



Alberta WPAC Legislation and Policy Project

Background

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) act as hubs of watershed management across Alberta, reaching thousands of partners from across Alberta. This document outlines an opportunity for provincial WPACs to coordinate shared efforts related to policy and legislation, in service of the goals of the *Water For Life Strategy* and the ongoing effectiveness of WPACs.

WPACs are a trusted partner of the provincial government and all *Water For Life* partners, and have a positive history of engaging multiple sectors. However, several challenges outlined in this document have limited our potential to work together on matters of policy and legislation, with the potential to undermine credibility as well as impact.

All levels of government, Indigenous Nations, and community stakeholders are asking WPACs for information and advice about a variety of topics, and we cannot keep up with the demand. For example, WPACs have been asked to provide input on the new Coal Policy, the Mineral Mining Strategy, and the upcoming Water for Life Action Plan. Not all WPACs have the capacity to provide information on current topics, and governments will sometimes only ask some WPACs for input on provincial topics. We aim to fill these gaps, maximize efficiencies, and speak as one unified voice by working collaboratively to collect questions from stakeholders, review scientific information, and share crucial information to advise stakeholders and partners, federally and provincially.

Project Overview

Building and maintaining stronger relationships between WPACs, and with all levels of government, Indigenous communities, and stakeholders, is essential for the ongoing effectiveness of WPACs and to position WPACs as leaders in watershed management.

Benefits for WPACs

- Reputation and public awareness
- Alignment with funding priorities
- Organizational effectiveness
- Policy understanding and engagement
- Strengthen partnerships

This project will support work across WPACs in areas related to watershed policy and legislation.

Multi-year funding for WPACs is the key long term goal of the project. To accomplish this, WPACs must be visible and relevant to funders and stakeholders, as trustworthy and credible leaders in community discussions. Building upon our current reputation and trust with stakeholders will increase our value with all levels of government. There is opportunity for governments to utilize the wealth of knowledge and expertise from within the WPAC membership, especially with our Boards of Directors, when they develop policy.

There are also important opportunities for WPACs. For example, the federal government is currently allocating hundreds of millions of dollars to the post-COVID recovery effort, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. If WPACs have not engaged and are not relevant at the federal level, we will not receive any of those funds. If we are not actively participating in discussions that are a priority for governments and stakeholders, we risk becoming irrelevant. We need to demonstrate our value by showing leadership on critical topics that influence watershed management and health.

Building a process for collaboration

The goal of the first year of this project is to strengthen the ability for WPACs to collaborate successfully, by discussing expectations, and developing guiding principles and procedures on issues related to policy. Together we will develop a flexible process that WPACs can use to guide collaborative decision-making and information sharing. For example, one of our most recent collaborations was sending group feedback to the federal government's public engagement process regarding the formation of the Canada Water Agency.

The process we develop will build WPAC capacity, and our confidence in working collaboratively at the provincial scale, where we can have more impact on legislation and policy, and build recognition of Alberta WPACs at the federal level. As people gain trust and comfort with the new process, we will be able to expand and improve upon it. This is not lobbying, but focused on sharing neutral, unbiased information.

This project is an important opportunity to:

- Share knowledge from the diverse and well-informed stakeholders on WPAC boards,
- Help governments make decisions that will be supported by stakeholders, and
- Build momentum and relationships that will be valuable to decision makers and stakeholders.

WPAC Boards make key decisions

The process will be coordinated by the newly formed WPAC Legislation and Policy Committee and the Legislation and Policy Manager. WPAC Boards will be included throughout the process to help shape the course of this initiative. Your support is foundational to this process.

Key Objectives

- Secure long-term funding
- Raise awareness about WPACs
- Maintain relevancy and trust with funders
- Strengthen relationships with all stakeholders and decision-makers
- Understand and contribute to key policy issues

What success looks like

Success will be measured through feedback from stakeholders, that the information WPACs provide is valuable, impactful, and applied. WPAC partners will report that they feel confident speaking about current topics, forming their own views, and sharing information with their networks. Stakeholders will write letters of support for WPACs. WPACs will be viewed as a reliable partner that is there when needed, active on topics of community discussion, and is able to depolarize challenging issues. Success will be fostering active collegial partnerships, including with the Government of the Alberta

Funding

The first year of this project has a budget of \$86,000. It is funded by a \$30,000 grant from the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation and contributions from Alberta WPACs. Most of the funds are being used to hire a Legislation and Policy Manager for one year. Susanna Bruneau has been seconded for this role to the Oldman Watershed Council, who is spearheading the project. Susanna has over 10 years of experience with the Battle River Watershed Alliance where she specialized in policy and stewardship.

The ongoing work of the Legislation and Policy Manager will be dependent upon grants and continued support from all Alberta WPACs.

Year One Project Timeline

Meeting with boards to introduce Susanna, start gathering feedback → January – March 2022

Development of collaborative decision-making process with boards and staff → February – May 2022

Approval of process document by all boards, selection of priority topic(s) to pilot the process with → May – June 2022

Pilot the new process with selected priority topic(s) → June – October 2022

Final report to Alberta Ecotrust Foundation → October 31, 2022

*Ongoing throughout: Grant writing, liaising with all WPAC Boards and Managers, regular meetings with the Legislation and Policy Committee

Questions for Board members

What are your initial thoughts regarding this project? Do you want any clarification?

Do you see yourself and your sector in support of this endeavour? If not, how can we gain your support?

What are some elements or key principles you would like to see as part of this process?