

Planning for the Future!

Strategic Watershed Assessment and Priority Setting

Priority Setting

The Oldman Watershed Council is working with stakeholders to improve the Oldman River Watershed through **sustainable water management and land use practices**. The State of the Watershed (SOW) was released in Spring 2010, which provides the scientific information on the current state of the Oldman watershed. A shared Vision and qualitative outcomes were also developed based on residents input through interviews, workshops, and online surveys. This completed the first phase of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan. We are now in the process of combining the scientific information from the SOW with the qualitative outcomes to create a Strategic Watershed Assessment and Priority Setting Summary.

Stay tuned for updates and to learn how you can participate!

What is a watershed?

Water is a uniting force. It cycles around the globe, falling from the sky, moving across the land, sinking into the soil, travelling down our rivers, or up our wells.

A **watershed** (or a *basin*) is an area of land that catches precipitation and drains into a larger body of water such as a marsh, stream, river, or lake. A watershed is often made up of a number of sub-watersheds that contribute to its overall drainage. No matter where you are, you're in a watershed.

The Oldman Watershed

The Oldman watershed is a large diverse land and water system in southern Alberta covering 23,000 km² in southwestern Alberta and 2,100 km² in Montana. It extends eastward from the forested slopes of the Rocky Mountains, through rangelands in the foothills, dryland and irrigated agricultural plains, to the prairie grasslands. The Rocky Mountains feed the headwaters of the Oldman mainstem and its tributaries (Crowsnest and Castle rivers, Willow and Pincher creeks), while the headwaters of the Belly, Waterton and St. Mary rivers rise in Montana. The watershed varies greatly; both in terms of the status of the land and water resources and impacts from human activities. In headwater sub-basins, water quantity is adequate, quality is fair to

good, and riparian ecosystems are generally healthy. However, as the Oldman River flows east, water quality deteriorates, available water supplies diminish, and there are several areas of concern.



Integrated Watershed Management Plan

The OWC seeks to maintain and improve the Oldman River Watershed through partnerships, knowledge, and the implementation and integration of sustainable water management and land use practices.

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC)

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) is a not-for-profit organization working in partnership with communities and residents to improve the Oldman River Watershed through **sustainable water management and land use practices**.

Goals:

- ◆ To understand our watershed
- ◆ To keep residents well-informed and actively engaged
- ◆ To define desired outcomes together with stakeholders that will form the bases of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan
- ◆ To build capacity and commitment to achieve defined outcomes
- ◆ To adopt practices that will benefit the health and function of the watershed

The OWC is made up of watershed residents and stakeholders like you, from various backgrounds and perspectives. Council members provide leadership and guidance in watershed planning and management, water quality monitoring and stewardship.

State of the Watershed

This report provides a snapshot of the entire watershed under current land use and hydrologic conditions, and is divided into four sub-basins based on natural drainage patterns and water management history. The four sub-basins are: Mountain, Foothills, Southern Tributaries and Prairie. A fifth sub-basin is also identified, the Oldman River Mainstem, because it receives and is influenced by water in the other sub-basins.

For the Oldman watershed, three sets of indicators were chosen and assessed to understand the cause and effect relationship between human activities on the landscape and the environmental response to those activities. Those indicators are as follows:

1. Terrestrial and Riparian Ecology – Land Cover; Soil Erosion Rates; Riparian Health; Land Use (linear development and total disturbances).
2. Water Quantity – Trends in Natural Flow; Licensed Allocation and Actual Use vs. Natural Flow; Performance in Meeting Instream Objectives and

Water Conservation Objectives in Recent Years; Irrigation and Municipal Water Use Efficiency.

3. Water Quality – Nutrients (nitrogen); Nutrients (phosphorus); Total Suspended Solids; Fecal Coliforms.

Based on an evaluation of the combined rankings of the indicators, the overall health of the Oldman watershed is rated as “Fair”.

To view the complete State of the Watershed Report visit www.oldmanbasin.org



Rochelle Coffey

Overall State of the Watershed Ranking for all Indicators by Sub-basins:

Indicator	Sub-Basins						
	Mountain	Foothills	Southern Tributaries	Prairie	Mainstem	Oldman Watershed	
Terrestrial and Riparian	Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Good	Fair	
Water Quantity	Good	Fair	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair	
Water Quality	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor	Good	Fair
Overall	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair

Oldman Watershed Planning Vision

The initiation of the first phase of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan occurred concurrently with the finalization of the State of the Watershed report. The intent was to ensure that all the foundational materials would be available for the next phase of the planning process. Community direction to the planning exercise will complement the scientific components of the State of the Watershed and will serve as a critical foundation for a successful watershed management plan.

Watershed residents and stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide input in the development of the Vision and a set of qualitative outcome statements through interviews, on-line questionnaires and surveys, and workshops. To view the Process Summary for creating the Vision and outcome statements visit www.oldmanbasin.org

The following Vision and outcome statements were prepared from this input.

Community Vision

A healthy, resilient watershed where people, wildlife and habitat thrive.



Outcome Statements

Environmentally aware, responsible and motivated watershed residents.

A safe and secure water supply.

- ◆ Clean ground and surface water, for safe drinking and healthy ecosystems

- ◆ Naturalized river flows for healthy aquatic and riparian ecosystems

- ◆ Aquifers are understood and sustained

Balanced allocations and wise management of water.

- ◆ Efficient water use through improved urban, agricultural, and industrial conservation practices

Abundant, healthy and biologically diverse aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems in particular riparian areas, native grasslands, headwaters, native fish and forested areas.

- ◆ Reduce invasive species

Land managed for multiple use with minimal impact on natural, cultural and historical assets.

- ◆ Agriculture land base maintained

- ◆ Well planned, minimal impact developments along waterways

- ◆ Population growth that compliments watershed function

- ◆ Protects headwaters

- ◆ Low impact recreational public access to waterways and river valleys

- ◆ Responsible tourism and recreation opportunities

Integrated Watershed Management Plan

An Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) is a comprehensive approach to managing water and land resources. This involves looking at what affects the health of rivers, wetlands and riparian areas, particularly in relation to water quality and quantity.

It combines local and scientific knowledge to manage watersheds in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways. Scientists and people who live and work in the watershed are brought together to identify watershed issues and goals, and to develop and implement a watershed management strategy/plan.

In summary, the *Community Vision* tells us how we want our future watershed to look, the *State of the Watershed Report* tells us how near or far we are from our Community Vision, and the *Integrated Watershed Management Plan* will outline what we need to do to reach our vision.

The Risk Assessment and Priority Setting Process

Priority Setting

Sept-Dec 2010—Risk Assessment and Priority Setting

To ensure all sectors and sub-basins are represented, a diverse group of stakeholders have been brought together to form a Core Team for the main discussion and decision making. This group of individuals will be participating in a risk assessment and priority setting exercise for the Oldman watershed. A Strategic Watershed Assessment and Priority Setting Summary will be created from this exercise.

Jan-Mar 2011—Share Priorities with the Public

After the Risk Assessment and Priority Setting exercise is complete the OWC will share the results with the public at open houses. This will give residents a chance to see the resulting DRAFT document and to learn how they can become more involved in the watershed.

June 2011—Strategic Watershed Assessment and Priority Setting Summary will be released

How can I find out who's representing my sector and sub-basin?

A list of the core team is posted online www.oldmanbasin.org.

How can I participate if I'm not part of the Core Team?

Two surveys will be conducted during the Priority Setting and Risk Assessment process. The surveys will be circulated through the OWC Weekly Update as well as posted online.

The information gathered from the surveys will be incorporated into the overall Strategic Watershed Assessment and Priority Setting Summary.

Join our Facebook page—Oldman Watershed Council. Updates will be posted regularly.

Open House locations and dates will be posted on the website in January.

Join Us Today!

We welcome any and all participation from the watershed community. If you are interested in completing a survey or attending one of the open houses please contact Stephanie Palechek or visit the website below.

There are many other avenues for getting involved, such as becoming a member of our Board of Directors, participating on one of our various working teams

including the IWMP Steering Committee, or signing up to be a OWC member to stay informed about the OWC and activities relevant to your watershed.

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