and planning initiatives, technical projects and updates, engagement opportunities, education events, and increased stewardship awareness).

The underlying purpose of designated WPACs is to support the engagement of Albertans in the shared stewardship of watershed resources and assure the achievement of the GoA Water for Life Strategy outcomes through collaborative partnerships, adaptive planning, and knowledge transfer.

It is a top priority of the MPWA to provide a professional staff compliment to lead, facilitate, administer, and convene the appropriate stakeholders to meet the Watershed needs through a variety of mediums and projects. A multitude of water resource concerns in the Peace/Slave basins can be effectively addressed through MPWA facilitated collaboration. Through the efforts of the MPWA staff team, a number of necessary and inovative projects are being advanced to completion in pursuit of the WFL goals, Regional Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) goals, and MPWA goals (as indetified in our State of the Watershed, Integrated Watershed Management Plan, and Strategic Plan).

With appropriate funding in place, the MPWA will:

1. MPWA staff will continue to be the Project Lead for restoration planning in the Redwillow Watershed Restoration Project. MPWA is also taking the lead on winter water quality monitoring while closely collaborating with Alberta Conservation Association on summer water quality monitoring. There is work needed for bank stabilization through livestaking It is funded through resources Corporate Donations and partner groups (MPWA, County of Grande Prairie, ACA, AWES, Cows and Fish, West County Watershed Society). The work on the fish passage was complete fall 2018, and we are entering year 5 of a 5 year commitment to a monitoring program funded by Alberta Transportation.
2. As the MPWA has worked with partners and stakeolders to complete both the Wapiti River and the Grimshaw Gravels Aquifer Source Water Protection Plans, our focus has moved towards implementation of the plans and addressing recommendations. This will include continuing to work with the various partners and stakeholders to find the best way to meet or improve on recommendations either inividually or with partners. Work has begun on a number of actions but further planning, guidance and leadership support is required to ensure that the work is progressing at a continued pace. MPWA is always looking towards initiating and being a catalyst for consensus based Watershed Planning/ Source Water Protection Planning that brings in stakeholders to implement plan recommendations.
 - a. Leading a process with Municipalities, AEP and the Grimshaw Gravel Aquifer Management Association, the Source Water protection Plan was completed and accepted by the Association and partner Municipalities. MPWA operational funding will continue to provide staffing for management and administration. Municipalities are funding the the plan and the engagement, while MPWA directs the collobrative implementation, and provide expertise and guidance for watershed approaches.
 - b. Source Water Protection Plan for the Wapiti River and the communities drawing on those resources is complete and discussions have begun with a number of the partners and stakeholders regarding how to implement changes, Beneficial Management Practices and

improve processes. So far these conversations have been on a one-on-one basis with the local stakeholder organizations to ensure the decision makers are on board and willing to work towards improvements. The MPWA is leading this process and providing resources, professional staff time and administration needs.

3. The addition of another staff would ensure a more robust Education plan is in place that will reach adults to youth. Our current staffing, consists of two (2) members, that continuously incorporate a variety of learning opportunities within other projects to ensure that knowledge transfer and Beneficial Management Practices are brought to light. Future activities will be similar to previous activities: School group presentations, Wetlands Workshops and involvement in the Evergreen Wetlands Centre Committee to provide learning opportunities, Walk through the Forest (Grande Prairie and Peace River areas), Lake Monitoring through Lake Keepers with ALMS, Work with various municipalities to provide Septic Sense, Working Wells, and Green Acerages workshops. One of our strategic Goals is to ensure the board and stakeholders are provided training/educations opportunities of emergent issues. Continued work regarding education of invasive species, stewardship, source water protection, surface water management plans, and water conservation.
4. Continue working with Alberta Lake Management Society (ALMS) on their “LakeKeepers” project, where the MPWA will assist with finding and retaining appropriate physical support for monitoring identified lakes in the watershed. This will allow MPWA to engage community members in basic monitoring efforts of their water resource. This partnership has provided valuable information about lake health in the Peace Region, as that information is a data gap mentioned in the SOW. To date, ten (10) lakes have been monitored in either summer, winter or both.
5. Ongoing convening of organizations to undertake watershed work in the Grande Prairie area as evidence by the recent completion of three (3) Watershed Resilience and Restoration Program (WRRP) approved projects in the County of Grande Prairie led by the MPWA (MPWA, AWES, ACA, County of GP, Cows and Fish, West County Watershed Society and various landowners).
 - a. Improved Livestock Crossings – initially from Apr 2017 to Mar 2019; was extended to December 2021 to provide further crossing options
 - b. Streambank Stabilization and Extension – Apr 2017 to Mar 2020.
 - c. Wapiti Watershed Bank Stabilization – Apr 2019 to March 2023

MPWA took the lead in coordination, planning, and engagement. The Core Funding will allow for MPWA to work in the role of project management, policy creation, Beneficial Management Practice identification and stakeholder engagement.

6. The Core Funding from AEP **allows for the MPWA directors and staff to provide resourcing and input from the multi-stakeholder perspective** to processes such as Water North Coalition (Northern Municipalities Group), Weyerhaeuser, Mercer, and Foothills Forestry Public Advisory Groups, WBNP Environmental Flows, and other initiatives that present themselves throughout the year which require a local stakeholder contribution focusing on water resources, landscape activities and planning initiatives.
7. Further discussions with AEP regarding possibly working towards a joint implementation of the Wapiti River Water Management Plan and the Wapiti River Source Water Protection Plan. This would require commitment from AEP and stakeholders for funding, data sharing and monitoring, to meet the needs of fulfilling the recommendations outlined in the plans.
8. Continue with sound governance and operational processes to ensure high standards for the organization and its on-going work. Continue to provide annual reporting including operational updates, highlights, financials & in-kind support.
9. Continue to identify and develop partnerships with sectors that have a water mandate.
10. Identify data and information sources that will improve water literacy through awareness and education within the watershed. MPWA works with the other coordinators across the province to share resources

regarding literacy, and information on invasives, wetland policy, water conservation, and beneficial management practices. With additional staff, MPWA will re-establish the MPWA Wetlands Education Committee (with possible members from NAIT Boreal Research Institute, AEP and MPWA). At present the current staff are including education components into other project areas through tours, demos, training at sites, social media posts, newsletters, and reporting; however the plan is to hire a full time person to take a lead in an education strategy.

11. Promote sector and stewardship communities to ensure that the work of these groups and the WPAC is aligned with the WFL goals and outcomes (activities to include engagement forums, information/education opportunities with stakeholders, newsletters, up-to-date website and social media options);
12. Continue to provide necessary information to the Land Use Framework and Regional Plans. Continue to hold meetings with the AEP Regional Staff to align work and priorities so that MPWA and AEP can work towards similar goals. Regional Staff team have indicated their priorities and MPWA has aligned their projects to these priorities ie/ Wapiti River work and Beaverlodge River Monitoring.
13. Continue directed dialogue and information gathering related to Transboundary concerns. These Transboundary concerns need to be considered when developing the Integrated Watershed Management Plan and Regional Plans for the Upper and Lower Peace. MPWA is able to provide community values tied to Transboundary water management.

The core operational funding requested in this grant application will be used to assist the MPWA to address it's Strategic Plan (which has been attached). The Strategic Plan presents a strong correlation with the implementation of recommendations of the IWMP (Integrated Watershed Management Plan). The activities listed in the plans are to further enhance the capacity of environmentally focused stakeholder organizations, partnerships, and networks to carry out initiatives to protect and/or enhance the environment. **Our primary objective** in these activities is to be a catalyst for watershed management conversations, collaboration, planning efforts and watershed priority identification. MPWA will provide a range of professional services to a variety of partners as we work together to address watershed management projects. The MPWA core staff team is instrumental in a number of projects and programs throughout the watershed. The Staff provide services that assist partners with engagement processes, planning initiatives, administrative leads, strategic planning processes, knowledge transfer, education and stewardship outcomes. Through this work, MPWA will be in a stronger position to provide consensus-based recommendations for policy and management to the GOA. The multi-stakeholder approach taken in these processes will encourage shared responsibility among those around the table as they work towards implementation efforts.

The MPWA has been working with multi-stakeholder groups to achieve outcomes in water and watershed management planning and restoration planning. This work has increased the engagement and education opportunities of the MPWA. Granting from ECCC (EDF -Environmental Damages Fund, HSF Habitat Stewardship Funds, EcoAction Funds) opens opportunity for diversified funding and promotes beneficial management practices (including improving farming practices, watercourse crossings, riparian areas and wetland restoration, and increase aquatic ecosystem health).

Work with Municipalities and sectors to educate, increase awareness and capacity to meet the *Water for Life* goals and conservation of water will continue. Water quality and quantity concerns are being identified and partnerships are being established that will allow for work and education in these areas - i.e. Grimshaw Gravels Aquifer Source Water Protection Plan Implementation, Smoky Headwater Initiative, Wapiti River Plans Implementation, Beaverlodge River Monitoring, ALMS Monitoring, Evergreen Wetland Centre Committee, revival of the MPWA Wetlands Education Committee to name a few.

Project initiative for 2023-2027:

The State of the Watershed Report (March 2015) and the Integrated Watershed Management Plan (March 2018) will be the basis for education, collaboration and watershed management purposes. These documents identified four (4) Issues of Concern: Water Quality and Availability away from the Mainstem as well as Consumptive Use, Wetlands and Wetlands Loss, Non-Saline Groundwater, and Peace River Flow Regime. These documents provide high quality and vetted input, which is not only useful for MPWA purposes but is also directly relevant to the Land Use Framework's regional plans.

The MPWA is in the implementation phase of the IWMP, this has allowed the organization to focus its workload and restructure its Strategic Plan to meet the goals of the Organization and the IWMP. MPWA will move forward collaboratively with the network of stakeholders it has been engaged with to fulfill projects that will integrate education and more technical projects. The ability to put together people and projects that address beneficial management practises, planning initiatives and education opportunities is a strength of a local stakeholder organization with a common interest and need to do better. The organization will provide assessment and planning supports to a variety of organizations and initiatives.

Please refer to the attached **Table in PART B** for status, timeline, achievements, deliverables, and how the individual projects correspond to the MPWA Strategic plan.

MPWA will request in-kind support from AEP in the form of a Board of Director member as well as data and analysis contributions from the agency. Data for groundwater work in the areas of Grimshaw Gravels Aquifer, work on the wetlands issue will greatly benefit from AEP's wetted areas mapping LiDAR, and further resource information for the Wapiti River Source Water protection. Another in-kind contribution that AEP could provide is in the form of GIS work and maps for the some of the Project Working Groups. Directed monitoring and/or aquatic ecosystem study and analysis may be requested to underpin planning work. A final in-kind contribution would be requesting AEP staff with expertise to present on topics to the Board and its committees at meetings and AGM.

The MPWA continues to work to align the organization Strategic Plan, IWMP Recommendations, Stakeholder concerns, and AEP Provincial and Regional Priorities. Our workplan provides a variety of activities that meets the Roles as identified in the newly signed MRD with AEP.

1. State of Watershed Assessments and Reporting: Working towards gathering data to assess the State of the Watershed. The SOW was completed in 2015 with the hope to update after 10 years as resources become available. The Board and committees have begun to think about what the update process will look like, next step will include a Board Retreat to do a detailed review and determine needs, process, SOW update essentials to include. Unfortunately, the Peace Basin still has many data gaps that hinders a fuller view of the State of the Watershed.
2. Planning: Continuing work on IWMP implementation. This plan was completed in 2018 and since then the MPWA has worked with partners and stakeholders to coordinate and collaborate to address the multitude of recommendations. Many of the project areas MPWA is working on are a direct result of the recommendations of the IWMP and subordinate plans (including Source Water Protection Plans, Riparian Restoration Planning, Surface Water Management Planning, Smoky Headwaters project, etc.). The IWMP Committee continues to evaluate the progress annually and produces a 'report card' to track achievements, hurdles, to-do's, and potential further steps. Implementation to date has included convening and collaborating with individual partners and local decision makers to advance this work. One of the large hurdles in the IWMP is the huge information gap found in most areas of the Peace

Basin. Many of our projects are adding in components of community-based monitoring as well as assisting with other monitoring initiatives to gather this much needed information.

Note, as there are no Regional Plans for the Upper or Lower Peace Basins, MPWA continues to offer our work and information to that process. Greater inclusion in the Regional Planning process would be appreciated so our work can be identified and included in a more comprehensive way.

3. Literacy and Education: The MPWA, with additional staff, would be able to further dedicate focus to programming geared towards literacy and education within our region. MPWA will continue to include education components in all other work through tours, demos, workshops (Surface water Management Plan Speakers, Invasive Species, Training and Discussion sessions for contractors, Municipal focussed events like Septic Sense, Green Acreages, Working Well, etc.), Newsletters, Annual reporting, up to date website, filming presentations to make available for online resource. Social media posts have found a decent following and are good ways to increase MPWA exposure and disseminate water/watershed literacy and education information.

MPWA strives to include opportunity in other project and planning work to increase the knowledge of public, partners, landowners, recreation groups, industry, municipalities, and stakeholders. engagement of groups of volunteers with a stewardship focus (School Groups, Adult volunteers, Junior Forest Wardens, Mountain Metis Nation Association, Watershed Stewardship Groups) has been key to meeting some of the MPWA goals.

4. Convener and Collaborator: With a watershed as large as the area covered by MPWA, it is key that we engage and collaborate with as many individuals and organizations as practicable. We have fostered strong connection with a number of municipalities, environmental groups, education organizations, First Nations, Metis Associations, Higher Education facilities, and Industry. This allows us to take the role of convener, facilitator, and lead on a number of projects and initiatives that increase awareness of watershed and water concerns as well as working through processes to find ways to address issues or concerns. This role is the foundation of the work of the MPWA. We have become a voice that many municipal decision-makers, and stakeholders have turned to for unbiased discussions and information. We continue to be in connection with and participate in discussions with Rural Municipalities of Alberta Zone 4, Forest Management Advisory Groups, etc at regular intervals. A greater engagement of stakeholders will need to be included as we start our review/update of the SOW.
5. Governance: MPWA strives to meet the requirements of the Societies Act, has an up-to-date Strategic Plan, and conducts an annual general meeting and election of Directors. Four (4) to six (6) regular Board meetings are held for Directors (includes organization business, Board training and Education opportunities, Updates of Organization work, Financial updates, etc).

Recognition for AEP's contribution to the MPWA: AEP is acknowledged in presentations as providing core funds and also specific project funds. Likewise, MPWA consistently communicates that it is a designated WPAC under the GOA AEP *Water for Life* Strategy. AEP is identified on our brochures, newsletters, and annual report as the organization's funding source.