



Water Matters

Water Matters Annual Report 2011



Message from the Chair

A watershed moment can be described as a critical point in time when things change forever. In some ways it is an antithesis to the phrase “the more things change, the more they stay the same”. In terms of the environmental and water world, there were a few watershed moments in 2011 that are likely to impact on Water Matters work moving forward. Certainly, upon reflection, the year brought the beginnings of change on the federal front of environmental management, with a new government and new direction. This change is likely to have implications into the future not only for the management of the oil sands but for the rest of Alberta as well. Throughout 2011 Water Matters continued to provide a strong objective voice for effective water and environmental management, through publications such as *Effective Environmental Monitoring Systems* and *Drilling Down: Groundwater Risks imposed by In Situ Oil Sands Development*.

Provincially, we saw watershed moments as well, as many within the province grappled with the regional planning legislation and what it meant for land and watershed management. Water Matters focused on our values as a community and what our vision for a region of significant water importance might look like in *Values and Voices: Stewardship Priorities for Southern Alberta Foothills*.

As we strive, as Albertans, to reach our environmental goals, Water Matters continues to be involved in the key policy and collaborative discussions around the province. The staff and Board have witnessed the watershed moments in 2011 and find that the more things change, the more things remain the same, and that is to say, the need for an organization like Water Matters to provide a voice for water issues in the province is as relevant now as it has ever been.

Water Matters will continue its important work, with the help of our individual and institutional funders, in providing solutions for moving Alberta to the next watershed moment, one that we hope will sharpen its focus on watershed protection.



Jason Unger, Chair



Our Vision

Watersheds in Alberta are protected for ecological and human health, recreational benefit, and their aesthetic, economic, and spiritual value.

Our Mission

Water Matters is a champion for improving watershed protection in Alberta. To fulfill its mission Water Matters will:

- conduct and promote timely and leading edge research and investigation;
- provide and support outreach and education programs;
- advance initiatives for watershed health; and
- work with others concerned about the protection of watershed.



Strategic Goals 2010 - 2013

Shape the debate on watershed policy in Alberta by communicating directly with decision makers and empowering citizens of Alberta with the knowledge needed to act to ensure that:

- There is a strong agenda for appropriate land use and watershed protection to protect water resources
- Alberta adopts progressive policies and practices with respect to water allocation, rights trading and basin transfers
- Alberta adopts strong policies and regulations that ensure protection for aquatic ecosystems

Build and support watershed stewardship in Alberta by:

- Providing watershed stewards with resources and knowledge to increase their capacity and effectiveness
- Engaging local citizens to increase their awareness and capacity for watershed protection
- Working collaboratively with partner organizations, and interested groups and individuals
- Effectively communicating with and educating Albertans about Water Matters' vision and programs for watershed protection

To support all other goals, be a sustainable organization by:

- Building the organizational capacity of Water Matters to act as an effective voice for watershed protection

Accomplishments: January to December 2011

Contributing to the Water Policy Dialogue in Alberta

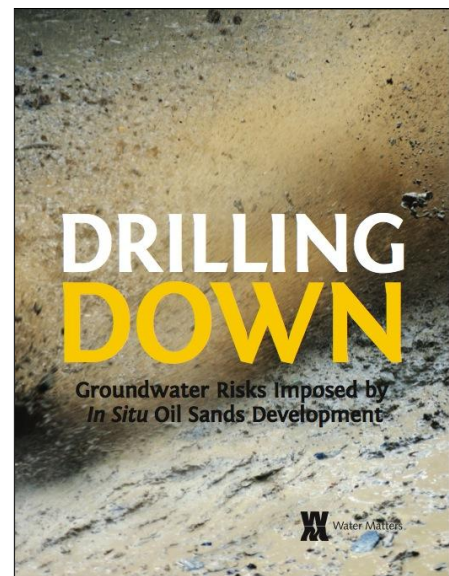
Through our research publications and outreach to decision makers, stakeholders and the public, we support progressive ideas to advance provincial and municipal water policy in the province.

Water Policy Dialogues: Instream Flow Needs and Water Allocation

In 2011, this project focused primarily on research and development of policy options for incorporating instream flow needs protection into water management in Alberta, with the aim of protecting long term ecosystem health. The proposed recommendations and tools, which highlight the value of healthy rivers and the need for a provincial instream flow needs policy, were informed by interviews with key stakeholders, experts and decision makers across Alberta. In addition, our research focused on water rights and equity issues, and their impact on water use and healthy rivers, with the aim of identifying progressive water policy and management tools in the area of water allocation and drought management.

Groundwater Risks and Environmental Monitoring

Water Matters completed substantive work in 2011 promoting oversight of freshwater management that recognizes the costs of oil sands development to aquatic ecosystem health, and increasing understanding of the impacts of in situ operations on groundwater resources. In *Effective Environmental Monitoring Systems*, we outline how federal monitoring and RAMP have failed to meet the standards of acceptable scientific practice in environmental monitoring, and provide recommendations for the creation of a scientifically defensible environmental monitoring program. In *Drilling Down: Groundwater Risks Imposed by In Situ Oil Sands Development* we provide clear, achievable recommendations for improving groundwater management, assessment and monitoring in the oil sands region.



Engaging Albertans in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

In 2011, the second year of this project, we furthered our objectives for source water protection and the integration of water and land use planning in southern Alberta by supporting land use planning in the public arena, communicating with the public on input opportunities related to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan process, and informing key decision makers in municipal and provincial government.

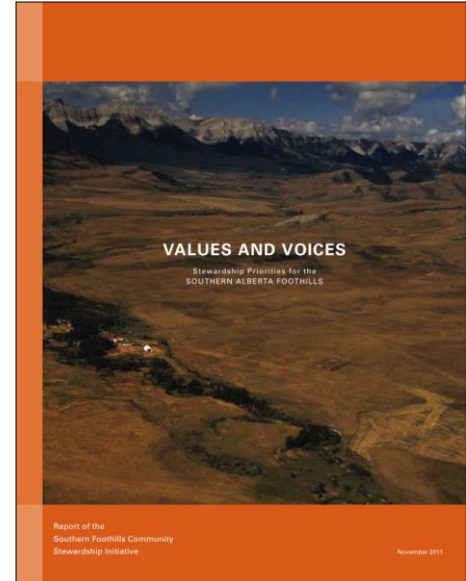
Modeling New Conservation Tools to Conserve Watersheds in Southern Alberta

Water Matters partnered with the Miistakis Institute to deliver a series of workshops on the potential applications for market-based conservation tools outlined in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act to the MDs of Foothills and Ranchland, two progressive municipal districts seeking to conserve their watersheds and agricultural land base. The MDs were assisted in considering the value of and avenues for using market-based instruments in relation to municipal development and conservation objectives.

Supporting Watershed Stewardship

Southern Foothills Community Stewardship Initiative

In partnership with the Chinook Institute and the Pekisko Group, Water Matters delivered a regional public engagement initiative to educate citizens and give voice to the values and priorities of local people for maintaining healthy ecosystems and watersheds in southwest Alberta. Through a series of facilitated community forums across the region, a clear picture emerged of the significance of this landscape, its role in providing ecological goods and services for society, and the imperatives for maintaining healthy, functioning ecosystems. The resulting recommendations in *Values and Voices: Stewardship Priorities for the Southern Foothills* —intended to inform and provide direction for regional and community planning, land and water management, and conservation decision-making — reflect the perspectives, culture and experiences of people who live in this iconic region of Alberta.



Partnering to Promote Local Stewardship

Water Matters collaborated with Cows & Fish to support and assist six water stewardship groups across Alberta to build their capacity to deliver effective watershed protection and stewardship. Groups from Pincher Creek to Lac la Nonne undertook a variety of initiatives – including riparian assessment, website development and state of the watershed reporting - with targeted assistance from Water Matters and Cows & Fish staff.

Collaborating with Alberta ENGOS

Water Matters continues to actively participate in meetings with Alberta Environment Network ENGO partners to share information and build collective strategies for promoting and supporting water management and stewardship practices leading to watershed protection and aquatic ecosystem health.

Communicating About Water Issues

Water Matters distributed four electronic newsletters, *The Water Log*, featuring an in-depth analysis and reporting of water issues in Alberta. Each newsletter, reaching 1200 people, aims to build Albertans' knowledge of water issues. As well, we actively engage an online community through Facebook and Twitterfeed, providing news items and information on a timely array of water topics to stimulate public discussion around water challenges and solutions.

Building Our Organizational Capacity

Fund Development Initiative

Water Matters participated in CentrePoint's *Fund Development Plus*, a program that combines elements of professional mentoring, training and peer networking to promote organizational growth and capacity building in fund development. We gained valuable insight into our current fund development infrastructure, practices and procedures, giving special attention to diversifying our funding base and more actively engaging our supporters. We were gratified to receive recognition and support from a number of new donors and foundations over the past year.

Looking Forward: 2012 Initiatives Coming Onstream

Source to Tap: Supporting Community Stewardship in the Oldman Watershed

Water Matters will directly engage people across the Oldman River Basin to increase public knowledge of, support and capacity for headwaters protection and watershed stewardship. Delivered in close collaboration with the Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) and a regional network of partners, this initiative will connect urban and rural residents together with headwaters land and watershed stewards, to share knowledge and build mutual understanding of issues. *Source to Tap* contributes to maintaining the ecological integrity of the Oldman headwaters and watershed through building public capacity for implementing stewardship tools and best practices that are currently available or being explored in Alberta. The community-based engagement and educational events will directly support the work of the OWC to develop its integrated watershed management planning process in the Oldman Headwaters.

Determination of Pollutant Export Coefficients from Different Landbase and Landuse Types to Alberta Rivers

The objective of this project is to develop methods to calculate nutrient export coefficients and loading rates from different landscape and landuse types in Alberta watersheds, on the basis of readily available water quality and landuse data. This important and timely project will provide critical methods for determining nutrient export and loading to rivers to watershed protection and advisory groups, ecosystem modelers, and government managers that will enable informed development and remediation decisions to enhance the protection and health of Alberta rivers.



Water Policy Dialogues: Outreach and Engagement

Water Matters will release a series of policy briefs in 2012 as a means of disseminating our policy research and recommendations in the areas of instream flow needs and water allocation. Our intent is to build public awareness and initiate ongoing dialogue with government and water stakeholders, to catalyze and inform discussion on a suite of changes needed to develop an instream flow needs policy, address equity issues amongst stakeholders, create incentives to redistribute water, and protect the public interest for water during times of drought.

Oil Sands

In 2012, Water Matters will press for implementation of a scientifically defensible water monitoring system and legally enforceable environmental thresholds; demonstrate opportunities for the Government of Alberta to satisfy instream flow needs and keep the Athabasca River healthy; participate in the creation of new groundwater regulations; and leverage existing relationships and public interest in wetlands to promote adoption of a wetlands policy.





Water Matters

2011 Foundation and Institution Funders

*We extend our sincere thanks to the following **funders** that enable the important work of Water Matters.*

Alberta Ecotrust Foundation

Alberta Real Estate Foundation

Chinook Institute for Community Stewardship

The Calgary Foundation

Edmonton Community Foundation

Kayak Foundation (through Calgary Foundation)

Max Bell Foundation

The RBC Foundation

Tides Foundation

Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation

W. Garfield Weston Foundation

*Equally as important, we thank and celebrate our many **individual donors** whose contributions sustain our work of watershed protection across Alberta.*

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