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Battle River Watershed Alliance Holds First Annual General Meeting

The Battle River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) held its First Annual General Meeting in Camrose on November 14. More than 30 attendees helped to elect board members and celebrate the organization's part year successes.

The meeting included a review of the BRWA's vision, mission, guiding principles and budget.

BRWA Goals:

- *The BRWA is an effective, efficient and sustainable Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC)*
- *The Battle River watershed community is aware of, and understands the ecological, social and economic values provided by a healthy Battle River watershed*
- *There is broad community and partnership involvement or support for the BRWA, its Vision, Mission, Goals, Strategies and Actions*
- *The ecological, social and economic health of the Battle River watershed is sustained or improved.*

2007 Highlights:

- Formation of BRWA as a non-profit society,
- BRWA designation as the recognized WPAC for Battle River watershed
- Formation of a formal BRWA board structure and standing committees
- Development of communications materials (brochure, display, newspaper series and website redesign) which earned BRWA an APEX Award of Publication Excellence
- Initiation of three major projects: Index of Biological Integrity Study, Aerial Videography, Signs of Life Project
- Formation key partnerships: Ponoka Fish & Game, Caring For Our Watersheds, Pigeon Lake Stewardship Group, Iron Creek Watershed Improvement Society, University of Alberta, Augustana Campus Students, Canada World Youth, Camrose & Area Community Adult Learning Centre
- Identification of strategic actions and primary, secondary & tertiary project priorities

We are all stewards of the Battle River Watershed



Reduced Tillage LINKAGES: In Conversation with Rick Taillieu

Reduced Tillage is a systems approach to crop production, which relies on carefully managing each production component if you wish to achieve long-term success.

Reduced tillage and direct seeding is a farming practice that encourages farmers not to till the land after the crop has been harvested in the fall and to leave the stubble standing.

In the spring, using new or modified equipment, the farmer seeds directly into the ground without tilling the ground first. This has many advantages; farmers having to make fewer passes over their fields saves on fuel and labour costs.

By eliminating spring tillage, local farmers are also able to grow winter wheat and other crops that typically do not grow this far north. With the stubble standing and rooted, the soil has more integrity, causing less erosion from wind and water, which saves soil and protects neighboring water bodies from excess nutrient and particulate matter when the water runs off the land.

Rick Taillieu, Regional Agronomist, Central Region, for Alberta Reduced Tillage LINKAGES, says approximately 70% of farmers in the Battle River Watershed are using reduced tillage as one of their land use practices.

He says that the reasons that it is not 100% is that it is a big change for many and one, which in the end takes more management.

Tilling is seen as a quick fix for weeds and crop diseases, with reduced tillage one has to be more specific when it comes to weed and pest control.

The increased management of reduced tillage is little compared to the increased soil health and integrity and the

increased protection that it provides our local waterways.

Reduced tillage is one step in making our soils and farming practices more sustainable with the goal of allowing farms and ecosystems to flourish.



Two of the goals of the Battle River Watershed Alliance are to support actions that improve water quality and to help maintain and enhance ecological integrity of the watershed.

One of the goals of the Reduced Tillage LINKAGES program is to increase the awareness of the positive effects of reduced tillage systems on surface water quality.

By increasing the adoption of soil, nutrient and livestock manure, best management practices protect surface water quality.

How we use and treat the land has a direct impact on water quality. Reduced tillage is helping to keep soils and nutrients in the fields where they belong and not in the water.

For more information, contact Rick Taillieu at 780-679-5174 or visit the Alberta Reduced Tillage LINKAGES website (which includes more than 350 articles on reduced tillage and related issues) at: reducedtillage.ca



**Iron Creek Watershed
Improvement Society:
In Conversation with Don Ruzicka**

Part of the mandate of the Battle River Watershed is to help create and support watershed stewardship groups in the Battle River Watershed.

The Iron Creek Watershed Improvement Society is one stewardship group that has been working hard in Flagstaff County to improve their knowledge about what makes a healthy watershed so they can work towards having better water quality and better prepare themselves for drought.

BRWA Staff Member, Maurice Samm, talked to Iron Creek Watershed Improvement Society Chair, Don Ruzicka, who is also one of the group's founding members.

Maurice:
When did you form?

Don:
Carol Wilson, with the Alberta Beef Producers, started a conversation to form a watershed group in 1999 and we became an official society in 2001.

Maurice:
What issues did your group first look at?

Don:
Riparian health was the first big issue that we looked at. We had Cows and Fish come and talk to us and we had some local producers sign up to have their riparian health tested. Since then we are also looking to support wetland and native grassland health because most bio diversity comes from riparian, wetlands and native grass lands and these areas are decreasing quickly, because of human impact, all across Alberta.

Maurice:
How many people do you have

involved?

Don:
We have a core group of about 10 people with a membership of about 45.

Maurice:
What are some of the challenges that you have faced?

Don:
The drought was a very difficult time for us.

We had many people interested and wanting to make a difference but they had to make tough decisions between making a living and supporting healthy riparian, wetlands and native grasslands. Another challenge that we face is that people are busy and they get volunteered out; we have to be careful not to over stretch our volunteer base.

Maurice:
What are some of the successes that your group has had?

Don:
For the last three years, we have put on a kids education day for elementary students in our county. Our focus was to teach kids about the value of wetlands, trees and forest. This was possible because of partnerships with organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Cows and Fish, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, & Alberta Beef Producers.

These organizations did presentations to the students and we coordinated the day. The response from students, teachers, partners and parents has been very positive. We have also done riparian demonstration sites, solar water pumping demonstrations, bird surveys, information suppers and water information articles in the local paper to help educate the public.

For more information on the Iron Creek Watershed Improvement Society, contact Don Ruzicka at (780) 385-2474 or email: ruzickadon@hotmail.com

BRWA Communications and Education Committee Update

The BRWA Communications and Education Committee met (via conference call) on December 5 to discuss roles and responsibilities of the committee, as well as education and communications activities currently underway in the Battle River watershed.



Committee members include:

- Carol Wilson (Chair & BRWA Board Member)
- Greg Nelson (Alberta Environment Education Awareness Specialist)
- Kelsey Spicer Rawe/Kerri O'Shaughnessy (Cows & Fish Riparian Specialists)
- Vicki Cole (City of Camrose Education Promotions Coordinator)
- Maurice Samm (BRWA Staff Member)
- Maureen Lynch: (BRWA Staff Member).

Committee members agreed that the role of the committee will be to raise the profile of the BRWA/support the Board of Directors, ensure tools and key messages link to BRWA Business Plan, and ensure efforts complement the work already being done in the watershed.

The committee has agreed to meet monthly via conference call with plans to meet in person three to four times per year.

The committee will develop smaller working teams to carry out the work on the committee. Next meeting date is January 11th with future meeting dates of April 11, June 13 and September 12.

For more information, contact Maureen Lynch at: 403/554-3321; email: malynch@telus.net or Maurice Samm at: 780/672-7621; email: msamm@telus.net

BRWA Staff Meet with Area Educators

BRWA staff attended a meeting of north and central Alberta environmental educators in Sherwood Park on December 6 to seek ways to build capacity for local environmental education initiatives.

The meeting included environmental education stakeholders from Alberta Environment, Lakeland College, Pembina Institute, Mountain Equipment Coop, RiverWatch, Parkland Conservation Farm, City Farm Edmonton and Parks Canada. Participants discussed ways to work together to advance local environmental education opportunities and agreed to form a Central Alberta ACEE chapter.

Objectives of the chapter would include information sharing, networking, professional development, advancing environmental education involving a wide variety of audiences, and creating a culture of stewardship that improves the local environment while maintaining a healthy economy and vibrant society. Next steps include a potluck meeting in the new year.



