
December WLA Water Update

AWA's Water file sees no rest, and for good reason, as it is an important element that is intrinsically woven into every major conservation issue in our province. Take, for example, coal mining in the Eastern Slopes. Water withdrawals and contamination from coal mining activities not only pose a major risk to the ecological integrity of these invaluable landscapes, but also have implications for the health of human communities. As a life-giving resource, we cannot be too diligent about protecting our water sources.

AWA's work on water pursues three general objectives:

- 1) Protecting and conserving healthy aquatic and riparian communities in Alberta's rivers headwaters,
- 2) Raising the profile of sustainable water management and stewardship lead initiatives, and
- 3) Ensuring all Albertans now, and in the future, have safe and secure drinking water supplies.

To accomplish these water conservation objectives, AWA continues to participate and connect with focus groups such as the Alberta Water Council (AWC), Alberta Environmental Network's (AEN) Water Caucus, in addition to small grass-root or stewardship groups. For nearly two years, I have chaired AEN's Water Caucus and have been a Non-Government Organization representative on the Alberta Water Council board.

AEN's Water Caucus serves as a forum for AEN members to share water-related projects and conservation concerns. It also provides an opportunity of continuous dialogue and the exchange of water related information. In the last six months, a significant portion of AWA's contribution to the Water Caucus has focused on updating members on our work on coal. We also provided detailed concerns on regional water projects we have been following such as the Special Areas Water Pipeline project, the Wapiti Watershed Management Plan, and more recently, the Irrigation Expansion Project. Our participation in Water Caucus over the years is a worthwhile venture as it improves our understanding of watershed-specific issues, and allows us to tap into historical and expertise knowledge of Water Caucus members. Forming these new working relationships with environmental professionals from various backgrounds is integral to refining our knowledge on water, and staying looped into upcoming issues.

AWA's work with the Alberta Water Council is similar to Water Caucus in that it deals with water issues across the province. But, AWA's involvement with the Alberta Water Council also enables us to directly participate in specific water projects that could ultimately set standards and improve water management across the province. In my time on the board, the Alberta Water Council has approved projects such as a guide source water protection for municipalities, a guide for building drought resiliency, and more recently, a Water For Life Implementation Review.

At AWC's summer board meeting this past June, the Government of Alberta proposed the council adopt a "nimble" process for projects that provide relevant information for water management and conservation. Generally, AWC projects are a significant time investment, taking anywhere from one to two years to complete.

The AWC board accepted the government's proposal, and is in the midst of applying this shortened or nimble approach to two projects:

- 1) Alberta Wetland Policy Implementation Review, and
- 2) Alberta Water Futures.

The goal is to finalize both projects by March 2021.

The AWC fall board meeting approved the Terms of Reference for both projects. I volunteered to be on the formal project working team for the Wetland Policy Implementation Review.

Alberta's Wetland Policy is by no means perfect, and this project aims to gather perspectives from all sectors on its implementation. It also will suggest potential performance measures to indicate whether the goals, outcomes, and strategic directions of the policy are being achieved.

AWA believes that a review of the implementation of the Wetland Policy is an important opportunity to provide meaningful feedback and perspectives on behalf of the environmental community on the effectiveness of the policy in achieving wetland conservation. Participation in this project will also be important in ensuring that the review does not culminate in a list of sector-specific grievances that will only serve to further harm the effectiveness of the policy in conserving wetlands.

AWC's other current project is the Water Futures project. This project has the goal of identifying water risks, and assessing the preparedness of Alberta's water systems to cope with these potential stresses and risks. This project's finalized product will be a report on cross-sector perspectives for the provincial government. While AWA does not have a direct representative on this project team, we have colleagues from Water Caucus who are and provide regular updates on the progress of the project.

- Nissa Petterson
