

## **Collaborative Thinking About Water—the Alberta Water Council**

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Our quality of life depends on having a safe and sustainable supply of water for our communities, the environment, and the economy. With extreme weather events, climate change, development, and population growth, the need for a collaborative decision-making forum for groups to come together and discuss water management challenges and opportunities is necessary.

Under the *Water for Life* Strategy, the Government of Alberta established the Alberta Water Council (AWC) to serve as a collaborative partnership for providing advice on provincial water management issues. The Council is comprised of 24 members organized into four sector groups - industry, non-government organizations, government, and the Government of Alberta and Provincial Authorities. For more than a decade, the Council has reviewed the *Water for Life* Strategy's progress, provided policy advice, resources, tools, and served as a forum for the discussion of important water management challenges and opportunities.

The AWC adheres to a consensus decision-making process whereby members work collaboratively to craft decisions that satisfy their respective interests. Each member brings a unique perspective that requires respect and consideration. Consensus decision-making fosters a process where the resolution of issues is likely to meet the social, economic, and environmental priorities of members. Each member has an equal opportunity and responsibility to speak to an issue and to influence the results of the discussion and the shape of the solution. The Council has a hierarchy of consensus-based discussions on any given issue. Having received direction from its board of directors, working groups, project teams, or committees are tasked with tackling specific issues, working towards consensus on defining the problem, understanding its consequences, and providing advice, tools, and resources on how to resolve the issue.

Since its inception, the AWC has worked collaboratively with its members to review the implementation progress of the *Water for Life* Strategy five times, produce 20 reports with valued policy advice, and address a diversity of provincial water management challenges. Examples include lake watershed management, aquatic invasive species, water literacy, and water conservation, efficiency and productivity among others.

At the Council, work is underway in areas of source water protection and multi-year drought resiliency. The Source Water Protection Project Team is tasked with documenting existing approaches and providing guidance for protecting public, private, and individual drinking water sources in Alberta. The team is expected to synthesize source water protection practices, processes and risks to drinking water sources in Alberta, examine approaches and risk management models in selected jurisdictions, and develop a guidance document that highlights best practices by the end of 2019.

The Building Resiliency to Multi-Year Drought Project Team is tasked with producing a guide and workshop materials to assist Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils engage municipalities and communities within their watershed to plan for, mitigate, respond to and recover from multi-year droughts. The project will highlight the importance of multi-year drought management in Alberta,

compile existing drought management information and resources in the province, and facilitate the delivery of customizable information to support small urban and rural municipalities before, during and after a drought by the end of 2019.

The AWC continues to bring together important groups to develop solutions to Alberta's water management challenges and be as a platform to inform, discuss, and raise the profile about perspectives on water management through newsletters, videos, symposiums, webinars, and other means.

For more information about the AWC's work please go to <https://www.awchome.ca/>





*Photo credit Alberta Water Council*