



Wapiti River Water Management Plan

Questions and Answers

Wapiti River Water Management Plan Steering Committee

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Why is a Water Management Plan for Wapiti River Basin necessary?

The Wapiti River watershed is home to the City of Grande Prairie, one of the fastest growing communities in Alberta, as well as numerous other smaller population centers and Aboriginal settlements. In addition to the thriving urban growth, the watershed supports very active forestry and agricultural sectors and a flourishing oil and gas industry. The Wapiti River is an important source of water for all of these uses, and continued population growth and economic development will be highly dependent on reliable quantities and quality of water from this same river.

The Wapiti River receives continuous industrial and municipal effluent discharges as well as other point and non-point source pollution. These, together with water diversions and withdrawals, affect the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the Wapiti River aquatic ecosystem, especially during periods of low flow. Such changes also affect human use of the aquatic resources. Aquatic resources in the Wapiti River, and some of its tributaries, have been affected negatively by the present level of development and use. Planning and direction is needed to provide certainty for economic growth, social use, and environmental values in the future.

What is the Purpose?

The purpose of the Plan is to provide guidance to Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP), and the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) when making water allocation decisions under the *Water Act* and, where appropriate, under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* by establishing a Water Conservation Objective. The plan will also provide guidance and recommendations to other resource managers, water users, and residents to protect and improve the Wapiti River watershed. The Plan will provide greater clarity, consistency and transparency regarding water allocation and effluent discharge decisions and non-regulatory actions and strategies to protect and improve non-point source pollution. It will also provide recommendations that may be considered in other planning initiatives such as the Land Use Framework.



What is the Scope of the Wapiti River Water Management Plan (WRWMP)?

As endorsed by the Steering Committee, the WRWMP will make recommendations to AEP on:

- Water quantity and quality recommendations that seek an acceptable balance among environmental, social and economic interests.
- Water quantity recommendations will consider surface water use, including groundwater that has a direct hydrological connection to the surface.
- Water quality recommendations will consider impacts caused from both point and non-point source inputs.
- Recommendations in the water management plan may include: a) regulatory changes to be enforced through Provincial or Federal legislation; b) site-specific water quality objectives; c) education and voluntary implementation of appropriate land or water-use practices (e.g., best management practices); and, d) identification of other planning initiatives that address the issue.

Who is Involved in Developing the WRWMP?

The WRWMP Steering Committee was established to oversee and provide direction for the planning process. The Steering Committee is also responsible to ensure that all stakeholders and the general public have the opportunity to provide input and feedback into the planning process.

The membership of the Steering Committee includes:

- Aquatera Utilities Inc.
- City of Grande Prairie
- ConocoPhillips Canada Ltd./Cenovus Energy Inc.
- County of Grande Prairie No.1
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Alberta Environment and Parks
- International Paper Company
- Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance
- Municipal District of Greenview
- Seven Generations Energy
- Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
- Town of Beaverlodge

Aboriginal Communities – When the planning process began in 2012, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation were invited to participate in the development of this plan. Horse Lake First Nation opted to be informed at key milestones, while Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation indicated their interest to participate and attended a few Steering Committee meetings.

What are the outcomes and specific objectives of this plan?

The desired outcomes of this plan will align with the three broad goals of the provincial Water for Life Strategy:

- Safe, secure drinking water supplies
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems
- Reliable quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

Specific objectives of this plan are:

1. The development of recommendations for Water Conservation Objectives under the *Water Act* that best balance water consumption and protection of the aquatic environment, while taking into consideration environmental, social and economic interests by:
 - determining the current water allocation, demand and supply on the Wapiti river
 - estimating potential future water demand and supply within the Wapiti river basin
 - developing a science-based environmental flow needs assessment that includes water quantity, water quality, physical habitat and aquatic species necessary for protection of the aquatic resource
2. Creation of a foundation for future integrated watershed management planning by:
 - providing a comprehensive account of the major issues, challenges, priorities and objectives within the watershed.
 - identification and recommendation of key watershed issues and challenges that should be considered in the Watershed Plan.

Who will be affected by this plan?

From a regulatory perspective, the recommendations of this plan will apply to:

- All new water licence applications and renewals under the *Water Act*.
- The recommendations of this plan will be retroactive to the Aquatera Utilities Inc. water licence issued 2013. All other existing licences will be grandfathered upon the implementation of the WCO.
- All new water licence applications and renewals under the *EPEA*.
- Existing authorizations under the *EPEA* where appropriate.

What is the Geographic Scope of this Plan?

The geographic scope for the Plan is the Alberta portion of the Wapiti River basin, from the British Columbia border to where the Wapiti River joins with the Smoky River, including all tributaries.

While the water management planning process pertains to the entire Wapiti River basin, assessments focused on areas of highest impact or projected development, in particular the Wapiti River mainstem downstream of the Redwillow River to where it joins with the Smoky River.

All new water allocation authorizations in the Alberta portion of the Wapiti River basin are subject to meeting the WCO. New water allocation authorizations in the Alberta portion of the Wapiti River basin may also be subject to their own reach or water body specific objectives, WCOs, or other regulatory requirements, in addition to this Wapiti River WCO.