

Wood River Riparian Authority

Old Wives Lake Watershed Report

2010



This report was developed by the Wood River Riparian Authority in response to the Saskatchewan Watershed Authorities request for an analysis of the feasibility for Watershed Protection Planning in the Old Wives Lake Watershed.

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Our Vision:

A sustainable, healthy watershed

Our Mission:

Work with local residents to ensure the long term health of the water resources in the watershed.

A Brief History:

The successful start of the Wood River Riparian Authority (WRRRA) grew from three separate reports regarding the environmental health of the Wood River and its watershed¹, and from provincial maps highlighting areas of concern provided by the Prairie Farm and Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority (SWA). These showed that the Wood River is an important source of domestic water in the area but grossly exceed Environment Canada's acceptable levels for Phosphorus and Nitrogen. As well, nearly 50% of riparian sites assessed had a health rating of either at risk or unhealthy¹. From this data, along with two well attended producer issue identification meetings, the WRRRA was able to identify surface water quality and riparian health as priorities in the watershed.

In November of 2005, a group of local producers and concerned citizens developed and submitted a proposal to implement an Agri-Environmental Group Plan in the Old Wives Lake watershed. Approval for funding was received and staff was hired at the end of April 2006. A management group of producers and town residents was formed to oversee the operations of the newly created Wood River Riparian Authority (WRRRA).

After initial consultations, the WRRRA made it a priority to increase awareness of the newly formed organization and the priority issues in the watershed. The WRRRA has been able to achieve this through publishing quarterly newsletters, developing a website, advertising, and hosting many producer workshops, classroom visits, and water monitoring projects. The awareness campaign coincided with the development of beneficial management practice project proposals with producers.

¹ Bradshaw, Amy L., and Serena E. McIver. 2001. Wood River Riparian Project: A final report. A joint report by the Centre for Studies in Agriculture Law and Environment, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon; and PFRA, Gravelbourg.

Holm, J.K. 2004. Water quality in the Wood River and effects of land use. M.Sc. Thesis, Division of Environmental Engineering, University of Saskatchewan.

Schmutz, J.K. 2006. Water Supplies and Management in the Wood River Watershed

Where We Are Now:

The WRRRA has now successfully conducted four years of Agri-Environmental Group Plan programming. To date, we have been able to develop 148 separate applications to implement BMP's in the Wood River watershed, totaling almost \$1,000,000. In conjunction with this, we have published 16 quarterly newsletters with a distribution of 2300, delivered 23 producer workshops and classroom visits, and implemented 2 years of habitat stewardship programming for species at risk. The strength of our organization to implement future programming is clearly evident.

Where We Are Going:

It was originally intended from the beginning of our organizations formation that we wanted to ensure the long term health of the entire Old Wives Lake Watershed. The scope of this type of project at the time was much too large, and it was thought that we would be much more effective if we limited our programming area to just the Wood River sub-basin. We are now at a point where there is an apparent need and demand for us to deliver future programming in the entire Old Wives Lake Watershed.

Our organization determined that for us to operate on a level that large, we would need to have a plan developed to effectively organize our focus of operations. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authorities Watershed Protection Plan initiative was determined at that time to be the best suited to our needs of establishing a comprehensive overview of our watershed, while determining a way forward for its management. To have SWA recognize the Old Wives Lake as a priority area and begin the process of Watershed Protection Planning is our new initiative.

In efforts to have SWA designate the Old Wives Lake Watershed a priority area for developing a Watershed Protection Plan, the WRRRA began asking for support from local municipalities, public representatives, parks, and businesses. This was done by mail, and attending meetings if requested. This process resulted in strong feedback. From the 28 rural municipalities contacted, 20 supported the initiative, from the 13 urban municipalities & parks contacted, 9 supported, and a response from all 8 government officials contacted was provided in regards to requesting support for our initiative.

In response to generating support across the watershed, The Wood River Riparian Authority board was able to meet with Saskatchewan Watershed Authority representatives Gary Neil and Tom Harrison. This meeting occurred on September 29, 2009. Discussion at the meeting included SWA's watershed planning unit priorities and capacity realities, what options are available to meet our needs of attaining a sustainable, healthy watershed, funding available to our organization for continued efforts in proceeding with our initiative, and suggestions on how to proceed with our initiative.

Suggestions from the meeting also included to continue with generating support from the municipalities, and host public consultations across the watershed to determine the amount of

public support while considering alternatives that could meet our goals and objectives besides a Watershed Protection Plan.

Following this, the WRRRA wanted to stress the level of involvement and support from our supporting organizations through providing a delegate. We initiated this through mail and meetings again. This resulted in 14 of the 41 original supporting organizations committing to having a delegate be part of a potential Watershed Advisory Committee for a potential Watershed Protection Plan.

Between the period of February 23rd – March 3rd, the WRRRA hosted a series of forums across the watershed with the goal of generating awareness, reporting on the WRRRA's activities over four years, finding out what concerns there are about water amongst the general public, and what kind of support there is behind our current initiative and whether or not it is the best solution. The forums stressed having an open discussion about concerns and ideas for our current water issues. The bulk of time spent was after the presentations, talking with the attendees about what they've been finding, and what issues are affecting them. Below is a list of some questions and comments that arose at the meetings.

- Gravelbourg
 - Where are flow monitors upstream of Thomson Lake? Will they be increasing?
 - What are the towns doing for the dumping of lagoons?
 - Why is there not much, if any, irrigation off Thomson Lake? What are the issues holding it back?
 - Why is there so much algae on the lake and how can we decrease it? Would increasing the flow through the lake decrease the amount of Algae?
 - What is the main purpose of the dam? Flood control, recreation, industry, etc..?
 - How can we control the proximity of cropping along the river? What incentives are there to avoid cropping so close?
 - What is currently going on with the proposed pipeline from Lake Diefenbaker?

- Ponteix
 - Vanguards ground water is not recharging. Some of the wells are down 16ft.
 - Cryptosporidium in Lac Pelletier seems to be a growing issue.
 - What sort of effect does a good runoff have for water quality? It's flushing effect...
 - We need a benchmark for our wells. What the levels are and the quality.
 - The conversion of wetlands is a big issue. They are no longer around to recharge our groundwater. Same with the pumping of potholes in the spring.
 - Water users... Who gets the first rites to the water?

- Chaplin
 - Water allocation...
 - The water use & allocation of SaskMinerals needs to be looked at.
 - A baseline needs to be established so we (producers) can know where to put our fence lines without having them being washed away.
 - Water levels of Old Wives Lake need to be maintained at a certain point

- Pumping wetlands in the spring and then flooding downstream is becoming an issue. There is a large amount of erosion and our groundwater is not being recharged.
- Ecological Goods & Services pilot projects. What potential is there for one in this region?
- Loss of land & fencing because of water allocations.
- Lake Diefenbaker pipeline. Who would it be available to?
- Glentworth
 - What impact has seismic testing had on our springs and wells? It has severely impacted regions before, what are we doing to not be put in that same situation?
 - Noxious weed solutions. There needs to be an effective management plan put into place for the entire region.
 - Government programming confusion...
 - Fear of raising issues and being reprimanded by government.
 - Am I going to be forced to fence off the creek?
 - Will I not be able to pump out my slough?
 - Flood irrigation systems; what's being left behind?
- Hodgeville
 - What type of monitoring is being conducted at this point?
 - How can we expand on the current lack of monitoring?
 - Wells seem to be running dry more and more while the usage has stayed the same. What is happening?
 - Pipeline from Lake Diefenbaker.
 - Is there a database or mapping system available to estimate how deep we need to drill and where for water?
 - How can we get our wells tested on a regional scale?
- Shamrock
 - What programming is available to producers to implement BMP's?
 - What is being done for flood control measures?

Conclusion:

From the discussions and the amount of attendance that occurred at the forums, it is apparent that there are issues and concerns that go beyond what the Wood River Riparian Authorities delivers through its AEGP and HSP contracts. Being able to develop a plan that could encompass all of these issues while outlining how and when delivery will occur would be the first step to addressing the concerns of the watershed residents. The Old Wives Lake Watershed contains an enormous amount of ecological significance; from the Old Wives Lake shorebird reserve of western hemispheric importance, to its vast tracts of native prairie, a plan for the future of its ecology should be of top priority to the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. The Wood River Riparian Authority is requesting that the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority include the Old Wives Lake Watershed in the 2010 – 2011 Watershed Protection Planning initiative.

