

BATTLE RIVER

WATERSHED ALLIANCE

2019-2020
ANNUAL
REPORT



Students from Veteran hike at Big Knife Provincial Park

ABOUT THE BRWA

We are the people who live, work, and play in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds. We are landowners, community members, business people, researchers, and decision makers. We are the people who will ensure a stable economy, healthy natural areas, and resilient communities in this place that we love.

Our Vision

By using sound knowledge, wisdom, and wise actions, we ensure that the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds sustain abundant life, now and for future generations.

Our Mission

The BRWA provides relevant science, social science, policies, and education for a diverse community of people to create solutions to our watershed's challenges.

Board Members

Academia

Greg King, *University of Alberta - Augustana*
Les Parsons, *University of Alberta - Augustana*

Agriculture

Khalil Ahmed, *Battle River Research Group*
John Pearson, *Landowner (see memoriam on next page)*

Business/Industry

Barb Bosh (Board Chair), *ASHCORE Technologies Ltd.*

Environmental NGOs

Lorne Ferguson (Board Treasurer),
Camrose and District Fish and Game Association
Diane Hanson, *Rural Outreach & Agricultural Renaissance Society*

Individual

Al Corbett (Board Vice-Chair)
Midge Lambert
Peter Pullishy



Municipal Government

Corinne Kelts, *Special Areas*
Preston Weran, *Town of Blackfalds*
Ryley Andersen, *M.D. of Wainwright*

Provincial/Federal Government

Melissa Orr-Langner, *Alberta Agriculture and Forestry*

Ex Officio

Jamie Bruha, *Alberta Environment and Parks*

Staff Team

(Top Left to Bottom Right)

Office Manager, Sheila Logelin

Education and Outreach, Nathalie S. Olson

Research and Stewardship, Susanna Bruneau

Education Lead, Mackenzie Durocher

Education Program Assistant, Samantha Bauer

General Manager, David Samm

Watershed Management, Sarah Skinner



Welcome from our Manager

Welcome to the 2019-2020 BRWA Annual Report and thank you for being part of our work. I suggest as you read this report you will learn about a number of accomplishments we achieved this year. We continue to connect BRWA to our wider community and enable collaboration, inclusion, and innovation, which are essential when working to improve the health of our watershed. I thank the BRWA board and dedicated staff for their work that brings the BRWA vision to life.

Collectively, we celebrate our significant accomplishments, most notably the launch of our largest project to date. Our Riparian Intactness Assessment Project will use satellite imagery to achieve a basin-wide understanding of the health of riparian areas in the Battle River watershed. This exciting initiative truly supports our mission of providing sound science that allows people to take local action.



This past year, BRWA received an Emerald Award for its Finding Common Ground tour. This project was one of our innovative ways to connect members with broader issues that impact our watershed.

The BRWA was deeply saddened by the sudden passing of board member John Pearson this year. He was a caring and hard-working family man and community member. In memoriam, we named a route in our Paddle the Battle Guide after him. The "Big John Route" runs from Highway 53 near his farm in Donalda to Big Knife Provincial Park. Our condolences to all who knew and loved him.



Our outreach work was impacted by the emergence of the COVID-19 virus as we had to change how we worked with groups across the watershed. Before COVID-19, I thought ZOOM was a noise made by a speeding car, not an internet program to connect people! No matter how we meet in the future, let's continue to work together and help our world recover - and perhaps, in the process, redefine what's important for the good of all.

David Samm,
General Manager



About our Watersheds

The Battle River and Sounding Creek are unique prairie-fed watersheds. Home to over 120,000 people and spanning the boreal, prairie, and parkland natural regions of Alberta and Saskatchewan, these watersheds are rich in history, culture, and ecology. Beginning at Battle Lake and meandering across Alberta and Saskatchewan for some 1,100 kilometers, the Battle River eventually joins the North Saskatchewan River at Battleford, Saskatchewan. While Sounding Creek has no outlet beyond

Manitou Lake in Saskatchewan, it is a key water source for the people and wildlife that call the Special Areas home.

We face many challenges in our watersheds, such as degraded water quality, limited water supply, and increasing land-use pressures. However, we are a resilient community of people who are able to work together to find solutions to the challenges that face us.

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

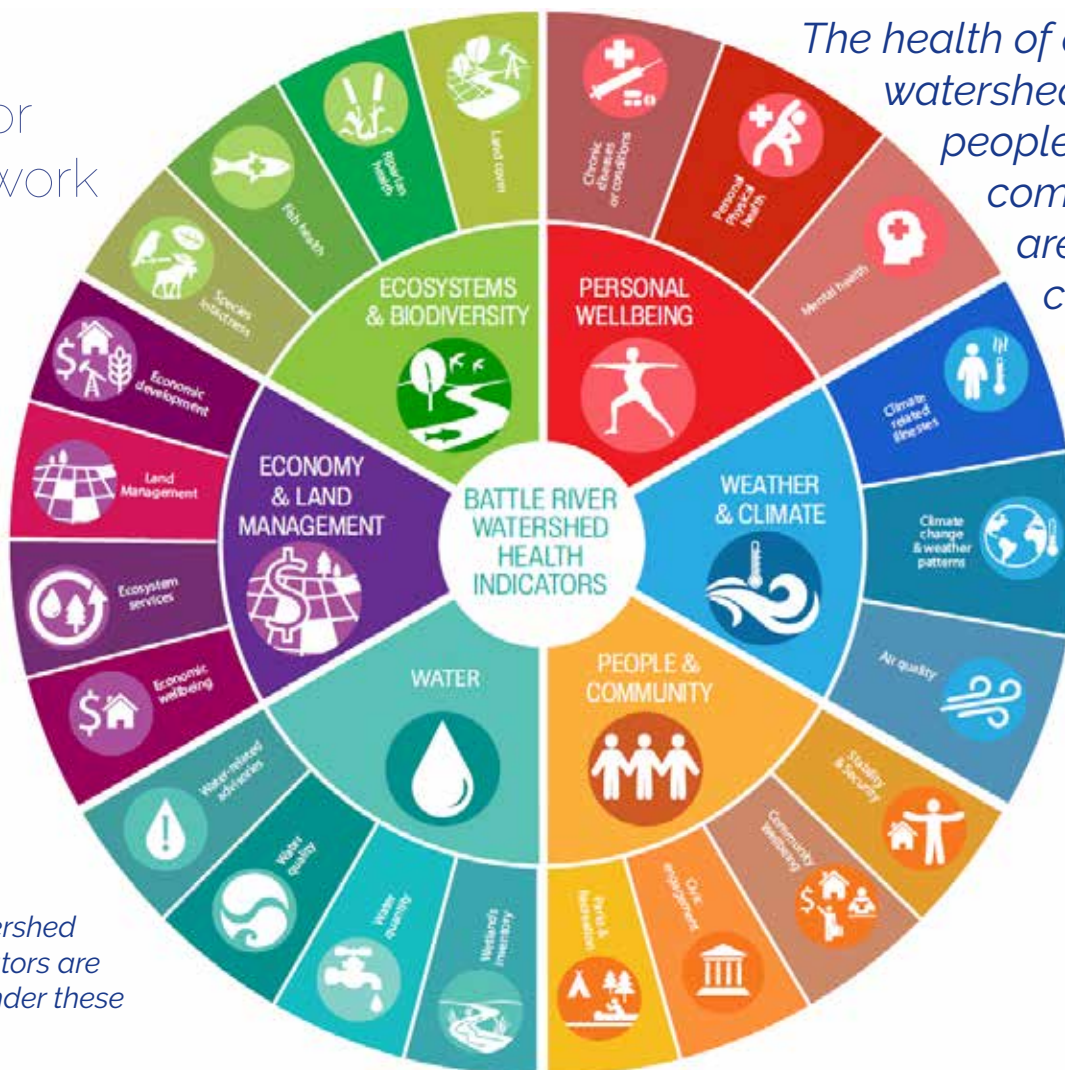
The goal of our watershed management planning (WMP) process is to work with partners to develop recommendations for how we want to see land and water managed in our watersheds. This year, we've focused on implementing some of our recommendations related to wetland and riparian health, non-point source pollution, and drought management. We've also been working on building a more complete picture of the health of our watersheds, in order to better understand what actions we can take to ensure the health of people, communities, and ecosystems.

ECHO Network

Since 2017, the BRWA has been a member of the Environment, Community, Health Observatory Network (or ECHO Network, for short). This Network includes partners from universities, public health authorities, and non-profit organizations across Canada and around the world. The Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds are one of four "regional cases" involved in the ECHO Network. An important focus of our work over the past year has been to create a draft "indicator framework" (seen below) that represents the ways in which ecological, community, and public health all contribute to the health of our watersheds. A central role of the BRWA is to report on the state of our watersheds; this broader suite of indicators will enable us to provide a more holistic picture of the health of the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds.

Draft
Indicator
Framework

*The health of our
watershed,
people, and
communities
are all
connected.*



*Over 40 watershed
health indicators are
measured under these
focus areas.*



Battle River at Mistahiya

Protecting Nipiy

"Nipiy" is the Cree word for water. The "Protecting Nipiy" project is a joint effort of the BRWA and Samson Cree Nation to protect and restore riparian lands identified as priority areas by the community. Another focus of the project is to provide learning opportunities for community members related to riparian health assessments, native plant identification, source water protection, drinking water and wastewater management, and more. In 2019, the BRWA teamed up with Samson Cree Nation's Nipiy Committee to begin identifying potential riparian project sites and planning for future educational events.



This project is one example of how the BRWA is working to implement recommendations we've identified through our WMP process. To learn more about these recommendations and how you can take action, visit

www.battleriverwatershed.ca/watershed-management-planning.

Riparian Intactness Assessment Project

Riparian areas are the transition zones between land and water, and play an important role in supporting watershed health. In 2019, the BRWA began a joint project with the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) to assess the intactness of riparian areas in our watersheds (including the eastern reaches of the North Saskatchewan River watershed and the entirety of the Battle River watershed).



The assessment will use satellite imagery to measure how "intact" riparian areas are by looking at the amount of natural plant cover, woody shrubs and trees, and human disturbance in these areas. A key strength of this method is that it allows us to assess thousands of kilometers of riparian areas across the watershed, including lakes, streams, and the Battle River. This will give us a comprehensive overview of riparian health in our watershed, and help us identify riparian areas that would benefit from further conservation or restoration efforts.

NSWA and BRWA staff holding a map of our watersheds

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The BRWA works to engage people of all ages and stages from across the watershed. We develop new and creative programs, and continue to offer our old favourites. By hosting programs and events, we support watershed community members to experience their watershed, appreciate what it provides, and build a culture of stewardship.

Watershed Festival

Our annual watershed celebration was hosted at Big Knife Provincial Park for the second year in a row. With the park full of campers and many more families attending for the day, we were swamped with good cheer and smiling faces. With help from friends and partners, we were able to offer a variety of activities including: canoe trips with Caroline Boddy; a plant walk with Stephen Olson; plants, traditional medicine, and Cree traditions with Crystal Wilmot; stories with Glenys Smith and Fraser Beebe; and a real Saw-whet Owl to learn about with Emily Grouse of the Beaverhill Bird Observatory. We were also able to offer a BBQ lunch and Saskatoon pie (while supplies lasted!) to over 120 people.



Saskatoon Pie Baking

Camrose and region residents braved the mosquitoes this year to pick our watershed's favourite berry to bake a Saskatoon pie. With a colder summer, the berries were sparse but we still enjoyed sampling nine pies. The 2019 Saskatoon Pie Baking Champion was Chris Yuha of Rosalind, who used her mother-in-law's recipe. By hosting the event at the Downtown Camrose Market, we also got to meet a lot of watershed residents and share information about our work and how they can get involved.

Winter Tales

In the spirit of winter gatherings and the seasonal tradition of swapping stories, we hosted our first ever Winter Tales event. It was a family-friendly event full of food, warm drinks, and good company. There were crafts and activities for the kids, and "Big Fish Tales" for the young and young-at-heart!

Thanks to our storytellers: Sarah Skinner, Bob Silverthorne, Glenys Smith, and Bill Harder. We are also grateful to Renate Burns, from the Camrose Arts Society, who led the kids crafts.



Paddle the Battle *"Life is a journey, not a destination" - Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Full of loops and bends, paddling the Battle River may take more time than the final distance suggests. However, our meandering river means you have to travel less distance for the shuttle! To help more people enjoy our watershed's waterbodies, we have developed a guide of where to take non-motorized boats. This guide is for both new and experienced paddlers, and provides put-in and take-out locations, attractions, and more. The guide includes 10 locations on the Battle River and local lakes, with more to come. Follow the journey and add your own experiences with the hashtag #PaddleTheBattle, and get your copy of the guide at: www.battleriverwatershed.ca/paddle.



Energy Ambassadors inside the Battle River Generating Station

Finding Common Ground 2.0 *Energy Ambassador Bus Tour*

In October 2019, we took a new spin on our Finding Common Ground program. Over 30 participants from across the Battle River watershed and beyond signed up for this two-day exploration of our region's energy options and opportunities. Our Ambassadors learned about the pros and cons of different energy production types, and how they are all trying to become more efficient to reduce costs and protect the environment.

We heard from 17 guest speakers and visited 9 energy production/efficiency sites, including:

- Lougheed Performing Arts Centre • Speaker: Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities • Speaker: Chris Turner • Paintearth Mine • Battle River Generating Station • Halkirk Wind Farm • Speaker: NEWO Global Energy • Lacombe Composite High School • Speaker: David Dodge, Green Energy Futures • Speaker: Alberta Council for Environmental Education • Louis Bull Tribe • Speaker: Empower Me • Nadon Straw Bale Home • Speaker: Alberta Narratives Project.

Even with this jam-packed schedule, there was so much more to see. The Battle River region is blessed with energy, but as the saying goes, "with great power comes great responsibility."

The emissions from this tour have been offset by The Carbon Farmer. We also supported agricultural methods to capture carbon by funding wetland and riparian area restoration at Brenlea Farms.

"The Finding Common Ground 2.0 Tour was an excellent opportunity to see a significant amount of the Battle River watershed in a short amount of time. It highlighted the vast resources within the region and the many opportunities we have to continue to diversify. There were thought-provoking presentations and discussions. Although our future is unclear, I am excited for the innovative solutions that could be found right here in rural Alberta and the Battle River region." -Energy Ambassador

Our Common Ground Presentations

After the tour, our Energy Ambassadors shared their experience with members of their community. As a formal presentation at their workplace or an informal chat with their neighbours, Ambassadors spoke about their experience and listened to the concerns, questions, and interests of their audience.

These presentations helped spread what was learned, as well as practice the difficult and important work of having tough conversations. In the end, we hope that everyone was able to find some common ground.



This program was made possible by the Government of Alberta's Community Environment Action Grant and Energy Efficiency Alberta's Energy Efficiency Education Grant.

MAPPING OUR ACTIONS

The BRWA strives to host activities across the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds for a variety of audiences. This map shows this year's events in these areas of our work:

Youth Programs

Through the various programs listed below, 2,420 youth learned about their watershed.

- Caring for our Watersheds Presentations
- Discover your Wetland Field Trips
- Experience your Watershed Summer Camps
- University of Alberta (Augustana Campus) Guest Lectures
- Magpie Nature Camp
- Waste in our Watershed Tours
- Watershed Day at Terrace Ridge
- X-Stream Science Field Trips

Community Events

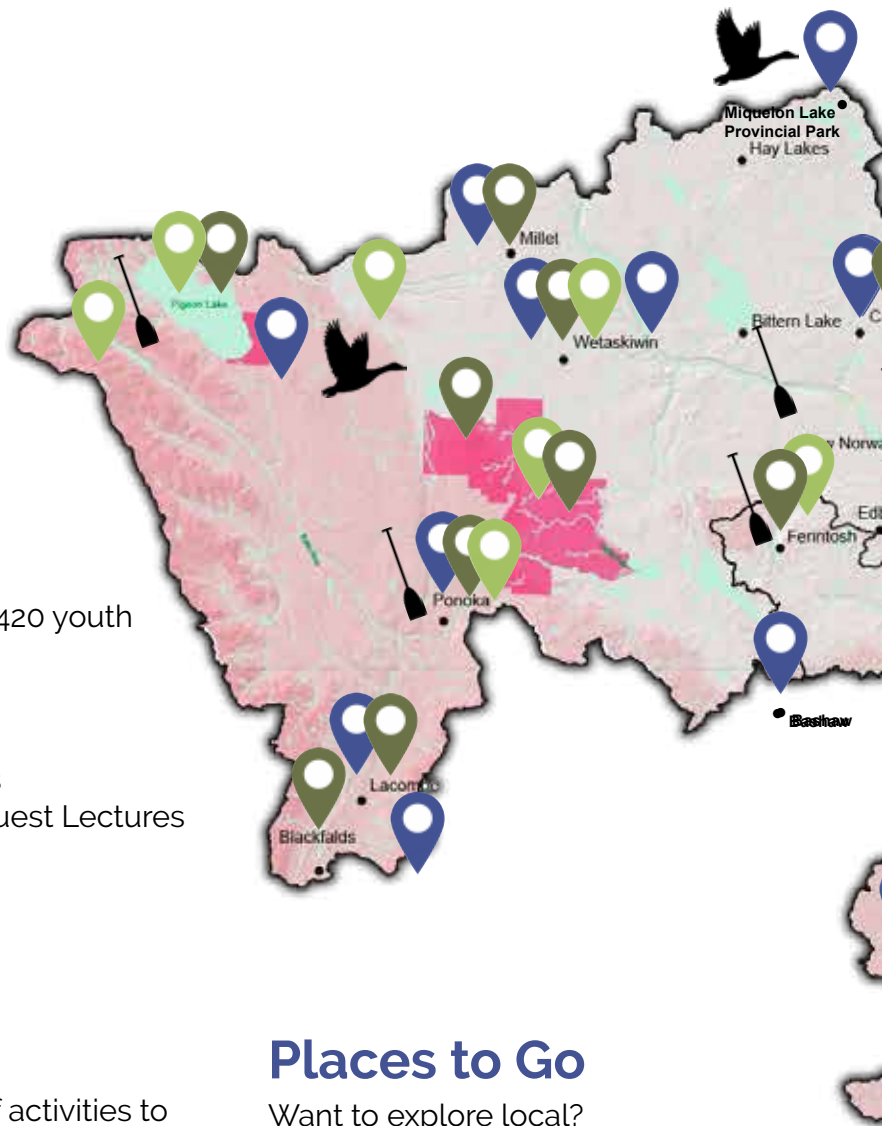
We engage watershed residents in a variety of activities to learn about Water for Life goals. These community events engaged about 929 stakeholders.

- BRWA Annual General Meeting
- Battle River Watershed Festival; Big Knife Provincial Park
- Finding Common Ground 2 Energy Ambassador Tour and Our Common Ground presentations
- Saskatoon Pie Baking Competition
- Winter Tales event
- OTIS Award presentations

Watershed Management Planning & Implementation

Watershed management is a collaborative process. We are the lead on some of these projects, and on others we are there in a partnership role.

- Buffalo Trail Riparian Restoration Program
- Protecting Nipiy Project
- Pigeon Lake Watershed Management Planning Committee
- Battle Lake Synergy Group
- "Shelterbelts and Eco-Buffers" and "Earthworks for Cold Climate Water Resiliency" Workshops
- Bigstone Creek Riparian Planting Workshop
- Camrose Creek Research Project



Places to Go

Want to explore local?

- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas
- Paddle the Battle Sites

[Visit our website for details on these and more sites!](#)

YOUTH PROGRAMS

The BRWA's education programs engage youth to appreciate the beauty of our watersheds, their importance, their challenges, and what actions students and their community can take to become stewards of our watershed. This is possible thanks to our educational partners, including Battle River Community Foundation, Cargill, Enbridge, and Nutrien.

X-Stream Science

What is the health of our local streams, and how has that changed over time? High school students across the watershed are involved in the BRWA's X-Stream Science program to answer these questions. Through a "field experience," students follow scientific protocol to collect benthic macroinvertebrates and use a hand-held YSI probe to monitor water quality. Data is collected and shared to compare results across the watershed and over the years.



Discover your Wetland

Wetlands are an important water resource and biodiversity hotspot in our watershed. This half-day field trip invites students to get up close and personal with their local marsh wetland. They play games and complete hands-on activities to learn about biodiversity, water quality, and wetland functions like water storage and filtering. These lessons connect directly with the grade 5 wetland unit. Once a wetland has been discovered, it is unlikely to be forgotten! Over 380 students participated this year from nine different schools across the watershed.

Explore More - Stettler

Explore More is an all-day, in-school field trip where 160 students in grades 5-6 from Stettler Elementary had the opportunity to meet and learn from guest experts in a variety of fields. Guest presenters included: Alberta Lake Management Society • Inside Education • Beaverhill Bird Observatory • Cows and Fish • Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society • Nature Alberta - Nature Kids • Living Lands Landscape Design.

Thanks to Cargill and the County of Stettler for supporting this event. Due to COVID-19 we postponed our Forestburg Explore More event (originally planned for March) until next year.



Terrace Ridge Watershed Days

This year we had the pleasure of working with Terrace Ridge School in Lacombe on their "Watershed Day," which focused on Indigenous traditions and knowledge. From kindergarten to grade 6, all 300+ students had a blast exploring a local wetland to learn about aquatic invertebrates!



Caring for our Watersheds

The BRWA is the proud partner of Nutrien in offering this program to students across central and northern Alberta. Since 2007, we have asked students in grades 7-12 to develop a project idea to improve the watershed. As the current and future stewards of our watershed, these students have developed creative ideas to address our watershed's concerns. In 2019, we received 85 proposals which were marked by a panel of judges, and the top ten groups presented at the final competition. All finalists win money for themselves and their school, and we also support project implementation with funding and mentorship.



Waste in our Watershed

In partnership with the City of Camrose, all grade 4 students in the city get a behind-the-scenes tour of the community's liquid and solid waste streams.

Key concepts include: what is a watershed; where does our water come from, where does it go, and how do we treat it before and after its use; how do recyclables get collected and what are their next uses; how do landfills work; and what can we do to reduce our waste.

This past year we had all 380 grade 4 students in Camrose participate from five schools.



Magpie Nature Camp

Our inaugural summer camp was hosted at the Camrose and District Fish and Game Association's Pleasure Island site in August. Eighteen campers aged 6-12 spent 5 days outside connecting to nature. They learned about edible and medicinal plants, wildlife and tracking, and how to identify and avoid hazards, all while making friends and building personal and group resilience. On our final day, we fished at the trout pond with Fish and Game volunteers and celebrated with a BBQ and "aponas," a Cree term for "meat on a stick." We look forward to working with partners to make this an annual event.

STEWARDSHIP

OTIS Award *for being OutsTanding In Stewardship*

The BRWA started the OTIS Award in 2013 to recognize the positive actions of stewards in our watersheds. This year we are proud to present 4 OTIS Awards to the following stewards:



Individual Winner: Pres Winter - Bluebird Trail

Pres has been an active member of the Viking community for over 50 years, where he worked as a pharmacist. His love for the Mountain Bluebird, whose prairies population had been in steady decline since the 1940s, led him to become their caretaker. Since 1977, Pres has built and installed over 1,000 bluebird houses on over 300 miles (482 km) of country roads. Every year, he cleans and repairs the houses and then monitors the number of bluebirds, eggs laid, chicks hatched, and birds banded. This work has helped increase the population of the species, and contributed to our knowledge of this beautiful bird.



Business Winner: Brenda Bohmer - Improving Practices for Wetlands

Brenda, matriarch of Brenlea Farms near Bawlf, was reflecting on her future on the farm and land she grew up on when she made the choice to begin restoring and reclaiming sensitive wetlands and riparian areas. Through a combination of taking cropland out of production, planting native trees and grasses, and amending soil in the adjacent areas, Brenda has begun the multi-year process of reclaiming some 20 acres of sensitive wetlands and riparian areas on her farm. Now, over 30 different species of plants grow on restored land.



Organization Winner: City of Wetaskiwin - Municipal Sustainability

Over the past several years, the City of Wetaskiwin has undertaken several initiatives to improve the watershed. Low impact development techniques were used on the reconstruction of Main Street when upgrades were needed in 2017. Rain gardens have since been installed in other parts of the city, with others planned for the near future. In 2019, the Plastic Checkout Bag Bylaw came into effect in Wetaskiwin, keeping these bags out of the landfill and out of the watershed. The City of Wetaskiwin is only the second community in Alberta to implement a plastic checkout bag ban.



Youth Winner: Grove Grizzlies - Creek Restoration

The Grove Grizzlies are a Junior Forest Wardens Club in Spruce Grove. When a rural landowner was looking for help with a tree planting project along Bigstone Creek, the Grove Grizzlies stepped up to lend a hand. Around 10,000 native trees, willows, and shrubs were planted with help from the landowner, the BRWA, and the Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society. This creek restoration will help improve the health of Bigstone Creek, which is a tributary of the Battle River. Even though these Grizzlies live outside of the watershed, we think they deserve "honorary watershed steward" status for their hard work in our region.



*Kayakers along the "Big John"
Route of the Battle River*

Yellow Fish Road

The streets and storm drains of Wainwright got a fresh coat of paint this year! The local Girl Guides and Scouts Clubs spent a sunny Saturday walking the streets to hand out informational brochures and stencil yellow fish next to storm drains.

Yellow Fish Road is a program we offer across the watershed. Its goal is to increase awareness of storm water pollution and prevent hazardous material from entering storm drains.

Thanks to these youth for doing their part to protect our watershed!



Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs)

This year, the BRWA joined The Nature Network, a program through Nature Canada that supports environmental organizations to do engagement and stewardship work. With their support, we have become a caretaker for a few local IBAs and learned about Engagement Organizing.

IBAs were designated by BirdLife International in the 1980s, and are coordinated locally by Nature Alberta. IBAs aim to maintain and improve the conservation of bird populations by protecting habitats and integrating with local community sustainability. Recently, the program's focus has shifted to include enhancing and preserving biodiversity of all species. There are 13 IBAs in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds (see our map on pages 8-9).

As caretakers, the BRWA will lead volunteer-based data collection and the protection of biodiversity at these sites. This fall, four students from the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus participated in a community service-learning project to gather data at two IBAs (Wavy Lake near Strome, and Bearhills Lake near Wetaskiwin). This data is being used to determine future stewardship and management recommendations in these areas.

We look forward to more site visits and birding opportunities across the watershed's IBAs. If you would like to help, please visit www.battleriverwatershed.ca/get-involved.



*Saskatoons in bloom at
Dillberry Provincial Park*

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

The BRWA is a local alliance — a web of people, organizations, governments, and businesses who work together to maintain and improve the health of our watersheds.

We would like to acknowledge the following groups for their support this year:

Youth Education Partners

Battle River Community Foundation: Discover your Wetland, Waste in our Watershed, Paddle the Battle

Camrose and District Fish and Game Association: Magpie Nature Camp

Cargill: Discover your Wetland, Explore More

County of Stettler: Explore More

Enbridge: X-Stream Science

Government of Alberta: The core funding we receive supports all of our education programs.

Nutrien: Caring for our Watersheds

Engagement Partners

Battle River Community Foundation: Paddle the Battle

Energy Efficiency Alberta, Energy Efficiency

Education Grant: Finding Common Ground 2

Government of Alberta, Community Environment

Action Grant: Finding Common Ground 2

Nature Canada: Nature Network

Watershed Management Partners

Canadian Institutes of Health Research: ECHO Network

Government of Canada, Lake Winnipeg Basin Program: Protecting Nipiy Project

Canadian Agricultural Partnership: Buffalo Trail Riparian Restoration Program

Samson Cree Nation: Protecting Nipiy Project

Government of Alberta, Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program: Buffalo Trail Riparian Restoration Program

Collaborative Partnerships

These pages are full of partners who have supported our work this year. We also give back to a number of organizations to support their work and our shared goals. This year we worked with:

- Agroforestry and Woodlot Extension Society: community workshops
- Alberta Water Council: drought resiliency project, source water protection project
- Camrose Green Action Committee: Camrose Climate Change Committee
- Ducks Unlimited Canada: Camrose Creek Research Project
- Hospice Society of Camrose and District: Hike for Hospice
- Pigeon Lake Watershed Association: Watershed Management Planning Committee
- Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils: meetings for Managers and Outreach Staff
- Wavy Lake Co-op: Prairie Dreamers Project

Municipal Partners

BRWA thanks municipal partners who contribute funds to our Alliance through our Invest 50 program. We request \$0.50 per watershed resident from municipal governments. This very important financial resource is used to support our education, outreach, and watershed management projects. We thank the following municipalities for the funding this year:

- Camrose County
- City of Camrose
- County of Paintearth
- County of Vermilion River
- Flagstaff County
- Hamlet of Ferintosh
- Hamlet of Gadsby
- Lacombe County
- Leduc County
- M.D. of Wainwright
- Summer Village of Grandview
- Summer Village of Golden Days
- Summer Village of Ma-Me-O Beach
- Summer Village of Paradise Valley
- Summer Village of Poplar Bay
- Town of Hardisty
- Village of Bawlf
- Village of Bittern Lake
- Village of Forestburg
- Village of Halkirk
- Village of Lougheed



Battle River southwest of Rosalind

2019-2020 Major Contributors

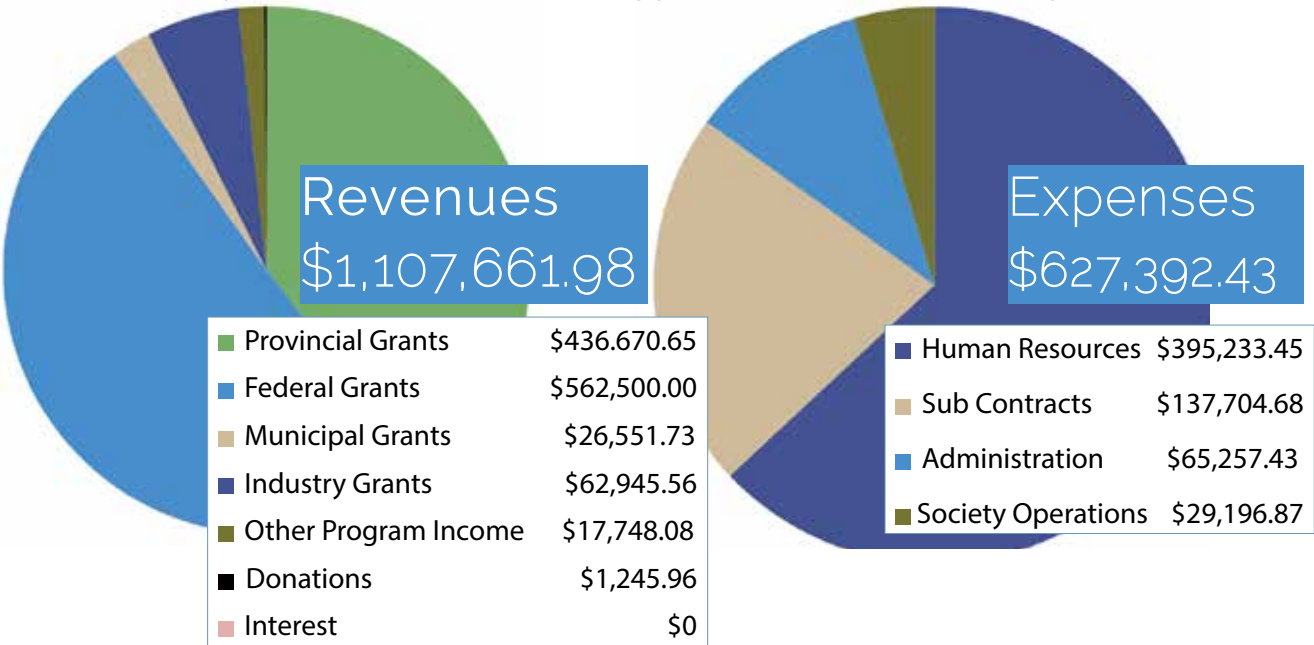


We would especially like to thank our largest partner and sponsor, the Government of Alberta. We work closely together through the Water for Life partnership towards our shared goals.



2019-2020 Financial Report

The BRWA appreciates the financial contributions of all of our partners. We work hard to use funds as efficiently as possible to make the biggest impact within our budget.



Members who would like a complete audited financial statement for the BRWA should contact Sheila Logelin at 780.672.0276. You can also find it on our website on the "Resources" page.

BATTLE RIVER

WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Connecting People to Place for Action



Stay Connected

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