

Wetland Education Network Pilot

Municipal Action Group Summary Report

By: Liliun Consulting

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We wish to extend a special thanks to the following individuals who participated in the Municipal Action Group, providing their feedback and engaging in the collaborative sessions:

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1.0 Introduction

The Government of Alberta has implemented a province-wide Wetland Policy in order to address the great deal of wetland loss that has been occurring across Alberta for decades. The policy, which has a goal to “*conserve, restore, protect and manage Alberta’s wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society, and the economy*”, includes both regulatory and non-regulatory means. While the emphasis of the Wetland Policy is on the regulatory aspects of wetland management, there is also an acknowledgement of the role that wetland education and outreach will play for the policy to reach its goal successfully.

There are numerous wetland educators throughout Alberta, however education and outreach efforts have been occurring in an independent and non-coordinated fashion. The Alberta North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) Partnership recognized the value in having wetland educators work collaboratively, and created the multi-stakeholder Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group in order to create a conceptual framework for a coordinated wetland education and outreach program.

The conceptual framework created by the Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group included an annual meeting for the wetland education community, a steering committee for future collaborations, and sector working groups (hereby referred to as Action Groups). The purpose of these meetings and groups being to identify wetland education needs, tools and products to improve the wetland education and outreach efforts in Alberta.

In order to follow through with the conceptual framework designed by the Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group, a pilot was created to gather each of the four Action Groups together for two half-day meetings a piece, to examine the wetland education and outreach needs of the particular sectors. In order to focus the meeting content and provide the opportunity to find synergies across the Action Groups, the members of each group were asked to concentrate on basic wetland education (i.e. basic wetland identification and function), and avoid some of the other topics of wetland education (e.g. understanding the Wetland Policy, roles and responsibility of specific groups, technical wetland topics, etc.).

The groups were populated and the process was facilitated by Lilium Consulting. Individual proceeding reports for each Action Group as well as a report outlining the state of wetland education and outreach in Alberta across the Action Group sectors were also performed.

This Municipal Action Group report provides a summary of the discussions at the Municipal Action Group meetings. The content represents the opinions of the workshop participants and experts, and not those of Liliun Consulting.

2.0 Municipal Action Group Background

In order to gain the advice of individuals connected with municipalities in Alberta to gain their specific viewpoint on wetland education and outreach, Alberta NAWMP decided to utilize the already established Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group. This group was established in 2015 as a result of a wetland stewardship workshop hosted by the Alberta NAWMP partnership and the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada. This group was an ideal cross-section of individuals representing various types of municipal interests. The group had already met to address many topics in advance of the Wetland Education Network pilot.

Due to the fact that the group was already very cohesive in nature, adding wetland education and outreach items to the agenda was straightforward and the group had already thought of responses to many of the questions in other discussions.

3.0 Meeting Objectives

The Municipal Action Group had already arranged for meetings to follow up on action items connected to their work as the Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group, and therefore the Wetland Education Coordinator (Liliun Consulting) was brought into those meetings with specific Wetland Education Network agenda items.

The intended outcomes of the Wetland Education Network portions of the meetings were as follows:

Meeting #1:

- gain clarity on the key audiences, products (tools/messaging) and engagement strategies to develop effective wetland education and outreach materials for the municipal sector.

Meeting #2:

- elaborate on ideas for wetland education and outreach priorities for municipalities identified in meeting #1, by adding details and plans for how to proceed.

4.0 Meeting Discussion Summaries

The Municipal Action Group members were asked to identify where they felt their sector was on the Literacy Ladder created by the NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group (Figure 1). They were also asked to discuss the various wetland education resources that were currently being used for municipal audiences. The efficacy of the current wetland education resources were examined to determine some of the key points that could help inform future wetland education and outreach tools.

Figure 1. Municipal Literacy Ladder

Ladder Steps	Outcome
Action	Actively managing wetlands within the municipality
Skills	Understand how provincial and municipal policy, legislation and planning relate to wetlands
Attitudes	Wetlands are an important component of municipalities who can play an important role in their management
Knowledge	Wetlands provide many goods and services that benefit municipalities
Awareness	There are wetlands within the municipality

(NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group 2016)

The Municipal Action Group was then asked to move on to address the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ for the creation of a wetland education and outreach program for their sector. The Municipal Action Group members were told to think in terms of having limited resources available, in order to really narrow down ideas to key priorities.

The outcomes of these discussions are summarized below.

4.1 Current Situation

The Municipal Action Group members agreed that while there is a general awareness of wetlands in the municipal sector that has emerged over time, there are still wetland knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. The Municipal Action Group therefore identified that most of the audiences in the municipal sector would fit on knowledge ‘rung’ of the Literacy Ladder (Figure 2). There was agreement that there is an appetite for wetland knowledge amongst municipal audiences, but there was

concern that in the absence of knowing where to access sound scientific wetland information, the sources being used were not necessarily credible.

The Municipal Action Group members also brought up capacity as a key issue for wetland education and outreach, particularly in some of the larger rural municipalities with limited resources.

Figure 2. Municipal sector Literacy Ladder with ranking according to Municipal Action Group

Ladder Steps	
Action	
Skills	
Attitudes	
Knowledge	←
Awareness	✓

4.1.1 Existing Programs

The Municipal Action Group identified that not many wetland education programs exist specifically for municipal audiences. The existing wetland education programs that were identified over the course of the meetings with the Municipal Action Group are:

- *Stepping Back from the Water: A Beneficial Management Practices Guide for New Development Near Water Bodies in Alberta's Settled Region* (Alberta Environment and Parks [AEP] 2012), and
- Cows and Fish Programs (primarily riparian but have some wetland content)

Rachel deVos of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) also identified that she had been putting out water related content through an unofficial newsletter that was well received.

The Municipal Action Group had identified a lack of wetland education resources in previous meetings (as the Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group), and had created a document to fill the gap. This document, entitled *Your Guide to Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality* (AB NAWMP 2017), was not yet released at the time of the Wetland Education Network pilot meetings, but was in the later stages of edits at the time it was discussed. The Municipal Action Group felt that this document (to be released by the NAWMP partnership) would be the best resource available for municipal audiences for wetland education and resources.

4.1.2 Additional Information

The Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group received a presentation by AEP outlining some of the key results from their Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program (WRRP) Municipal Engagement Survey in advance of the second Wetland Education Network meeting. This study involved surveying a sample of municipalities to understand how the Government of Alberta can work with municipalities to conserve riparian and wetland functions.

A few of the key findings were very pertinent to the discussion around the municipal sector's wetland education and outreach needs. These key points being:

- the least understood area participants identified pertained to what wetland education and outreach information is available and where it can be found, however participants also indicated that having a good understanding of available information was important for decision-making processes;
- engineers and those involved in planning and development were most likely to indicate their understanding of wetlands was inadequate; and
- only 22% of participants in the survey had used the resource *Stepping Back from the Water* (AEP 2012).

The above results of the WRRP Municipal Engagement Survey and some of the other information presented by the Government of Alberta WRRP group were incorporated into the dialogue around wetland education and outreach for the Municipal Action Group's second meeting.

4.2 Key Audiences

The key municipal audiences that were identified by the group as being important for wetland education and outreach opportunities were as follows:

- Planning and Development staff, including Municipal Planning Agencies and their consultants
- Chief Administration Officers (CAOs)
- Administrative staff

- Operations staff
- Elected Officials
- Individuals with professional designations (eg. planners and engineers)
- Provincial Agriculture Service Boards
- Municipal Associations:
 - Association of Summer Villages of Alberta
 - Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)
 - Alberta Associations of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC)
 - Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association
 - Society of Local Government Managers
 - Local Government Administration Association
 - Alberta Association of Agricultural Fieldmen
 - Urban Development Institute (UDI)
- Agricultural Fieldmen
- Public Works
- Surveyors and Engineers
- Land Development Industry/private developers

The Municipal Action Group members were asked to choose the municipal audiences they would prioritize if limited resources were available for wetland education and outreach. CAOs and Planning and Development Staff were identified as being of utmost importance, with a focus on those roles within municipalities with smaller capacities for wetland management.

4.3 Product and Tool Ideas

The Municipal Action Group was quick to promote their publication: *Your Guide to Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality*, as the key piece to fill wetland education needs for municipal audiences. While the guide deals with many aspects of understanding and managing wetlands, the modules that pertain to the basic wetland education needs related to the Wetland Education Network pilot are as follows:

- Module 1: *Understanding Wetland Definitions and Descriptions*;
- Module 3: *Understanding Wetlands in the Watershed*;
- Module 6: *Identifying Wetland Values and Setting Objectives*; and
- Module 8: *Promoting Wetland Stewardship and Education*.

The modules in the guide offer brief overviews with further resources identified for more information, and the understanding with the Municipal Action Group was that each of these module topics could be expanded to be more comprehensive for a wetland education program. The group also identified that a resource guide directory would be useful add-on to the work that had already been done, in order to allow municipal audiences to know who to contact for specific wetland questions or challenges.

The Municipal Action Group members also identified that a collection of case studies on positive wetland action would be an asset for a municipal audience, as they tend to be a group who want to use processes that are already proven to be successful. Examples of case studies that would be of interest to municipal audiences included:

- constructed wetlands;
- how wetlands are commonly lost (including before and after photos);
- what a wetland is (videos or visuals of the range of wetland types); and
- topics linking wetlands and economics.

Testimonials were also brought forward as an idea that could be incorporated into wetland education tools that could bring municipal audiences on board much more quickly. The Municipal Action Group also noted a keen interest in joining in on what was being produced for wetland education and outreach in other sectors, as to ensure that efforts and resources were being used efficiently.

4.4 Key Messages

The first key message that the Municipal Action Group agreed on was a reflection of wanting to communicate to municipal audiences that they have a role to play in wetland management and that resources are available to them to increase knowledge and skills on wetland topics:

“Wetlands are a shared responsibility to manage and we can help you”.

The other key message from the Municipal Action Group related to the importance of having a field component in the wetland education process:

“To make good decisions, you need to get your feet wet”.

4.5 Best means of delivering programs

Your Guide to Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality was close to completion at the time of the Wetland Education Network pilot meetings, and the Municipal Action Group wanted to ensure that the guide would be utilized effectively by municipal audiences upon its release. The Municipal Action Group decided that an endorsement process would likely be necessary to guarantee that there was broad awareness about the guide. The group (under the Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group) worked with a communications consultant to ensure the best result when they released *Your Guide to Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality*.

The Municipal Action Group identified that municipal audiences would be most interested in education products that are self-directed. The group discussed that this could be a web-based platform with the ability for the user to gain access to education on specific topics, in a succinct way, for example a brief online tutorial on

a specific pertinent wetland topic that could be streamed during a lunch break. The ability of these education products to be accessed at any time was identified as an asset as was the fact that the exact same content could be delivered many times. If a web-platform was put in place to address wetland education needs for municipal audiences, the platform would need to be user-friendly and recognize that many municipal users do not have high bandwidth capabilities available to them. For this reason, PowerPoint presentations have worked well in the past.

As an addition to the online tutorials, the Municipal Action Group also discussed the possibility of including webinars in a wetland education program. These webinars would differ from the online tutorials in the type of content they would offer. Whereas the online tutorials would be for specific teaching content, the webinars would be a platform to introduce topics that would be more amenable to group discussion and viewer interaction. Members of the Municipal Action Group noted that while webinars on wetland and water topics had been well received in the past (e.g. the *Wetlands Why? What? Who? How?* Webinar co-hosted by the AUMA and AAMDC), others had attempted to cover too much material in one session which was overwhelming to viewers, so keeping webinars concise would be important. The ideal length of a webinar for municipal audiences would be about an hour, with half an hour of content and half an hour of discussion. The other important note made by the Municipal Action Group was that it was key that webinar speakers be coached to have proper language and relevance for municipal audiences.

The Municipal Action Group members agreed that the key municipal audiences identified (CAOs and Planning and Development staff) work best with visuals and checklists and these would be important components to include in any wetland education tools produced.

The Municipal Action Group also identified a field component as being integral to a wetland education experience. Group members identified that hands-on experiences have had some of the most lasting impacts, given that many people in the municipal audience are missing the connection to the land. In order to reach a broad membership, it was recommended that a wetland education program with a field component be built into content for conventions, which happen regularly through many of the municipal associations (e.g. Agriculture Services Board tours). Wetland field programs with guides/brochures as accompaniments have been very well received in the municipal sector in the past (e.g. Strathcona County wetland field tours).

The Municipal Action Group also identified that any type of product or tool created for municipal audiences would need to come from a trusted source. The NAWMP partnership was identified as a potential source, due to their neutrality and scientific focus.

4.5.1 Potential Municipal Wetland Community of Practice

Over the course of their two Wetland Education Network pilot meetings, the Municipal Action Group recognized the potential for the municipal sector to have a Municipal Wetland Community of Practice (COP). The idea of having a network of people working in municipal fields, engaged in regular wetland learning and sharing was important to the Municipal Action Group. This Municipal Wetland COP was noted as being an idea that could leverage administrative groups and other key audiences, such as the development industry, as well as being an arena for sharing valuable information with other sectors.

6.0 Conclusion

Overall, the Municipal Action Group identified that awareness of wetlands and wetland topics has been growing amongst municipal audiences, but easy-to-find wetland knowledge from credible sources is still not available. In order to address the gap of wetland knowledge among municipal audiences, the Municipal Action Group created a document entitled *Your Guide to Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality*, which was released in March of 2017 (AB NAWMP 2017).

The Municipal Action Group noted many municipal audiences that require wetland education and outreach programs, but felt that CAOs and Planning and Development staff were priorities at this time. These particular audiences were particularly open to proven concepts and therefore case studies and testimonials would be key to getting them on board.

The group agreed that easy-to-use, highly visual tools and products were essential to municipal audiences and came up with a wetland education strategy that included online tutorials, webinars and a field component.

The Municipal Action Group was keen to work with other sector groups to identify synergies for wetland education and outreach programs and also felt a Municipal Wetland COP would be a great way to continue with the desire for credible wetland education resources in their sector.

7.0 References

Alberta NAWMP (AB NAWMP). 2017. *Your Guide To Making Wetlands Work in Your Municipality*. <http://www.abnawmp.ca/news/2017/mar/14/your-guide-making-wetlands-work-your-municipality/>.

Alberta Environment and Parks. 2012. *Stepping Back from the Water. A Beneficial Management Practices Guide for New Development Near Water Bodies in Alberta's Settled Region*. <http://aep.alberta.ca/water/education-guidelines/documents/SteppingBackFromWater-Guide-2012.pdf>

NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group. 2016. Draft Recommendations to Improve Wetlands Literacy in Alberta via a Wetland Education and Outreach Collaborative Framework.

Appendix A

Wetland Education Network Pilot Meeting Agendas

Municipal Action Group



Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group

Meeting # 9 – Draft Agenda

Tuesday September 27, 2016

Location: AAMDC Office Boardroom
2510 Sparrow Drive, Nisku

Time: Meeting 9:00am – 12:00pm

Invited: WG membership (attached – some updates required)

Meeting Purpose:

- Set next steps for Municipal WG recommendations
- Review **Wetland Education needs** of municipal audiences

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
9:00	1.0 Administration 1.1 Health and Safety 1.2 Welcome & Introductions 1.3 Review and Approve Agenda	Michael
9:15	2.0 Next Steps - WG Recommendations 2.1 Refresh WG recommendations (suggest bottom p. 15: Increase Awareness (& Knowledge), Improve Alignment (roles/responsibilities/process), Raise Capacity, Provide ‘Technical’ needs (tools, data, etc.. My heading!)) 2.2 Review and integrate WRRP Survey results (now available on restricted basis) 2.3 Refine/prioritize recommendations, specify actions, assign 2.4 Pilot?	All Michael, Monique
10:30	Break	
10:45	3.0 Review Wetland Education needs of municipal audiences: 3.1 Wetland Education Network start-up 3.2 Feed Municipal Wetland Education Needs into network i) establish audiences and level of literacy (who?) ii) key messages or products (what?) iii) best means to convey/connect (how?)	Terra All
12:00	4.0 Wrap Up	Michael



Wetland Municipal Engagement Working Group
Meeting # 10 – Draft Agenda
Wednesday October 26, 2016

Location: AAMDC Office Boardroom
 2510 Sparrow Drive, Nisku

Time: Meeting 9:00am – 12:00pm

Invited: WG membership (attached),
 Guests Terra Simieritsch, Kristina Dembinski

- Meeting Purpose:**
- Advance WG recommendations and Wetland Municipal Guide
 - Refine **Wetland Education needs** (Terra)

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
9:00	1.0 Administration 1.4 Welcome, Introductions, Health and Safety 1.5 Review and Approve Agenda	Michael
9:05	2.0 Advance WG Recommendations and Wetland Municipal Guide 2.1 Peer review results - WG Report and Municipal Guide (Action 2) 2.2 'Technical' actions update (Actions 8 - 11) 2.3 WRRP Results and implications (Actions 4, 5). Can the results inform the wetland literacy rating of our key municipal audiences?	All (5 min) Michael (5 min) Monique (15 mins)
9:30	2.4 Implementation options – Municipal Guide (Action 3)	Kristina
10:30	3.0 Wetland Education needs by municipal audiences: 3.1 Context – how does this initiative connect with the WG efforts? 3.2 Refresh Sep 27 direction from WG 3.2 Refine Municipal Wetland Education Needs	Michael (5 min) Terra
12:00	4.0 Wrap Up (and wraps!)	Michael