

SUSTAINABILITY OF LESSER SLAVE LAKE INITIATIVE

Minutes of

Watershed Committee

September 9th, 2004
Kinuso Senior Center, Kinuso, Alberta

1. CALL TO ORDER

Denny Garratt, Acting-Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm

Watershed Committee members in attendance:

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Stakeholder Group Represented</u>
Jeff Burgar	Town of High Prairie
Lorne Pratt	Agriculture (<i>alternate</i>)
Cindy Koop	Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council
Rod Burr	Alberta Environment
Tim Toth	Alberta Environment (<i>alternate</i>)
Terry Sly	Alberta Environment (<i>guest</i>)
Gordon Sanders	Forest & Related Industry
Jerry Wallsten	Municipal District of Lesser Slave River
Denny Garratt	Municipal District of Lesser Slave River (<i>alternate</i>)
Grant Gramiak	Tourism Operators/Groups
Murray DeAlexandra	Commercial Fishermen Association/Related Groups
Duncan Fisk	Oil/Gas Industry

Absent:

George Key	Chairperson
Lisa Brown	Town of Slave Lake
Larry Marquardt	Recreation/Tournaments
Craig Bissell	Municipal District of Big Lakes
Doug Lowe	Fisheries & Oceans Canada

Others in attendance:

Marilyn Cavanagh, Facilitator	Lesser Slave Lake Community Development Corporation
Scott Kelly, Facilitator	Lesser Slave Lake Community Development Corporation
Rick Denton	Slave Lake Pulp
Bonnie Raho	Regional Environment Action Committee (REAC)
Dwayne Pollak	Agriculture

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Moved by Grant Gramiak, that the agenda be adopted as presented.

Motion Carried

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES – June 10, 2004

Moved by Gordon Sanders, that the minutes of the June 10, 2004 meeting be adopted as presented

Motion Carried

4. FINANCIAL REPORT

4.1 Committee members were provided with copies of the following:

- Watershed Committee Administration Income Statement, August 31, 2004 (Attachment 1)
- Stakeholders Contributions Towards Action Plan statement as of July 13, 2004 (Attachment 2)

4.2 Business arising from the statements:

- Denny Garratt raised the question about M.D. of Big Lakes lack of contribution.
- Murray DeAlexandra stated that the Commercial Fisherman have no intention of paying their \$1,000 contribution. He cited reasons of unfairness based on revenue (forestry vs. fishing), as well as resources tied up in a lawsuit.
- Lorne Pratt stated that Agriculture was having difficulties as well.
- Rod Burr suggested putting these issues aside and move on with the meeting.

Moved by Jerry Wallsten, that the financial reports be accepted as read.

Motion Carried

5. OLD BUSINESS

5.1 Lesser Slave Lake Basins Water Management Plan – Phase One: Questionnaire. This was distributed to the members, both at the June 10, 2004 meeting and afterwards (by LSLCDC) to help focus Task 4 – the impacts of various weir configurations on the river and lake. The Committee must define and agree on its objectives for river flows, and then AENV will work to model the weir/cut-off changes to achieve those objectives.

5.2 Partnerships & Water Strategy

Terry Sly was present to report and answer questions about Water Planning and Advisory Councils (WPAC). He stated that under the *Water for Life* strategy, the government sees water management being achieved through partnership arrangements with Albertans. There would be three different types of partnerships (the Alberta Water Council [provincial level], Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils [WPAC – regional level] and Watershed Stewardship Groups [WSG – local level]). These partnerships are meant to empower residents of a basin, defining the roles and responsibilities of all groups involved in the large and complex undertaking of managing water in the province.

Included were examples of three similar committees that are closer to formally becoming a WPAC: the Oldman Watershed Council, Bow River Basin Council, and North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance. The Oldman Watershed Council business plan was handed out to show some of the work to be completed, prior to requesting becoming a WPAC.

Questions/Comments arising from the presentation:

- Denny Garratt: Asked if this Watershed Committee is considered to be a fledgling WPAC? Answer: A good start. To be considered as a WPAC the group must put forward an application, cover letter and a three-year business plan.
- Funding for WPACs was discussed: funding availability, need of a Director, public information, funding expectations.
- Jeff Burger: Mentioned that lack of funding was perhaps crippling the effectiveness of the Watershed Committee because it did not have the funding to get to the next level (WPAC).
- Rick Denton: The Watershed Committee formed before the current water strategy was adopted which may have worked against the committee's favour.
- Funding is required to develop a business plan. LSLCDC was asked if it could develop a business plan if the funding were available? Answer: Yes.
- Rod Burr: Issue identification has already been completed and could be incorporated into the business plan that is to be developed.
- Jerry Wallsten: Would like a template detailing requirements for WPAC accreditation. Terry Sly replied that AENV is preparing a document that will detail the full list of criteria for forming a WPAC.
- More discussion about funding led to the comment by Rod Burr that Alberta Environment had questioned some of the accountability of one of the existing Councils. Terry Sly mentioned that reporting deficiencies were experienced in other areas due to the lack of measurable goals. Measurable goals are a requirement of WPACs.
- Gordon Sanders: Stated that this committee has to move towards becoming a WPAC, or else risk never receiving any funding.

5.3 Water Management Plan – Task Updates

NOTE: PLEASE REFER TO THE JUNE 10, 2004 MINUTES FOR THE TASK DETAILS

- **Task 1: Future Water Uses**

Tim Toth provided a status report prepared by Ron Davis. **This task is essentially completed.**

- Review of the draft report prepared by the technical committee and presented to the Watershed Committee at the last meeting, has been completed.
- No significant changes will be made to the report, but a section will be added to place the water use information in perspective regarding the overall basin water balance, and especially regarding the rates of flow in the Lesser Slave River.

For example, the maximum or allocated rate of water withdrawal from the Lesser Slave River by the four major licensees is about **0.65 m³/sec**. The four major licensees account for almost 99 percent of total licensed volume withdrawn from the river.

- Information on present and projected water use will be used as input in developing recommendations for establishing a water conservation objective for the river (Phase1); we will continue to refine water use information for the lake basin for input into Phase 2 of the water management plan.

- **Task 2: In-Stream Flow Needs for Lesser Slave River**

Tim Toth provided a status report.

- The Government Coordinating Committee met June 17 to review details about in-stream flow needs. In July the GCC directed the technical committee to use the Alberta Desktop method.
- The Alberta Desktop method is based on natural flows, maintaining flow variability within and between years. It also stipulates an ecosystem base flow, indicating limits to water withdrawal in low-flow years. Being based on sound science, it relates stream flow to the health of fish and aquatic habitat.
- The model is designed to provide year-round protection of the aquatic environment, without gathering more field data. Although it is only a model (e.g., making assumptions about things such as the fish activity that goes on under-ice; an unknown), it is still a defensible approach and reasonable to use under the current time and budget realities.
- The next meeting of the Technical Committee is to accept the report and decide what work, if any, should be done as the report recommends (e.g., water quality modeling), considering the timeframe of the project and costs.

- **Task 3: Sedimentation in the Lesser Slave Lake Outlet Channel**

Rod reported that the technical work has been completed, but the report has not yet been written up.

- **Task 4: Weir Configuration Impacts**

Rod provided highlights from the input received on the questionnaire. Basically there are three schools of thought:

- Maintain the status quo, that is, leave the weir alone
- Maintain the lake at about 576.45 meters (the elevation at the time most individuals answered the questionnaire). Most individuals in this group also wanted a much narrower range of fluctuation than currently experienced, with the minimum and maximum levels varying less than a foot from the mean.
- Those not too concerned about lake levels, but ensuring adequate river flows are delivered to meet all downstream requirements.

There is little that can be done to reduce peaks since inflows are so large. During the July flood events, discharges for the Swan, East and West Prairie Rivers were 300, 300 and 250 cubic meters/second (m^3/sec) respectively. Since the Lesser Slave River cannot discharge these volumes as quickly as they arrive, the lake level rises. To reduce the frequency of low lake levels the weir could be raised, but this also would increase the mean and peak water levels as well.

Larry Marquardt proposed increasing the discharge capacity of the river (with additional cut-offs), and modifying the weir to restrict discharges at lower lake levels. Environment modeled lake levels based on the following assumptions: complete the last two cut-offs (of the original regulation project) and raise the weir one foot, maintaining a 25-meter wide opening. These results show that peak lake levels could be reduced somewhat (up to about 30 cm.), but low levels dropped slightly lower (see Attachment 3).

The requested fluctuation range, identified in the preferred high and low water levels, is not likely to be attained at a reasonable cost. Some individuals were not sure what the impacts of reducing the range of fluctuations would be and wanted more information; others were concerned that the impact on beaches and the fishery would not be acceptable. It was generally accepted that a reduced range of fluctuation would enhance boating and reduce flooding of agricultural land, but would also reduce beach widths and cause losses of aquatic vegetation that would subsequently impact fish populations.

As part of developing the water conservation objective (WCO) for the river and the potential impact on lake elevations, Rod looked at current human use requirements. Current municipal and industrial maximum withdrawal rates are about $0.65 \text{ m}^3/\text{sec}$. An additional $7.2 \text{ m}^3/\text{sec}$ is necessary to maintain the flow calculated to protect the aquatic environment through effluent dilution (the 7Q10 flow). At this rate, a doubling of human use (i.e., $0.65 \times 2 + 7.2$) would equate to a WCO of $8.5 \text{ m}^3/\text{sec}$. Over a 6-month period, an $8.5\text{-m}^3/\text{sec}$ withdrawal is equal to a lake volume of about 12 cm. This does not equate

to a 12 cm drop in lake levels, as inflow continues year-round. However, additional work is necessary to confirm these calculations, since it is only rarely that this flow would be necessary to be delivered for a 6-month period.

There was no agreement on delivering the discharge that was described above, and further discussion was put off until the next meeting.

Tim Toth presented one graph showing river hydrology compared to the Alberta Method for In-stream Flow Needs (to protect the aquatic environment) (Attachment 4). Tim described the graphic: the green dotted line shows the recorded low flow of 1999 when water virtually stopped running over the weir for a few days. He compared that flow to the dark blue line that shows the average regulated flow, noting the difference. Lastly, he identified the red lines, which shows the flow needed to protect the aquatic environment (Alberta Method). Tim added that our current understanding indicates that under very low-flow years, we only need to make up the amount used by licensees (the 0.65 m³/sec maximum rate), so that withdrawal activity can continue.

Questions/Comments arising from the task updates:

- Does the weir still meet the current needs of basin residents?
- Silt. A few individuals believe that silt is filling the lake – one member said that the maximum depth in the 1960s was 110 ft., but that now it is difficult to find a depth of 66 ft. Rod Burr indicated that AENV has no data that supports this, but noted that these concerns would be dealt with during Phase 2, and committed to compiling existing data about siltation.
- Lake levels. It was discussed that the level of the lake should be able to fluctuate to allow for the natural cleaning of the beaches for recreation, and provide the necessary conditions for a healthy aquatic environment.

6. NEW BUSINESS

- 6.1 LSLCDC (Facilitators) mentioned the technical nature of the minutes was an issue for them. Tim Toth and Rod Burr stated that they would be happy to continue to work with LSLCDC to make sure that minutes were technically correct.
- 6.2 Letter from Myler Savill regarding the proposed feedlot in Joussard was received as information.

7.0 ADJOURNMENT

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Kinuso Senior Drop in Center.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Chairperson, Watershed Committee