

# Battle River Watershed Alliance Strategic Plan



May 2022

## Water for Life

Our quality of life and life itself depends on having a healthy and sustainable water supply for the environment, for our communities, and for our economic well-being. *Water for Life* has been the vehicle for managing Alberta's water resources since 2003. *Water for Life* has **three main goals**: Safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. The strategy outlines **four key partnerships** who each engage local stakeholders and work together for the shared watershed goals.

**WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP GROUPS** are community-based and usually volunteer-led, who work to protect a smaller sub-basin or lake watershed. They lead stewardship actions, such as lake monitoring, advocacy, education, or clean-up activities. In our watershed, these groups include; Battle Lake Synergy Group, Clear Lake Watershed Association, Friends of Little Beaver Lake Society, Lacombe Lake Watershed Stewardship Society and Pigeon Lake Watershed Alliance.



**WATERSHED PLANNING AND ADVISORY COUNCILS (WPACS)** seek to create opportunities for stakeholders to come together, share resources, and explore innovative solutions to water management challenges. There are 11 WPACs for each major basin in Alberta, including the BRWA. Each WPAC is an independent, non-profit organization, although we work together on a number of initiatives.

### ALBERTA WPACs



**ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL** is a collaborative partnership which represents 24 stakeholder groups. The Council monitors, collects and shares data and provides guidance on watershed priorities and policy implementation at the provincial scale. The BRWA has been actively involved in various initiatives of the Alberta Water Council over the years.



**THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA** is the overarching partner and provides leadership, funding, and in-kind support to each of the other partners.





## WPAC Roles

During discussions with Alberta Environment and Parks in 2017, it was proposed that WPACs have four roles in working with watershed partners. These roles have been accepted by the WPACs however the stakeholders of each WPAC prioritize the focus of their efforts based on their local needs and interests.



### CONVENER AND COLLABORATOR

**CONVENER** - WPACs will provide an important forum where stakeholders meet to share information and identify, discuss and recommend priorities for issues and initiatives within their watershed.

**COLLABORATOR** - WPACs will work together in partnership with stakeholders in their watershed to support or lead projects and programs to address watershed-related issues.



### EDUCATION AND LITERACY

WPACs will work to improve environmental literacy throughout their watersheds so residents can become better stewards of the land and water.



### MONITORING AND REPORTING

WPACs will be a valuable source of information about regional issues and monitoring needs related to watershed health and management.

WPACs will produce “state of the watershed” reports that identify watershed conditions, the local pressures facing the watershed and the data and research gaps that may need to be addressed.



### POLICY AND PLANNING

WPACs will serve as a valuable source of knowledge and regional perspectives for relevant government policy development.

WPACs will prepare integrated watershed management plans (IWMPs) as advice to the Government of Alberta that identify issues and examine the best course of action to address them. WPACs will also promote and coordinate implementation of these plans including opportunities



## Our Place

The Battle River and Sounding Creek are amazing 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 1100 kilometres, the Battle River eventually joins the North Saskatchewan River near Battleford, SK. From there, its waters flow on to Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay. 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, but we are also a resilient community of people who are able to work together to find solutions to the challenges that face us. Great work is already being done to promote the long-term health of our watersheds. This Strategic Plan serves as a guidance document to support the BRWA in continuing its work.

## We are all Treaty People (Indigenous Peoples Acknowledgement)

The Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds have been the home, meeting ground and travelling route for many Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. We gratefully acknowledge the traditional territory and ongoing presence of Indigenous Peoples and Nations within the watershed\*. Their experiences, teachings, knowledge and wisdom inform and enrich our collective efforts to care for the land and water of this region. We also acknowledge that this land is Treaty 6 territory. Fulfilling the spirit and intent of this Treaty is an ongoing process, and the Battle River Watershed Alliance is committed to building strong and respectful relationships with the Indigenous Peoples of this land, with all living beings, and with the land and water on which we all depend. The Battle River Watershed Alliance office is located at ᐃᓵᓵᓵᓵᓵᓵ (asiniskaw sipisis - Stoney Creek) in Treaty 6 territory.

\*First Nations currently residing within the Alberta portion of Battle River watershed include the Four Nations of Maskwacis, which includes Neyaskwayak [the Northern treeline or Ermineskin Cree Nation], Kispahthinaw [the end of the hill or Louis Bull Tribe], Akamihk [across – the river or Montana First Nation], and Nipisihkopahk [willow meadows or Samson Cree Nation]. On the Saskatchewan side of our border are Little Pine First Nation, Poundmaker Cree Nation, and Sweetgrass First Nation.



## A Watershed

"that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled,



## What is a Healthy Watershed?

An important role of the BRWA is to engage people to understand issues and take actions that support the health of this place and collaboratively compile and share information about the state (or health) of our watersheds. Over the past few years, we've been working to broaden our view of what "watershed health" means. We understand that the health of people, ecosystems, economies and shared communities are all interconnected. In a healthy watershed, we have clean, safe, and secure water supplies for our communities and economy. Healthy land and water ecosystems also support fish and wildlife habitat and biodiversity, and provide us with clean air to breathe, sustainable food production, outdoor recreation opportunities, resilience to floods and droughts, and so much more.



*Battle River Watershed Alliance's three-sphere sustainability diagram*

## About the BRWA

The Battle River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) was created in November 2006 as a non-profit society. Shortly after its formation, BRWA was selected by Alberta Environment, under the Water for Life Strategy, as the designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the Battle River and Sounding Creek Watersheds in Alberta. We are a non-governmental organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the land and water in these basins.

Over the past 15 years, the BRWA has grown into a well-respected community organization. Our work takes a balanced approach for healthy natural areas, resilient communities, and a stable economy.

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

**WHO WE SERVE:** Our Watershed Community Members are all of the stakeholders in this region, including those who live, work, and play in the watershed. Specifically, this includes, but is not limited to; governments including First Nations, Federal, Provincial, and Municipal, Business and Industry, Non-profits and organizations, farmers & landowners, residents both rural and urban, and visitors.



Top: BRWA Staff.  
Bottom: BRWA 2019  
Board Members.

Opposite page, from  
top left: Forestburg  
School Discover Your  
Wetland day; view  
of Ribstone Creek;  
canoe along the  
Battle River (credit:  
Joelle Skinner), 2021  
AGM online.



## Vision and Mission

**VISION:** We exist to have a watershed that sustains all life by using sound knowledge, wisdom, and wise actions to preserve our watershed for future generations.

**MISSION:** We achieve our vision by providing relevant science, social science, policies and education for a diverse community of people to create solutions to our watersheds challenges.

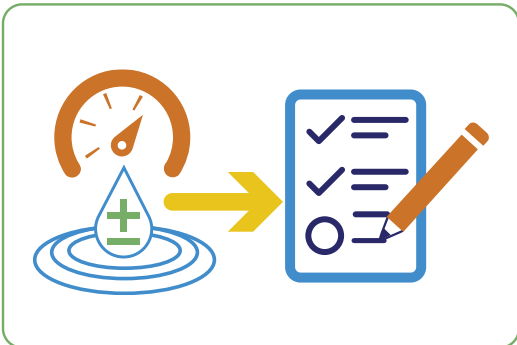
**VALUES:** Sound research, shared knowledge, mutual responsibility, innovation, diversity, equity, inclusion, collaboration, sustainability, economic resilience, leadership, adaptive management, consensus-based decision making, intergenerational involvement.

**INCLUSION:** BRWA strives to ensure that all voices (organizations, businesses, and individuals) within the watershed are heard and vows to purposefully identify, discuss and challenge issues of race, gender, and abilities and the impact(s) they have on our organization, its systems, and its people. Our commitment to continue to encourage and involve all individuals is reflected in our culture through policies, programs, and practices as we continue to learn and grow.



## Looking Back: 2015- 2020 Strategic Plan Key Outcomes Achieved

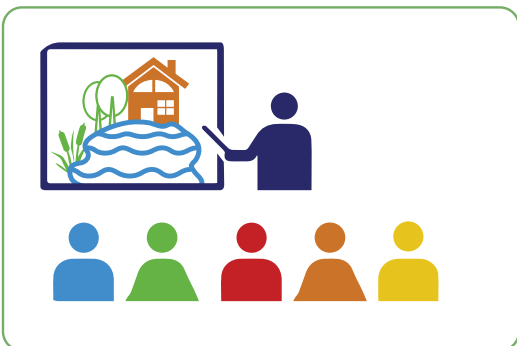
Our work focuses on two major themes of engagement and sustainability. These themes inform three key areas: Watershed Management, Watershed Engagement, and Watershed Stewardship. Our 4th overarching strategic area is Alliance Management.



### Watershed Management

The BRWA works with watershed residents, stakeholders, and decision-makers to identify and report on issues facing the watershed and recommend solutions.

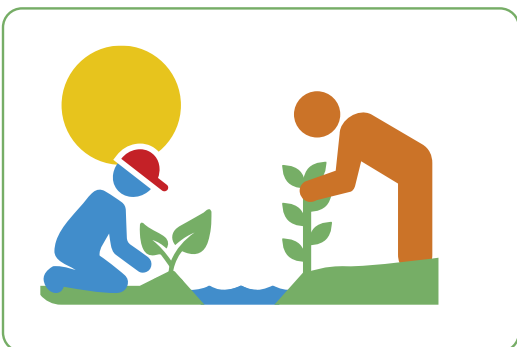
**14 of 16 (87.5%)** WMP actions listed in the plan were completed or are ongoing. Working within the ECHO Network, BRWA has a robust suite of watershed health indicators to use in future state of the watershed reports. Read more on page 10.



### Watershed Engagement

The BRWA's watershed engagement includes our youth education, community outreach, and communication activities. These projects will help our communities understand the complex causes and solutions to the challenges our watersheds face.

12 of 13 (92.3%) education, outreach or engagement actions were completed. BRWA provides place-based, experiential watershed education for all community members. Read more on page 11.



### Stewardship

The BRWA supports the growth of a watershed stewardship ethic. Stewardship is our collective responsibility to care for our land, air, water, and biodiversity in a way that conserves all of its values, be they ecological, economic, social, or cultural.

**9 of 14 (64.2%)** stewardship actions were completed. BRWA encourages and supports the implementation of watershed management recommendations and other stewardship initiatives. Read more on page 12.



### Alliance Management

**11 of 15 (73.3%)** Alliance Management actions were completed. BRWA is a supportive *Water for Life* partner and actively seeks out collaborative partnerships. Read more on page 13.



# Strategic Plan Summary: 2022-2027

Our work in watershed management, engagement, and stewardship is guided by our watershed management framework (shown below). We are in the process of developing recommendations in each of the 12 component areas outlined in the framework. The BRWA and partners then seek to implement these recommendations through ongoing engagement and stewardship efforts.



Image: Strategic Areas Diagram

Our strategic plan focuses on the Three “Ps”



### PEOPLE

Our watershed community members, including our desired audience and our partners



### PROGRAMS

The activities, projects and other opportunities we offer to our community



### PLACE




The watersheds we call home.

The following pages outline the objectives and strategies in each of our strategic areas.

## Watershed Management

### The BRWA leads watershed management, planning, and reporting in our watersheds.

The goal of the BRWA's watershed management is to work with watershed residents, stakeholders, and decision-makers to care for land, water, and biodiversity in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds. We do this through a collaborative process of developing watershed management recommendations under the broad categories of water quality, water quantity, land management, and biodiversity. BRWA also implements demonstration or pilot projects based on the best practices identified to illustrate the positive benefits. Understanding the health of our watersheds is also important to watershed management. By keeping track of changes in our watersheds over time, we can determine if management actions are achieving our desired outcomes or if further actions are needed. We take a holistic approach to data collection and reporting on watershed health, recognizing that the health of people, communities, ecosystems, and economies are all interconnected.

OBJECTIVE		STRATEGIES
 <p style="text-align: center;">People</p> <p>Watershed residents, stakeholders, and decision-makers are well-informed about watershed management planning and are empowered to implement recommendations.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage watershed stakeholders in the research and draft recommendations of WMP components.</li> <li>Share information, tools, and resources to support stakeholders to implement WMP recommendations.</li> <li>Provide hands-on learning and engagement opportunities through workshops, field days, municipal forums, etc.</li> <li>Invest in relationships with potential stewardship partners and support them with relevant skills/tools to take action.</li> </ul>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Programs</p> <p>Watershed management plans and programs support increased resiliency and adaptability to current and future watershed conditions.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The BRWA carries out its WMP process to develop background research, policy advice, and implementation guidelines in its WMP components.</li> <li>Explore new ways to engage residents to communicate information in a user-friendly manner.</li> </ul>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Place</p> <p>WMP work collects and shares information to increase the <u>health</u> of the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and carry out a framework/method to holistically report on watershed health.</li> <li>Identify gaps in info/data, implementation, etc. and recommendations for how to fill them.</li> <li>Compile and share up-to-date information on watershed health with stakeholders.</li> </ul>






## Watershed Engagement

**The BRWA engages our community to increase their watershed-based awareness, knowledge, and connection.**

The BRWA's watershed engagement includes our youth education, community outreach, and communication activities. These projects will help watershed residents, stakeholders and decision-makers understand the complex causes and solutions to the challenges our watersheds face.




By participating in our engagement programs, our community members will have the essential knowledge and skills to enable them to make positive changes at the personal, professional, and political levels. We aim to work with people of all ages and stages, cultures and communities in our programming. We use place-based experiential education to increase participants' knowledge and awareness of their watersheds. We cultivate a sense of appreciation and commitment for our watersheds. We believe our watersheds will benefit from these activities today, and for the long-term.

OBJECTIVE		STRATEGIES
 <p style="text-align: center;">People</p> <p>Watershed education &amp; outreach participants feel more connected to their place and have knowledge and skills to enhance watershed health.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer watershed-wide engagement activities appropriate for all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, either through personal or professional participation.</li> <li>Track our interactions to keep our community members and partners engaged and coming back for more and increased levels of involvement.</li> <li>Build partnerships with organizations from all sectors to reach new audiences and provide a diversity of perspectives.</li> </ul>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Programs</p> <p>The BRWA's engagement programs provide multiple entry points for our watershed community to learn about and participate in our watersheds.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide place-based, experiential watershed education and outreach programming.</li> <li>Approach watershed activities from a holistic perspective- including environmental, social, economic, and cultural aspects of our watershed's health.</li> <li>Deliver up-to-date information about our watershed's health and engagement opportunities to community members and encourage them to approach us to find more.</li> </ul>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Place</p> <p>Our watersheds have more local community members who appreciate and actively protect its land, water, and biodiversity.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide suggestions to improve watershed health aligned with the age and stage of the participants, sensitive to historical and cultural beliefs and customs</li> <li>Present environmental challenges in balance with their solutions.</li> <li>Present relevant and accessible watershed information in a clear and engaging way, using the best available science and social science from trustworthy and balanced sources, responsive to our demographics and target audiences.</li> </ul>

## Watershed Stewardship

### The BRWA supports the growth of a Watershed Stewardship Ethic.

Stewardship is our collective responsibility to care for our land, air, water, and biodiversity in a way that conserves all of its values, be they ecological, economic, social, or cultural. All these elements are integral for healthy and sustainable communities. The BRWA encourages and empowers watershed residents, stakeholders, and decision-makers to take action as stewards of the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds.




OBJECTIVE		STRATEGIES
	<p style="text-align: center;">People</p> <p>Diverse audiences are engaged for meaningful stewardship dialogue and action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate opportunities that connect people to their place</li> <li>Connect with and support diverse audiences to build skills, capacity and leadership for sustainability.</li> <li>Partner with a wide range of organizations to meet goals of cultural, economic, ecological and social stewardship.</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Programs</p> <p>Provide opportunities that will enable and empower stewardship actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize and celebrate stewardship successes.</li> <li>Support ecological stewardship projects, mindful of the intersection of economic, social, and cultural factors.</li> <li>Help Alberta's natural resource sectors to advance watershed sustainability to address climate change adaptation.</li> <li>Our programs will promote and integrate inclusion, diversity, and accessibility.</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Place</p> <p>Increase the sustainability of our watershed's communities and regions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BRWA will provide information, advice, and collaborative approaches to assist stakeholders in addressing local and regional priorities.</li> <li>BRWA will encourage and support stewardship initiatives across the watersheds through skill and information sharing.</li> </ul>



## Alliance Management

### The BRWA is a learning organization dedicated to Achieving Excellence.

The BRWA will strive to have effective and efficient management in order to allow important watershed planning, education, and stewardship work to be accomplished. As a small non-profit society, the BRWA faces funding and sustainability challenges. It will be important to diversify funding partners, entrepreneurial opportunities and develop a clear governance structure. It will also be important to create mutually supportive relationships and partnerships with our Water for Life partners, as well as with watershed residents, community and environmental organizations, and all orders of government (Municipal, Provincial, Federal, and First Nations).

	OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES
	<p><b>People</b></p> <p>BRWA supports our people, including staff, board, volunteers, and partners, to achieve their highest levels of success to meet our mission and vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support board and staff in professional development and innovation.</li> <li>▪ BRWA actively seeks out new collaborative opportunities through innovation and partnerships.</li> <li>▪ BRWA conducts succession planning for organizational health and longevity</li> <li>▪ BRWA will work to address systemic racism and inequalities and improve inclusivity.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Programs</b></p> <p>BRWA is a fiscally responsible organization that achieves financial resiliency and transparency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage and mitigate organizational risk with policies that uphold financial accountability.</li> <li>▪ BRWA operates transparently reporting activities to the public and our funders.</li> <li>▪ BRWA fosters innovation in our workplace and within our programs.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Place</b></p> <p>BRWA maintains a safe, healthy, and productive work environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workplace culture promotes a safe and healthy work environment through strategies and invest in modern technology and equipment.</li> </ul>





#### Permission to Quote:

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#### Suggested citation:

Battle River Watershed Alliance. 2022. *BRWA Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026*. Alliance Management Report, 14 pages.



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**BATTLE RIVER**  
WATERSHED ALLIANCE