

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance's Fall Forum

This November, AWA was asked to speak at the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance's (RDRWA) Fall Forum. This has been a big year for the RDRWA. With the completion of a Background Technical Report on Terrestrial and Aquatic Biodiversity, development of a first draft of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) and the initiation of Project Blue Thumb, this Watershed Council has been keeping very busy. Project Blue Thumb is an especially promising initiative – it is a social innovation lab that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to build relationships and prototype solutions to a range of quality issues. In October, AWA helped provide feedback on the first draft of the IWMP.

The Fall Forum day was filled with a number of interesting speakers, beginning with Alberta Tomorrow. They described the changes to the landscape that have occurred in the Red Deer River Watershed over the course of time. Like many Alberta watersheds, much of the RDR watershed has been converted into agricultural land. This, coupled with exponential population growth and extensive energy footprints, has created multiple pressures on the land. They suggest that modelling the landscape can help inform future land use decisions and encourage best practices by visualizing the future outcomes of those decisions. Alberta Tomorrow is a non-profit group that has been advocating this message since 2005, when it first made its ALCES model-based educational tool freely available on its website platform. One can only hope that decision makers and land owners will heed this non-profit's advice.

Next up was Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency (AEMERA). It presented “Building the Picture (in the Red Deer Watershed) Today for the Future.” Established in 2014, AEMERA is now responsible for monitoring water quality which previously had been handled by Alberta Environment & Parks (AEP). During the transition, AEP passed on large amounts of water quality data which they have accumulated over many years. AEMERA is now working on reporting and making this information publicly available. Perhaps these more accessible data records will help to shed light on what impacts land use changes have had on our water and encourage better stewardship and responsible water management in the future.

The rest of the day consisted of a panel discussion on the changing role of agriculture in the Red Deer River watershed, followed by presentations from Western Canada Spill Service and the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC). AIWC’s presentation was eye opening for outlining the costs (money, time, love, and care) of saving and rehabilitating wildlife harmed by an oil spill. To wrap up the day, AWA gave a presentation on connectivity and biodiversity as well as the role everyone can play in improving biodiversity within the watershed.

Overall, it was a very interesting, infor-

mative day. It was very encouraging to see how many passionate people live within the watershed and are actively engaged with water issues. This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the RDRWA – AWA looks forward to what the next 10 years will bring and hopes that the commitment to improving water quality within the watershed will only grow stronger with time.

- Joanna Skrajny

Featured Artist Wendy Morris



“At a Glacial Rate”, Mixed Media, 36” x 24”



“Serenity”, Oil.