

Spring 2014

"News You Can Use"

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Lakescape

newsletter of the



WABAMUN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Council Update

by Kelly Aldridge, WWMC Past Chair

The State of the Watershed Report (SOW), released last summer, identified some information gaps that need to be addressed to improve our understanding of the lake and watershed. It also recommended that we proceed immediately to prepare a Wabamun Watershed Management Plan. At the SOW launch in Seba Beach (over 200 in attendance), however, you told us very clearly that you think we need less planning and more direct action to address concerns identified in the report. We heard you loud and clear, and are moving forward on both fronts with a 3-part strategy as follows:

Part 1. We are working with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) and the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance on the development of a Watershed Management Plan. This will be a formal partnership with an agreed understanding of who does what. We have already decided on some projects that will help prepare the plan. The plan itself will likely take several years to complete. Projects include a detailed assessment (already completed) of the number of livestock and the amount of manure in the watershed, and an assessment of the riparian areas (healthy shoreline) around the lake. We have recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Alberta Stewardship Network which will cover about half the cost of this latter project. We hope to obtain the rest of the funds from other grants and donations.

Part 2. To address some of our more immediate concerns, we will undertake several projects, including:

- In May we will be distributing information packages to all homes and businesses around the lake to help everyone understand what you can do to help protect the lake from nutrients and contaminants.
- We have formed a committee to work on a biological inventory of the lake and shoreline.
- We will be working with all schools in the watershed (and perhaps the entire county) to consider including lake stewardship in their curriculum in elementary, junior and senior high schools.
- We continue to meet with industry people (Kinder Morgan, Trans Mountain, TransAlta, Lafarge) to help ensure their projects are undertaken with due regard for the health of the lake.

Part 3. We are collaborating with the Parkland municipalities to assist Parkland County in developing their Lake Land Use Plans. Parkland County plans to form a steering committee consisting of 5 members; 1 member from the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, 1 member from ESRD, 1 member from the Wabamun Watershed Management Council and 2 members from Parkland County.

I hope you have a great summer, and I look forward to seeing you at the lake.

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Volume 4, No. 1.

[Note: There was no winter issue of *Lakescape* in 2014]

Editor: Don Meredith
(wvmc@donmeredith.ca)

Submissions

Lakescape welcomes contributions from WWMC members and others who wish to inform members about issues or events in the Wabamun area. Please keep submissions brief and to the point. All submissions are subject to editing for length and clarity. For more information, contact the editor: Don Meredith
wvmc@donmeredith.ca

Deadline for the summer edition is June 15, 2014.

Fisheries Update

by Don Meredith

The following is a summary of an e-mail conversation I had with Dr. Stephen Spencer, Senior Fisheries Biologist with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD), with regard to the state of Wabamun's fisheries. Dr. Spencer has worked on Wabamun fisheries for many years and has kept the WWMC informed about fisheries matters.

Walleye Stocking

As previously reported in the Summer 2012 *Lakescape*, Wabamun used to have a native population of walleye that was fished-out early in the 20th century. There have been several attempts over the years to re-introduce the fish to the lake, but all have failed, most likely as a result of the warm water outflow from the old Wabamun power plant. With the lake now freezing over, it is felt that walleye can now be successfully reintroduced. In 2010 and with the help of TransAlta Utilities (TAU), ESRD began transferring adult walleye from Lac Ste. Anne to Wabamun Lake. Hatchery-raised walleye fry (from eggs taken from spawning walleye in Lac Ste. Anne) were introduced into Wabamun Lake in 2011, and stocking continued in 2012.

Dr. Spencer reports the 2012 stocking program was so successful that ESRD did not run a spawn camp in 2013 on Lac Ste. Anne. Walleye are quite cannibalistic and a very strong year-class will suppress the numbers in the subsequent year. ESRD did a fall assessment of the walleye population (netting, counting, measuring and releasing) and the results were very promising. The 2012 stock did exceptionally well and are growing rapidly. As well, many 2011-stocked individuals have survived. Spencer was also impressed with the number of transferred adults that have survived over the years. However, he reports "the really big news is that these adults produced detectible recruits!!" In other words, the adults have been successfully spawning in the lake. "I was quite surprised because the adult densities are super low." TAU reported to ESRD that their staff saw a walleye running up one of the creeks on their property, presumably to spawn.

Overall, the fall survey captured 11 walleyes/net, which is a good start. Pigeon Lake would have 40-50/net. ESRD will be doing another stocking this year. If it is successful, there will be no need for further walleye stocking. It will just be a matter of letting the population grow to natural densities that would support a limited harvest.

Creel Survey

Last summer, ESRD conducted a survey of people fishing the lake. The survey results estimated that roughly 8,000 anglers fished the lake over the summer. Even with the catch-and-release regulation, fish will die from hooking and handling as well as poaching. As fishing pressure increases, catch-and-release mortality will affect the fish populations. So far, the lake can sustain the current fishing pressure.



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Social Survey

Fishing big trophy northern pike is very popular with anglers at Wabamun Lake. As a result, people have been asking ESRD to leave Wabamun a catch-and-release lake so that the opportunity to catch a large pike with good catch rates remains. Spencer said, "This is an unusual situation: a 'trophy lake' within 80 km of over one-million people." However other anglers would like to harvest fish at Wabamun. To determine public opinion about current and future fishing conditions at Wabamun and other fisheries west of Edmonton, ESRD designed with social scientists a survey and interviewed people west of Edmonton. The survey provided a description of what a lake with a regular harvest of fish would be like (small fish, low catch rates—yet the opportunity to harvest a fish; e.g., Lac Ste. Anne) in comparison to a trophy lake (high catch rates with the opportunity to catch an exceptional fish but no harvest of any species; e.g., Wabamun). More than 80% of the people surveyed wanted to keep Wabamun at catch-and-release only.

Dr. Spencer thanks the many volunteers who helped ESRD run these programs.

Wabamun Lake Level Update

[Note: this is a republishing of the message that was sent to the WWMC e-mail list on April 19.]

The water level of Wabamun Lake can be a perennial topic of concern among lakeside residents and other lake users. With the amount of snow we had this winter and the spring snow melt, it doesn't look like this year will be any different.

As of April 17, Environment Canada reports the water surface of the lake was 724.66 metres (2,377 ft.) above sea level (ASL). Since the top of the weir on the only outlet from the lake (Wabamun Creek) is at 724.55 metres ASL, the water level is about 11 cm (about 4 in.) above the weir.

It should be remembered that drainage out of Wabamun Creek (when flowing) has been characterized as a straw draining a swimming pool. So, if the amount of water entering the lake is more than leaving it, the lake level will rise above the level of the weir.

Last year, beavers down stream of the weir had constructed a dam that raised the water level above the weir. Working with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the Paul First Nation cleared a series of beaver dams on their land and opened the creek channel to allow the water to flow freely down the creek without causing too much flooding downstream of the dams. A recent inspection of the weir shows the water still flows freely (as shown in photo). So, the beavers are not a problem at this time. We thank the Paul Band for their cooperation in helping maintain the lake level.



Invasive Species Info.

Invasive plants and animals are an increasing problem on Alberta's lakes. Invasive species can cause much damage to our natural ecosystems negatively affecting fish and wildlife populations and our enjoyment of the lakes. All lake users should be aware of the problem and take measures to ensure that they are not part of the problem. For further information go to <http://esrd.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/invasive-species/default.aspx>

Help Your Lake

WWMC memberships come up for renewal on June 1. Please renew or become a new member of the WWMC and make a donation to help us proceed to a watershed management plan and ensure the health of the lake. Go to www.wwmc.ca, click on the Get Involved tab (at the very top) and download a membership application. We can use the support and there will be a lot of opportunities to volunteer your time and expertise to help with projects keeping Wabamun healthy and the beautiful lake it is.

Corporate Members

The WWMC thanks the following businesses and organizations for partnering with the WWMC as corporate members and helping the council to achieve its goals.



Camp Oselia Society, Falher Drugs, Kokanee Springs RV Park, Seba Beach Ice Cream Stop, Summer Village of Point Allison, Wabamun & District Lions Club

If you own or represent a business or organization that is concerned about Wabamun Lake and would be willing to help maintain its health, become a corporate member of the WWMC for just \$100 a year. Corporate members will be acknowledged at WWMC functions, in each newsletter and elsewhere. For more information contact Kelly Aldridge by e-mail, ktammaa@hotmail.com or telephone, (780) 953-2695.

If you are already a corporate member and would like to see your logo here, please send a digital copy to Don Meredith at wwmc@donmeredith.ca