



MILK RIVER *draft*

INTEGRATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM PARTICIPANTS AT THE
STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP HELD ON DECEMBER 6, 2012**

January 10, 2013; Revised February 25, 2013

1.0 BACKGROUND

On December 6, 2012, a select group of stakeholders were invited to attend a workshop to discuss the draft Milk River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP). Those attending represented the provincial government, federal government, municipalities, water co-operatives, agricultural industry, oil and gas industry, tourism and recreation industry, academia and non-profit environmental organizations. The meeting was held to determine if the draft Milk River IWMP is on the right track, if any important watershed issues have been missed or if new information was available to include or consider in the plan before the draft plan is presented to a broader group of stakeholders.

Potential participants were asked to review a series of discussion papers that were prepared for topic areas that included: water quality, riparian areas, biodiversity, tourism, recreation and access, agricultural activity, and oil and gas activity.

Thirty-one people attended the meeting and were involved in the round-table discussions of topic areas (See Appendix A for full agenda and Appendix B for the list of participants). Each group discussed issues, targets, thresholds and recommendations associated with water quantity, water quality, riparian areas, biodiversity and/or land use and reported a summary of the discussions to the entire group. Individual participants were also asked to complete a feedback form to document if the issues were identified correctly and if not, identify what additional issues should be considered. Sixteen forms were returned by participants; these comments are summarized in Section 2.0.

2.0 SUMMARY OF COMMENTS PROVIDED AT THE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

Sixteen comment forms were returned by participants. Note that all of the questions were not answered in every submission. Most participants were selective on the questions that they answered. Additional comments related to biodiversity and land use were received after the workshop and are provided in Appendix C.

1. WATER SUPPLY

Are water supply issues identified correctly?

Yes 8

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Drilling through the aquifer – oil and gas – pipelines under river?
- Request double lined casing for oil/gas wells.
- Standardize rules for handling oil exploration rather than individual landowners asking for proper handling.
- The water Co-op level need data showing aquifer levels.
- Government grants to Water Co-ops to help replace expired infrastructure.
- Leaking and broken pipes lose and continue to lose water.
- Resolve issues re. defining licences in good standing and therefore ability to transfer.

- Improve conservation and efficiencies
- Objective 1) enabling transfers is important, 2) reuse and water efficiency increases.
- Connect issues.

What additional recommendations would you make to achieve the Water Conservation Objective?

- Need better understanding of ‘natural’ winter flows/stream bed morphology for fisheries die-offs; may not be best use of scarce water to increase water flows unnaturally; need to understand trade-offs.
- Watershed Council should remain focused and diligent on the whole watershed areas. Must watch water, plants and air etc. - maintain safe levels on each.

What recommendations would you make for water conservation for municipal, agricultural and industrial users?

- Allow transfer (need WMP) of water allocations; may need to consider transfer from the ORB [Oldman River Basin] in future
- Identify and better regulate water sources available for oil and gas development – require non-potable water.
- Current and future municipal supply adequate
- Move forward with WMP.
- Develop a water “budget”. How much is available and how much is being used.
- Continue to monitor water usage from irrigation and industrial use.
- Can we, as a water co-op, request stricter guidelines on new wells being drilled near the Milk River aquifer?
- Study effects of climate change effects?
- Water metered at source of use.
- System of billing for water used.

Do you see storage as an option?

Yes 7
No 2

If no, please explain.

- No for onstream storage as studies (Klohn Crippen) shows not economic.
- Maybe for offstream storage. But there are still lots of options (e.g., conservation, transfers) for accommodating demand without additional storage that haven’t been explored.
- Feasibility study of options (on-stream and off-stream) show benefit/cost <1.
- A possible hazard of alkali outcropping could be a consequence of a dam on the river. A dam would have a positive effect on recreation and on fish populations.

2. WATER QUALITY

Are water quality issues identified correctly?

Yes 7

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Phosphorus should be monitored (especially its use by farming practices) to ensure a safe percentage within our watershed. Nitrogen is also a concern.
- Are gas levels being monitored? Fracking can affect our water quality.

Are the interim Water Quality Objectives (WQOs) acceptable?

Yes 6

If no, how would you define the WQO differently?

- Need to resolve the source of e.coli
- Capture of stormwater should be dual purpose with offstream storage

What additional recommendations would you make to achieve the Water Quality Objectives?

- A continuous monitoring and exploration of offensive materials and corrective measures should be set up to improve or maintain water quality.
- Gas fields close to aquifer, how much oil and gas can be removed without effecting our water quality.
- Double casings on oil and gas wells can be requested to help prevent any leaking.

3. GROUNDWATER

Are groundwater issues identified correctly?

Yes 6

No 1

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Groundwater interaction
- Communicating with Montana about usage and volume, etc.
- Well Head Protection (WHP) Zones can be designated.
- Are the levels of the Whisky Valley and Milk River aquifers moving? Increasing or decreasing?
- Do we need to be concerned about oil activity close to the Warner West pumping sites?
- Vulnerability of Milk River Aquifer.
- Gas/GW interface
- Transboundary GW fluxes
- GW use data

Is the groundwater target acceptable?

Yes 6

If no, how would you define a groundwater target?

- We need to broaden our education of all concerned, including oil and gas exploration to ensure that an environmentally safe condition remains in place perpetually for the on-going betterment of water quality.

What additional recommendations would you make to achieve groundwater objectives?

- Public awareness would be a great start.
- If water co-ops allow members to remove their check valves and back-flow preventers, their water license should be cancelled.
- GW meters

4. RIPARIAN AREAS AND WETLANDS

Are riparian and wetland issues identified correctly?

Yes 6
Don't know 1

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Uncertainty if wetlands and riparian areas have been adequately mapped – including drained wetlands and ephemeral ones.

Are the riparian health targets and thresholds acceptable?

Yes 5

If no, how would you define the riparian health targets and thresholds?

- Separate watershed level factors affecting health (e.g., flow regime) from factors that landholder can influence.
- I think 6 m is not enough due to the high erosion on the banks of the river. What can we do to help with bank erosion?
- More awareness of other groups that can help.
- Awareness and extension – BMP adoption.

What recommendations would you make to achieve the riparian health targets and thresholds?

- Provide incentive for landowners. Riparian repair and upkeep.
- Awareness

- Stewardship groups
- Demonstration sites
- Enabling partnerships
- Any plant life not indigenous to the area should be monitored, and if found detrimental to the riparian area, should be removed and replaced with plant life normally occurring there.
- Separate health parameters that landowners can have an influence on (like invasive plants) from ones that landowners have little or no influence on (like river flow).
- Help support local stewardship groups using demonstration sites to show changes.

Are the riparian setbacks acceptable?

Yes 6
No 1

What recommendations would you make to achieve the riparian setbacks?

- Public awareness programs.
- Re-planting if necessary.
- Location dependent.
- Education of municipal Council. Use a combination of administrative (fixed) setbacks and one derived ecologically by competent professionals in the field.
- Recognize partnership opportunities with other groups.
- Landowner controls – invasive plants vs. water flow.
- Focus on wetland restoration
- Connectivity of habitat on the landscape.
- Invertebrate spp. As biodiversity indicators and connections.
- Use best available knowledge for industry targets.
- Ecosystem approach.

Are the permitted and restricted activities in riparian areas and flood fringe zones reasonable?

Yes 1

Is the “No further loss of permanent, semi-permanent or ephemeral wetlands” target acceptable (described as a target in the biodiversity section)?

Yes 4
No

If no, how would you define the riparian health targets and thresholds?

- Partnerships with Ducks Unlimited etc.?
- But should consider wetland restoration as well.

5. BIODIVERSITY

Are biodiversity issues identified correctly?

Yes 6
No

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Increase connectivity; large parcels of native habitat vs. small scattered ones.
- Focus more on ecosystem rather than species.

Are the biodiversity indicators appropriate for:

| Indicator | Yes | No | Don't know |
|------------|-----|----|------------|
| Fish | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| Wildlife | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| Vegetation | 5 | 0 | 1 |

If no, what indicators would you include for a) fish, b) wildlife and c) vegetation?

- With variability of water in the Milk River, it is very difficult to establish a realistic indicator.
- Vegetation might be more specific – think of yucca as an example

Are the wildlife interim targets appropriate?

Yes 5
No

If no, how would you define the wildlife targets?

What recommendations would you make to achieve wildlife targets?

- Need assistance from universities and wildlife professionals to set targets that represent attainment of viable populations for the long-term.

Are the setback and timing restrictions for wildlife acceptable?

Yes 4
No
Don't know 1

If no, how would you define the setback and timing restrictions to minimize disturbance?

Please provide any additional comments regarding biodiversity you feel need to be addressed in the Milk River IWMP.

- Awareness, extension programs and materials, interaction with conservation groups and organizations needed.

6. LAND USE

A. Agricultural Activity

Are the agricultural issues identified correctly?

Yes 7
No 2
Mostly 1

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- No grazing will put pasture backwards [*Experience on the Natural Area shows that if grazing is not permitted, weeds tend to invade area. Future plan for Natural Area is to allow grazing at appropriate timing and stocking rate*]
- More water storage.
- Use of fire in range management is not addressed.
- Cultivation farming could have a greater influence on recommendations of GFP.
- People doing the monitoring vary in the quality of work they do. Not all studies are good.
- If policy changes make the grasslands less commercially valuable, then the government will need to find [*way*] to maintain health.
- Grassroots approach is more trusted by landowners than a top-down government push. Historic value can be destroyed by uncontrolled access.
- Consider benefits of water storage for irrigation purposes and fish habitat.
- Cultivated lands – economic impact, salinity impact on groundwater, reduced tillage.

Are the range targets and thresholds appropriate?

Yes 7
No 1

If no, how would you define the range targets?

- Consider patch dynamics at landscape scale of light-moderate-heavy levels of grazing.
- Some form of consistency of rating the range.
- Rating the land while considering the “whole picture” – wildlife, grass health etc.
- Who determines range health?
- Very subjective. Holistic approach. Sometimes what is good for one species is bad for another. E.g., an area of grass that is healthy with problems for the grass can be very healthy for species (such as burrowing owls).
- Needs more uniform style of assessing.

Can you recommend other targets that should be established for agricultural activity in the watershed (e.g., area maintained for agricultural production etc.)?

- Cultivation
 - Measure, planning
 - Increased salinity
 - Reduced tillage practices
 - Chemical resistance
 - Land erosion
- Look at cultivated land more – practices etc.
- Irrigation – flood irrigation
- Storage.

Please provide any additional comments or recommendations regarding agricultural activity you feel need to be addressed in the Milk River IWMP.

- I don't understand the benefit of chemfallow (and the runoff) over cultivation.
- More info on farming.
- Less Gov.
- Holistic approach instead of too specific.
- Flood irrigation is more efficient with energy uses, sprinkling more water efficient.
- Agriculture use must have #1 attention.
- To make irrigation more efficient there needs to be both offstream and onstream storage. You need to hold the water to use it.
- Work with to help educate if salt is moved good for watershed, but also good for even grazing.

B. Oil and Gas Activity

Are oil and gas activity issues identified correctly?

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 5 |
| No | 3 |

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Watershed/aquifer overlapping and oil field impact (i.e., M.R. watershed is not over all of the Milk River aquifer but oil field impacts both.
- Landowner "rights". What can a landowner find out, what can be asked. Can extra measures be implemented to protect surface and groundwater?
- Everybody needs to work together – County/Co-ops/watershed
- Landowners are not aware of the resources available or procedures that can be taken to protect water sources/aquifers, the onus is left to the landowner to find out.

- Hold workshops, be an advocate, educate in conjunction with Ag. Service Board and/or county.
- Fracturing and impact on water – need good science-based info.

Please consider the following targets and thresholds that might be investigated or applied to oil and gas activity in the Milk River watershed:

| Indicator | Applicable | Not Applicable |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Number of wells per area of land | 6 | 0 |
| Fragmentation of landscape | 5 | 0 |
| Linear disturbances | 5 | 0 |
| Size of “footprint” | 5 | 0 |

Can you identify additional targets and thresholds?

No comments received.

Please provide any additional comments or recommendations regarding oil and gas activity you feel need to be addressed in the Milk River IWMP.

- Address water consumption needs of oil/gas industry (oil patch could substantially increase necessitating greater water consumption needs).
- Lease and public land inspections by qualified personnel.

C. Tourism, Recreation and Access

Are tourism, recreation and access issues identified correctly?

Yes 4
No 1

If no, what additional issues should be considered?

- Rights of access.
- Maps, signs, safety concerns for river users. Work in a positive direction with the landowners.
- Private and Public Lands.

Are the tourism, recreation and access targets and thresholds appropriate?

Yes 5
No

If no, how would you define the tourism, recreation and access targets?

- Inform the public.

Please provide any additional comments and/or recommendations regarding tourism, recreation and access you feel need to be addressed in the Milk River IWMP.

- Public awareness program on ensuring that those using the areas for tourism leave no footprints.

7. Overall, are you pleased with the progress on the Milk River IWMP?

Yes 6
No 0

If no, please explain.

8. What suggestions do you have for the MRWCC Steering Committee in order that this Integrated Watershed Management Plan reflects your goals for your watershed?

- As I increase my involvement I realize that the organization is well defined and oriented and I hope to be able to increase my input as able.

9. Please provide any additional comments or pose any questions that you think would benefit the Milk River Integrated Watershed Management Plan. Use the back of this page if necessary.

- Well organized, very ambitious. Asking for and taking advantage of stakeholder input.
- I would like to see the local water co-ops and MRWCC work together to help set up rules or regulations for any new oil and gas exploration.

10. Please provide your contact information so that we may contact you if needed.

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APPENDIX A. STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP AGENDA, DECEMBER 6, 2012.

AGENDA

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 10:00 am | Welcome and Introductions |
| 10:10 | Presentation of the draft Milk River Integrated Watershed Management Plan |
| 11:10 | Questions and Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Are we on the right track?- Are we missing anything?- New information available? |
| 12:00 | Lunch |
| 12:45 | Break-out Session – Review and discuss topic recommendations |
| 1:30 | Break-out Session Report – Group Discussion |
| 2:00 | Complete individual feedback forms |
| 2:15 | Next Steps |
| 2:30 pm | Adjourn |

APPENDIX B. WORKSHOP INVITATION AND PARTICIPANT LIST.

| ASPECT | Member | Affiliation | ATTENDED |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| MRWCC | Sandi Riemersma | MRWCC | Y |
| | Tim Romanow | MRWCC | Y |
| | Mary Lupwayi | MRWCC | Y |
| | John Ross | MRWCC/ Ross Ranches | Y |
| | Will Lindeman | MRWCC/ Landowner | |
| | Sam Wirzba | AESRD/IWMP Team | Y |
| | Don Welsh | MRWCC | Y |
| | Warren Cunningham | MRWCC/County of Warner | Y |
| SURFACE WATER SUPPLY | Brian Hills | AESRD | Y |
| | Werner Herrera | AESRD | |
| | Ken Miller | MRWCC/Farmer | Y |
| MUNICIPAL | Stephen Bevans | Cardston County | |
| | Shawn Hathaway | County of Warner | Y |
| | Geoffrey Krokosh | County of Warner | Y |
| | Bob Jones | County of Warner | |
| | Phil Jensen | County of Warner | Y |
| | Kerry Hyatt | County of Warner | |
| | Steve Harty | County of Warner/ORRSC | Y |
| | Jason Storsch | Cypress County | |
| | Christine Barrieau | Cypress County | |
| | Dave Matz | County of Forty Mile | |
| | Ross Ford | MRWCC/County of Warner | Y |
| | Joan Hughson | MRWCC/County of Forty Mile | |
| | Lloyd Closson | MRWCC/Village of Coutts | Y |
| | Clark Selk | MRWCC/Town of Milk River | Y |
| GROUNDWATER | Jeff Gutsell | AESRD | |

| ASPECT | Member | Affiliation | ATTENDED |
|---|--------------------|--|----------|
| | Marie-Amelie Petre | MiRTAP (PhD Student) | |
| | Alfonso Rivera | Geological Survey of Canada - MiRTAP | Y |
| | Daryl Jaques | AESB, AAFC | Y |
| | | Milk River West Water Co-op | |
| | Ron Ford | Milk River East Water Co-op | Y |
| | Scott Tollestrup | Warner West Water Co-op | Y |
| | Kache Miller | Warner West Water Co-op | Y |
| INDUSTRY | Darlene Sakires | MRWCC/CNRL | |
| | Jennifer Nitschelm | AARD/IWMP Team | Y |
| | Lynn Fitzpatrick | AESRD | |
| RECREATION/TOURISM | Darcy Wills | MRWCC/ Landowner | Y |
| | Ed Sloboda | MRWCC/ Landowner | Y |
| | Ken Brown | MRWCC/Milk River Raft Tours | Y |
| | Mike Brown | Milk River Raft Tours | Y |
| | Aaron Domes | MRWCC/Tourism, Parks and Recreation | Y |
| WATER QUALITY | Wendell Koning | AESRD | |
| | Sarah Depoe | AARD | |
| BIODIVERSITY (RIPARIAN AREAS AND WETLANDS, FISH AND WILDLIFE) | Brad Downey | ACA/MultiSAR | |
| | Francois Blouin | PCF/MultiSAR | |
| | Lee Moltzahn | MultiSAR | |
| | Terry Clayton | AESRD | |
| | | Ducks Unlimited | |
| | Norine Ambrose | Cows and Fish | |
| | Lorne Fitch | Cows and Fish | Y |
| LAND USE | Dana Blouin | Nature Conservancy Canada | |
| | Cheryl Bradley | Southern Alberta Group for the Environment | Y |
| | Katie Rasmussen | Alberta Wilderness Association | Y |
| | Josh Bourelle | Development Officer (Development, Subdivisions and Planning) | |

| ASPECT | Member | Affiliation | ATTENDED |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|----------|
| SOCIAL/ECONOMICS | Roger Houghton | South Grow and Cardston County | |
| | Lorraine Nicol | MRWCC/ University of Lethbridge | Y |
| | Mike Gervais | MRWCC/Alberta Health Services | |
| | Paulette Fox | MRWCC | |
| MILK RIVER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE | William King | Milk River Management Committee | Y |
| | Cliff Wallis | Alberta Wilderness Association | |
| | Ken Kulgen | Foremost Fish and Game | |
| | Rob Morrison | Fish and Wildlife Enforcement | |
| | Terry Hood | Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (Public Lands) | |
| | Darwyn Berndt | Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (Alberta Parks) | |
| | Cam Lockerbie (Chair) | Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (Alberta Parks) | |
| Lee Finstad | Ranching Community | | |

APPENDIX C. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM STAKEHOLDERS UNABLE TO ATTEND THE MEETING ON DECEMBER 6, 2012.

BIODIVERSITY

Submitted by B. Downey, Alberta Conservation Association, via email December 17, 2012

Here are a few comments in regards to the Biodiversity Report for the IWMP. I've centered my comments to table 5 in the report.

Table 5. Summary of data requirements to better understand and manage wildlife species (Milk River State of the Watershed Report 2008).

Northern Leopard Frogs

- 1) Definitely could be looked at again along with some new sites as well.

Plains Spadefoot/ Great Plains Toad

- 1) Is this something that DU has developed
- 2) MULTISAR initiates toad surveys after heavy precipitation events and checks wetlands during detailed inventories during the summer.

Pronghorn

- 1) Public Lands and MULTISAR have gathered extensive range data within the watershed
- 2) Believe there is already a BMP for Silver Sagebrush
<http://www.srd.alberta.ca/LandsForests/GrazingRangeManagement/documents/BeneficialGrazingManagement-SageGrouse-SilverSagebrush-2004.pdf>

Prairie Rattlesnake

- 1) Road mortalities are currently being sent to ESRD as they keep track of hot spots that may warrant a sign
- 2) Surveys are conducted by MULTISAR at new locations each year to identify new hibernacula.

Greater Sage Grouse

- 1) Same as above in regards to silver sagebrush BMP
- 2) Already supplementing with birds from Montana

Sharp-tailed Grouse

- 1) RSF model has been developed

Ferruginous Hawk

- 1) Can add in the need to monitor nest success as we often identify how many nesting pairs there are but should also document how many young actually fledge. Ex. We may have 8 nests in the

watershed each year for ten years yet the number of young fledge from those nests could fluctuate from 24 down to 0 depending on conditions within the watershed.

Loggerhead shrike

- 1) We have an RSF model for loggerhead shrikes-MULTISAR
- 2) Definitely need to canoe the lower end of the Milk River in Reaches 4, 5, and 6. As this is where some of the best loggerhead shrike habitat exists within the Watershed.
- 3) Will have to look at some of the work that Cows and Fish did for MULTISAR and compare with what was found for loggerhead shrikes.

Grassland Birds

- 1) An additional BBS route or driving route would be great to have in the West that could encompass Reaches 1, 2, and 3. Likewise another in the far East in reaches 7 and 8.
- 2) There is lots of information on the relationship between grassland birds and the health of different vegetation communities. MULTISAR has a ton of data to that respect for the watershed we just need to analyse it.

One additional species would be the Richardson's Ground Squirrel as we will be looking at monitoring this species again in 2013 and monitoring for this species should occur every two to three years to get a better idea of how the ground squirrel population is probably impacting some of the species identified above. (Ex. Low nesting success or fewer nesting ferruginous hawks may not necessarily mean there has been a dramatic change in habitat on the landscape. It could simply mean that the ground squirrel numbers have crashed as there population can be cyclical)

LAND USE

Submitted by T. Gilchrist, Landowner, via email December 10, 2012 (also submitted as a response to the SSRP RAC advice document)

My comments will deal with the Conservation Areas recommended by the Regional Advisory Council.

Sections 4.2.1, 4.6.2.3 and 5.3.14.2 recommend enhancement of economic viability, best possible use of land, conservation and stewardship tools including economic market based incentives. These are laudable goals for ranchers that use public grazing lands as their primary grazing resource. The report concentrates on establishing Integrated Conservation Management Plans for those areas of the native grass resource contained in rancher's grazing leases. Public Lands staff has managed those areas in consultation with the lessees for the last 50 years. The large leaseholders, especially, have maintained their grass resource for the people of the province and themselves in a fashion that is a credit to Public Lands regulations, Public Lands staff and the ranching community. The Multisar projects carried out on cooperating ranches have documented the fact that the plant community and wildlife, including endangered species, are being maintained for the long term under the present grazing regime. Management of oil and gas activity on ranch leases has been assumed by the ranchers under the umbrella of the of Public Lands staff. The ranchers are best equipped to recommend sites, access road

placement and pipeline routes that minimize damage to the native grass resource. Public Lands do not have enough staff to be on top of the day-to-day impacts of drilling and pipeline activity.

The grass and wild life on public land leases have been enhanced over the last 50 years under the present management system.

The RAC recommends the establishment of Integrated Conservation Areas complete with management plans. Recent history shows us that the management committees for plans established for Natural Areas and Ecological Reserves seldom meet. Leases cover 2.16 M acres or 10.4% of the South Saskatchewan plan area. An army of Public Lands staff will be required to implement and manage the ICAs. The RAC thinks that no management of the native grass resource is presently in place. That is not correct. The present state of the resource and its management couldn't be better.

The RAC proposal for ICAs on leases has placed a pall over the ranching community. What will happen to carrying capacity? What will happen to tenure? Uncertainty of the future manifests its self in decreased value of a lease contract. A prospective buyer must be extremely cautious in his valuation of a lease contract in a ranch purchase. The seller obviously is disadvantaged especially in a retirement situation. A ranch sale valuation in the southeast area of the province suffered this consequence immediately after the RAC recommendations were announced.

The establishment of the ICAs will certainly lead to changes in carrying capacity for grazing under lease contracts. Lease contracts, with tenure, purchased by ranchers are real property. A rancher can provide these contracts as collateral to a financial institution as collateral for a purchase loan. Lowering of carrying capacity results in decreased income from grazing under the lease contract, decreased value of the contract and financing problems. This flies in the face of the RAC philosophy stated above i.e. to enhance the economic fabric of the region. The Multisar reports have established the fine balance now in place between grazing, wildlife and the ideal intensity of use of the plant community for the long term.

Partial defoliation of grass by livestock grazing during the vegetative growth stages of grasses is instrumental in nitrogen mineralization. That available nitrogen provides a huge boost to plant production, even in poor precipitation years. No grazing during the growth period of grasses diminishes long-term forage productivity.

If the enhancement of habitat, at the expense of the leaseholder or landholder, for whatever reason, is deemed to be valuable to the people of Alberta, that landowner or lessee should not bare the cost in decreased income. If the enhancement is good for the province and its people, compensation is due the landowner or lessee. Paid hunting and paid tourism access would set the value of that experience and mitigate the cost of managing those programs on a lease.

The present collaborative management system for leases has provided stability for the ranching industry, very adequate and demonstrated protection of the plant community and associated wild life, including endangered species. The proposed ICA philosophy contained in the RAC report is a very serious regressive step following 50 years of excellent Public Lands lease administration.

The controversy over Bill 36 resulted in the defeat of a significant number of PC MLAs. One would have thought that the government would have learned the fact that property rights are very important to the rural community. The wording in Bill 2 has rural residents in an uproar again. It appears that the government still believes that the rights of rural residents are expendable in the industrial development arena. The cooperation between oil and gas extraction companies and landowners, built up over the past many years, is doomed. This is a sad prospect for rural Albertans.

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY

Submitted by K. Rasmussen, Alberta Wilderness Association via email on December 7, 2012 (note other comments by author regarding recreation)

In regards to my comments on agriculture - I am always just wondering about opportunities to have a different model of agriculture that would bring more people back to rural areas and make smaller family farms more viable. I see this as a way to possibly address many issues such as water shortage, local economics and loss of people but I truly do not know enough about it to really comment. I just wanted to clarify with you that those are just questions I have in my head but I do not by any means have the knowledge to really comment on that - nor do I even know if that is within the scope of what you are doing. So I just wanted to point out those were more questions that I have in general about supporting rural Alberta and now looking back I hope they were not inappropriate!

TOURISM, RECREATION AND ACCESS

Submitted by K. Rasmussen, Alberta Wilderness Association via email on December 7, 2012 (note other comments by author regarding agriculture)

The other comment I made that I feel probably deserves a bit more explanation is the one about the mutual respect for people recreating on public lands and for land owner/lease holder rights. To give you some context, I had just been in Foremost at the SSRP meeting and heard a lot of comments about "managing the land with guns", a lot of anger about "city-people" being on public lands and not respecting the lease holders rights - but a few of those lease holders were saying that they actually OWN the land. I suppose my comment was partially in response to that. I have lived in rural SK on ranches and totally understand the feelings of resentment towards ignorant people who abuse the land and don't respect landowners- I feel the same frustration at those people. I also think, however, that there seems to be a need to address the other side of that equation. People who do not live in the area do have a right to recreate respectfully on public land and that can be very beneficial to the local community in many ways. Part of this is: 1) it is not just "city people" who behave disrespectfully - I have seen many rural people throw garbage out of their trucks, leave gates open, or light fires in dry season as well. This to say it is SOME people who cause these problems, not CITY people, and I would hope that we can build social capital and move away from divisive and unproductive comments that pit city people vs rural people. 2) I think that somehow, in addition to addressing the one side of the problem of people using the land in a disrespectful way (which I think your management plan does an excellent job of), there must be in tandem a building of understanding that many (maybe most?) people do go to recreate in a respectful way and that they are helpful to the local community and economy and actually do have

a right to recreate on public lands and rivers- again - respecting the rights of the leaseholders on public land.

Sorry that that was long winded - I just recognize I made a very brief comment about an issue that is very contentious and emotional and I just wanted to clarify my intent.

BIODIVERSITY

Submitted by C. Wallis, Alberta Wilderness Association via email on February 3, 2013

Hi everyone,

Good start on the biodiversity discussion paper.

It would be good to have a summary of conservation lands in the watershed, both public and private. Alberta Parks should be able to provide an assessment of the targets for the grassland subregions involved and how well we are doing meeting our targets as well as some actual acreages and themes represented and their importance in the system that have been designated in the watershed.

Not sure where we get private conservancy easements, land trusts etc. (registered on title) but would be good to at least discuss that people are considering this and it all contributes to the biodiversity objectives. This discussion should highlight landowners who have a keen interest in managing their lands for native habitat and native species even if we can't identify them (either due to data availability or because they don't want to be identified).

All the best,

Cliff Wallis P.Biol.

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