

Topic: Sturgeon River Watershed Alliance (SRWA) Watershed Management Plan (WMP)

Introduction:

In support of *Water for Life: Alberta's strategy for sustainability*, the Sturgeon River Watershed Alliance (SRWA) is a watershed stewardship group made up of communities and organizations operating in the Sturgeon River watershed. The vision of the SRWA is:

The Sturgeon River watershed is recognized and valued as a natural prairie river system that connects our communities and adds to our quality of life. It is healthy, sustaining its ecological structure, processes, functions, and resiliency, within its range of natural variability. It is collaboratively stewarded by rural landowners, urban residents and Indigenous communities, and is managed with knowledge and ecological integrity as the foundation for decision-making that balances our social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being.

To achieve its vision, the SRWA has collected and reviewed existing knowledge about the state of the Sturgeon River watershed, commissioned a number of studies to fill information gaps, and engaged others to better understand values and issues associated with water management in this area. Now, to address the issues identified to date and to guide future actions, the SRWA has developed this Sturgeon River Watershed Management Plan (2020). While the plan is a reflection of the SRWA's collective consensus voice, it is presented as information and advice only, with voluntary implementation expected to occur over time, as resources and collaborations allow.

Facts (Background Information):

The Sturgeon River watershed drains an area of 3,301 square kilometres and includes a number of tributaries, lakes and wetlands. This area has a rich history and today supports a large agricultural community, as well as a growing urban presence. The conversion of about 80% of the basin's natural land cover to other land uses has affected the health of the Sturgeon River watershed. Stakeholder concerns led to the formation of the SRWA in 2014. Since then, the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance (NSWA) has provided staff capacity in the form of administration and grant development support to the group.

Analysis:

A watershed management plan puts in place an iterative and adaptive management process with clear goals and performance measures and ongoing monitoring and assessment to ensure goals are met. It is a tool that helps to align and coordinate actions by various players in the watershed. In developing this plan, the SRWA recognizes that water management is complex. In order to discuss different components, the plan is organized around six key outcomes, as follows:

1. Policies and plans are well-informed and align to support a healthy watershed.
2. All residents have access to safe, secure drinking water supplies, whether they are on public or private systems or draw from surface or groundwater.
3. Aquatic ecosystems, including our rivers, lakes, wetlands and other water bodies, are healthy.
4. The importance of water quantity is recognized and reliable, quality water supplies are available for people, livestock, and a sustainable economy.

5. Wise land use ensures the cumulative effects of growth and development are mitigated, the land is resilient to climate change, and individuals and communities are well prepared for flood and drought events.
6. Residents and stakeholders support the Sturgeon River Watershed Management Plan and are willing to participate in local and regional initiatives to improve watershed health.

Each outcome is discussed in more detail in the plan including what is important about each particular topic area, what we know about it, what goals we have set, and what strategies and actions we will use to achieve our goals and outcomes. Priority strategies, to be initiated in the near term, are discussed under plan implementation.

In Spring of 2020 the SRWA was granted \$200,000 from the Alberta Community Partnership grant to begin implementation. The SRWA will report on plan implementation progress annually, and will review, and if necessary, update the plan every five years.

The SRWA is requesting that municipal Councils support the WMP by passing the following three motions. By accepting the plan for information, the County will not be committed to acting on the plan's objectives or implementation strategies. Implementation is meant to be voluntary, as resources allow. Committing to continue to work collaboratively in an inter-municipal setting will ensure community stakeholders' needs are represented at the regional level and will increase the County's ability to support balanced landscapes by leveraging NSW staff capacity and grant funding. The County will only be committing to use the information provided in the Plan where it meets Council's overarching vision, strategic objectives and fits within existing policy.

Alternatives:

The SRWA is requesting that the Councils of member municipalities consider the following three motions in order to support the Plan and its implementation:

1. That Council accept the Sturgeon River Watershed Alliance's Integrated Watershed Management Plan for information, as presented;
2. That Council resolves to continue to work collaboratively with other municipalities and the Sturgeon River Watershed Alliance to implement the plan; and
3. That Council resolves to consider the plan recommendations in the decision-making of the municipality including development of new or updated statutory and other documents.

Conclusion/Summary:

In conclusion, administration supports the proposed motions.

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