

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils - Their Impact on Municipal Watershed Management and Planning



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SYNOPSIS

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) have a lot to offer municipalities. For example, WPAC-based information and expertise help raise awareness of the broad watershed, as well as a host of more specific issues relating to, for example, water quality, water quantity, groundwater, wetland management, storm water management, flood and drought planning, and species at risk. For municipalities, WPACs can ultimately inform municipal decision-making concerning watershed management and planning.

This study assessed the impact of WPAC initiatives on municipal watershed management and planning. Four WPACs participated in the study – the Milk River Watershed Council Canada, Oldman Watershed Council, North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and Battle River Watershed Alliance. A survey of municipalities within the watersheds was conducted in February 2021.

Based on responses to the survey, the study finds municipalities have a relatively high level of awareness of, and support for, WPACs and their work. Results also show the greatest benefit of working with WPACs is shared knowledge and expertise. However, other results are mixed, depending on the WPAC. For example, Watershed Management Plans' impact on municipal planning vary from 71% of respondents affirming an impact to 32%, depending on the WPAC.

For some WPACs, effective communication with municipalities is lacking. Thus, while WPACs have a lot to offer, not all municipalities are maximizing benefits. WPACs can extend their reach to municipalities through greater use of presentations (including virtual), e-mail communications, and joint messaging amongst WPACs when common messaging is appropriate. Ultimately, improving the effectiveness of WPACs will in turn enhance land stewardship and water management for sustainable communities, which affects property values and impacts all citizenry, including people in the real estate industry who work and live in these same communities.

Specific findings include:

- there are relatively high levels of municipal awareness of WPACs and their work, ranging from 100% of respondents to 94%, depending on the WPAC
- there are relatively high levels of support for WPACs and their work, ranging from 100% of respondents to 80% of respondents, depending on the WPAC
- the greatest benefit of working with a WPAC is increasing knowledge, awareness, education, expertise, and information
- WPACs' impact on informing decision-making and statutory document development varies from a high of 69% of respondents affirming an impact to 41%, depending on the WPAC
- the impact on municipalities of WPAC planning exercises varies from a high of 72% of respondents affirming an impact to a low of 13% of respondents, depending on the WPAC and the exercise
- the greatest challenge of working with WPACs is making connections, engaging, and communicating
- certain WPACs need to extend their reach to municipalities and increase engagement through greater use of presentations (including virtual) and e-mail communications.
