

VOICES OF THE OLDMAN

“What We Heard...”



Taren Hager, WLP Manager
Oldman Watershed Council
September 2017



Introduction

The lifeblood of Southern Alberta is the Oldman river and its tributaries. The river provides a bountiful, prosperous, economy; some of the most picturesque landscapes in the world - and a bright and promising future for our children and grandchildren. This report outlines next steps for supporting better rural watershed management and health. You told us clearly what the barriers are – and what is required to overcome them. Together, we can – and will – set new standards and firmly establish better land use practices. After all, we are all downstream: we depend on our neighbours, upstream communities, and industry, to do the right thing.

On the basis of your feedback, the Oldman Watershed Council's *Watershed Legacy Program* will evolve to include a greater emphasis on communication between urban and rural communities in the Oldman watershed. The program will begin to tackle the myths, share knowledge and allow honest discussion between producers and consumers so that there is greater understanding and willingness to cooperate on shared issues. Your financial support and continued involvement will make this possible.

What is the Oldman Watershed Council?

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) is a large group of sector representatives, uniting together as a not-for-profit behind policies, research, education, and projects for the betterment of watershed management and health. As one of 11 WPACs (Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils) throughout Alberta, we are mandated by the provincial government to share unique insight into complicated environmental and social challenges. For everyone who lives, works, and recreates here, we are a neutral forum for all voices to be heard, providing independent science, trusted information, and bottom-line parameters that guide critical decision-making across Canada.

The Council focuses on several main projects and areas of research every year, dependent on current needs in the watershed, staff capacity, and our ability to procure funding. Work is not limited by an urban/ rural dichotomy, but recognizes the science underpinning basic ecological thresholds for watershed health throughout the basin.

Communication and outreach to and from those who live, work, recreate and invest in Southern Alberta is a critical part of our success. Since agriculture comprises 80% of the economy, ongoing, relevant, and responsive conversations with this demographic is of particular importance to shaping the programs we run, the kinds of support we offer, and the research we conduct.

What is the Watershed Legacy Program (WLP)?

The Oldman watershed includes some of the most productive farm and ranchland in the world. The OWC is proud of its reputation as being a "hands-on" organization, working on the land, directly with our rural stakeholders. Fostering an awareness of land stewardship in present and future generations underpins our core messaging.

Our Watershed Legacy Program (WLP) has been providing the tools necessary for watershed stewardship groups (WSGs) and landowner cooperatives to take the next steps toward sustainable

management of their land - for over 10 years. By coordinating efforts throughout the basin, the WLP aims to conserve and enhance our natural resources, and the rural way of life.

Examples of past projects include: off-stream watering sites, streambank stabilization, invasive weed removal, nutrient management, riparian fencing, wetland restoration, education, and technical support (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1. Solar, off-stream stream watering system & riparian fencing of dugout - installed by Trails End Beef in 2017 through the support of the WLP Program.

Applications to the WLP program are accepted once a year, and are selected on the basis of merit by a committee comprised of sector representatives (WLP Team) with expertise in agricultural issues. Funding for this program comes from sponsors and donors who want to make a lasting contribution to caretakers of the land who are improving the integrity of our landscapes, water quality and supply (*Figure 2 shows WLP Impacts*).

55

FUNDED PROJECTS:



IMPACTS



35 km

Riparian Fencing



23

Off-Stream Watering Systems



6795 Cows

Removed From Water Bodies & Riparian Areas!



300 Sheep



21

Weed Pulls



3

Garbage Clean-ups



700

Volunteers



2180

Bags of Invasive Weeds Removed & 650lbs of Garbage

4 Bio-Control Releases

304 Plans/Assessments/Surveys

6 Bio-engineering Projects

180 People engaged in educational events

1300 Willows Planted

2 Cattle Crossings

Figure 2. Impacts of the Watershed Legacy Program over the past 10 years.

What is Voices of the Oldman and Why Does WLP Need an Update?

Focus of the Initiative

Agriculture is constantly adapting to changes in technology, consumer expectations, market variability, climate fluctuations, and much more. The Oldman Watershed Council has supported agricultural watershed stewardship since long before being included in the Province's *Water For Life* strategy as a *Watershed Planning and Advisory Council* (WPAC). OWC is adamant that producers continue their stewardship activities as they adapt to changing conditions. As agriculture in Southern Alberta comes under increasing pressure, discussion around how to best adjust and make improvements to OWC agricultural programming is intensifying - both online and in person.

As a series of facilitated roundtable discussions, Voices Of The Oldman (VOTO) was set in motion to underscore a new iteration of OWC planning, and ensure appropriate analysis of input from producers (ranchers, farmers, landowners, irrigators, etc.) about watershed stewardship from an agricultural perspective (see **Appendix 1** for invitation example). The VOTO sessions were organized and presented by OWC's Taren Hager, Environmental Technologist, and acting WLP Manager. Taren will become the OWC's first full-time WLP Manager, when funds become available for this program.

In order to ensure input from throughout the watershed from a variety of producers at locations easily accessed by them, three locations were selected for the sessions:

1. **Taber and Area** - January 31, 2017 at the Heritage Inn and Conference Centre in Taber, AB (*this session hosted approximately **45 participants** - not including OWC staff*)
2. **Stavelly and Area** - March 1, 2017 at the Stavelly Community Centre in Stavelly, AB (*this session hosted approximately **25 participants** - not including OWC staff*)
3. **Pincher Creek and Area** - March 8, 2017 at the Twin Butte Community Hall in Twin Butte, AB (*this session hosted approximately **30 participants** - not including OWC staff*)

Participants represented a wide-variety of agricultural stakeholders who are involved with the rural community in some form. Individual producers, irrigation districts, agricultural organizations, ag-business representatives, rural municipal government and provincial government representatives made up the majority of the participants.

The two biggest questions that were addressed were:

1. What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing agricultural watershed stewardship?
2. What are possible solutions to address these challenges?

The answers were categorized into the top 3 challenges, and designated as to whether they were primarily economic, social or environmental in nature. Interestingly, many of the same top challenges to watershed stewardship were brought up at all three VOTO locations. A variety of solutions were suggested, which tie into areas of OWC's current work, and there are clear opportunities to develop new programming and ways of supporting agricultural producers. The moderator drew attention to some of the more intriguing and promising solutions that the group offered, which pointed the way

forward to stronger OWC collaboration and community-based solutions. Please see **Appendix 2** for the Methodology section.

Roundtable Discussion Results

What YOU told us are the biggest challenges facing agricultural watershed stewardship:

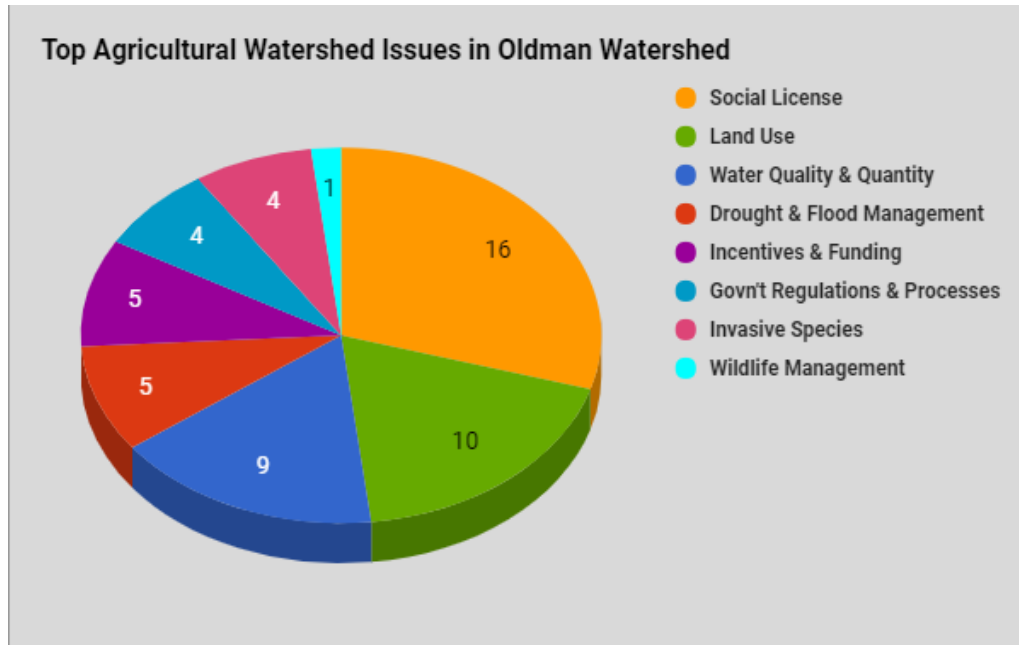


Figure 3. Numbers on the pie chart represent votes for the most important challenges facing agricultural watershed stewardship. The results have been summarized together from all three sessions.

Social License is clearly the main issue of concern that was identified by participants, through the VOTO input sessions (Figure 3). Social license is defined as:

“Social License refers to the level of public trust granted to a corporate entity or industry sector by the community at large and its key consumer base.

Public trust is the belief that activities are consistent with social expectations and the values of stakeholders, and earned through industry engagement, operating practices, and expressed values. Social license is slow to build, but quick to erode. Industry tacitly garners public trust by doing what is right.” (<http://croplife.ca/what-does-social-license-mean-for-agriculture/> Accessed 20.08.2017)

As a result, it's more important than ever before that the agriculture industry stands up and tells its story. The Oldman Watershed Council has gained a clear sense that the agricultural community feels misunderstood by their urban counterparts, and wants to show the consumer that they can feel good about the agriculture industry in Southern Alberta.

While OWC has already begun addressing many of the issues outlined in Table 1 below, we must expand our capacity in order to help the agricultural community communicate their positive stewardship stories to the urban consumer. We can work together to build public trust by educating consumers about food production and rural watershed stewardship.

Table 1. Summary of Key Topics Defined by Participants

<p>1. Social License</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educating Urban/Rural Communities ● Showcasing current stewardship work being done ● Human expectations of food + water ● Demands on resources ● Removal of consumer from land - disconnect ● Untrue public messaging ● Lack of government understanding ● Lack of producer collaboration 	<p>2. Land Use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Headwaters public land use (recreation) ● Urban sprawl/Subdivisions - taking away agricultural land ● Multi-use land pressures ● Access management ● Increasing “urban” acreages (removal of native pasture/forests) ● Fragmentation
<p>3. Water Quality and Quantity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manure & Fertilizer Management - managing runoff ● Water supply for irrigation ● Population growth - more water needed - decrease quality ● Efficient use of water ● Irrigation expansion and storage capacity ● Water security 	<p>4. Drought and Flood Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Water security - sharing and allocation ● Water storage ● Managing pastures/grazing ● Providing water access to livestock ● Cumulative impacts
<p>5. Incentives and Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to ecological monitoring services ● Incentives for good stewardship practices ● Loss of municipal staff to help producers get funding ● Revive government programs (shelterbelts, etc.) 	<p>6. Government Regulations & Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carbon tax - added expenses ● Approvals process (to slow) ● Drainage policy and legislation
<p>7. Invasive Species</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zebra/Quagga Mussels ● Invasive weeds (aquatic and algae) ● Multi-land use increasing spread ● More control & enforcement ● Climate change affecting spread ● More education 	<p>8. Wildlife Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Management on private land - whose responsibility is it? ● Carnivore predation ● Grazing management ● Infrastructure management/costs

What are possible solutions to these challenges?

We heard an impressive array of solutions to these challenges on varying scales of action - from producer-level to government-level actions. There are clear opportunities for meeting these challenges, including independently by individuals and producers, in collaboration with OWC, and at the government level.

What OWC can do to renew the *Watershed Legacy Program*

Overwhelmingly, what we heard from 100 agricultural producers at 3 events is that they are proud of what they do every day to provide food for our increasingly urbanized world. But producers are no longer in direct contact with consumers, and feel they have lost the trust and respect they deserve because of global concerns around environmentally-friendly food production, humane treatment of animals, potential spreading of disease, and use of antibiotics and hormones. Often these global issues are not well understood - or even relevant to how food is produced in the Oldman watershed, but it is difficult for consumers to know what to believe in this age of information overload and controversy.

That is where we come in. OWC can help navigate the science, explain the facts, and break down the barriers between rural and urban residents who all depend on our most precious shared resource - water. Our social media outreach alone covers more than 27,000 people a week. Our structure guarantees that we speak with the all kinds of citizens in Southern Alberta - whether they are here to live, work, recreate, or invest. We also have the ear of government; we are mandated to provide independent research and advice to the Province, and to provide a voice for the watershed community. It's our job.

On the basis of your feedback, the OWC's *Watershed Legacy Program* will evolve to include a greater emphasis on communication between urban and rural communities in the Oldman watershed. The program will begin to tackle the myths, share knowledge and allow honest discussion between producers and consumers so that there is greater understanding and willingness to cooperate on shared issues.

We will be thrilled to launch a revamped Watershed Legacy Program, and in order to do so, we will need to increase our capacity - and that also means having the resources to support a WLP Manager. For the last 10 years, this program has been a small part of what we do at OWC - but you are asking us to make it a big focus. If the agriculture community is committed to making this happen, our work is contingent on your support, investment and involvement.

FIRST STEPS FOR A NEW WLP FOCUS

➤ Harnessing the Power of 27,000 People A Week

OWC influences a large community on social media not only throughout Southern Alberta, but internationally. We are the right messengers, because we are a trusted source of science-based, neutral information - and we represent all voices. By sharing relevant, timely stories and information on social media, we can dispel myths about agriculture and showcase the good work that is happening. We already have many great stories to share, from our 55 WLP funded projects to restoration projects led by irrigation districts and watershed groups. The

stories are there - we just need the capacity to tell them in meaningful ways. Blogs, videos, Facebook Live, producer profiles and photo essays are just some of the methods we have found successful at changing hearts and minds.

➤ **Leveraging Influencers and Ambassadors**

Nothing can replace the positive impact of people speaking passionately. By leveraging trusted influencers and ambassadors that are doing watershed stewardship projects, we can educate consumers through honest dialogue - both online and face-to-face. It is critical that we offer consumers opportunities to see farming practices with their own eyes, and have ambassadors share why they are proud of their operations and the food they produce.

➤ **Advising the Government of Alberta**

The provincial government has a major role in agriculture - and especially irrigation - so of course, it is vital for OWC to communicate to them the challenges and priorities facing farmers. OWC regularly communicates with MLAs, Ministers, and staff at all levels, and we are an official advisor under Water for Life - a role we take seriously.

➤ **Educating and Reaching an Audience**

In addition to concerns about agriculture production, many people simply don't understand what they see happening on the landscape around them, and don't have time to research all the topics for themselves. It is very difficult to piece together the whole picture when all you have to go on is snippets of news reports and hearsay. By making information accessible and understandable, we make it easy for people to learn and make informed decisions. Our communications and outreach will focus on calls to action - we believe that everyone has a role to play. OWC operates based on needs, identified by local stakeholders, and leads by example. Our passion and unwavering commitment gets it done and it is the kind of thinking we work to instill in others.

➤ **Building Community and Trust**

We already work collaboratively with many other groups and organizations, and want to build on, and help improve resources. This will help ensure that the community is not duplicating efforts. We want to have more frequent interaction with all stakeholders, and have timelier conversations about things that matter. We will have more time and resources to assist with technical support, volunteers, and continue our hard work with practical projects on the land

Conclusion

Our heartfelt thanks goes to everyone who took the time from their busy schedules and braved the weather to participate in the VOTO sessions – as producers, partner organizations, and as presenters. This project will foster trust and personal responsibility at a time when we urgently need new solutions to bigger problems.

Obviously, none of this work is done by an invisible fairy with a magic wand! Concretely, before anything new can happen, and even before we can continue our rural work, your financial contribution toward hiring Taren Hager as our full-time WLP manager is required. OWC is strictly non-profit.

We would like to direct your attention to the attached *Case For Support* for details on how our *Watershed Fund* is structured. We hope very much that you will share both of these documents with other Southern Albertans who are invested in the health and prosperity of the Oldman watershed.



**Voices of the
Oldman**

: Agriculture Matters

ARE YOU A...
LANDOWNER, IRRIGATOR,
FARMER, RANCHER,
PRODUCER...ETC?

Are you passionate about the future of ag?



IF SO...the Oldman Watershed Council wants to hear from YOU.
Your input is VITAL! Have your voice heard!

- 3 sessions in the Oldman watershed.
- Panel of local ag. experts with updates on current stewardship projects.
- Roundtable discussions on:
 - The direction/future of agriculture in s.AB.
 - How the OWC can support the ag. community & the rural way of life.

Outcomes will be shared with participants.

 <p>1. Taber & Area JANUARY 31, 2017 2:00-5:00 p.m. Heritage Inn & Conference Centre</p>	 <p>2. Pincher Creek & Area FEBRUARY 10, 2017 1:00-4:00 p.m. Twin Butte Community Hall NCC Eat & Greet to follow @ 5:30 p.m.</p>	 <p>3. Stavelly & Area March 1, 2017 2:00-5:00 p.m. Stavelly Community Hall</p>
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FREE ADMISSION, REGISTRATION REQUIRED!
 Please register online at: https://voicesoftheoldman_agmatters.eventbrite.ca
 or call Taren Hager, Office Manager at 403-849-1346




oldmanwatershed.ca



Appendix #2 - Methodology

Participants were invited via email, social media, radio and newspaper to attend at any one of the three locations (see *Appendix 1*). The events were open to the public and there was no charge for admission. Each session was 3 hours in length and was framed in the invitations as an opportunity to present their ideas and discuss challenges in conducting watershed stewardship from their agricultural perspective - and that this feedback would form the basis of an overhaul to the way OWC provides rural support and programming.

Participants represented a wide-variety of agricultural stakeholders who are involved with the rural community in some form (*Table 2*). Individual producers, irrigation districts, agricultural organizations, ag-business representatives, rural municipal government and provincial government representatives made up the majority of the participants.

Table 2.	Location of VOTO Sessions			
Stakeholder Group	Taber	Stavely	Twin Butte	Attendee # Scale
Producer				More than 10
Irrigation				9-10
Ag Organization				7-8
Ag-Business				5-6
ENGO				3-4
Research				1-2
Urban				0
Government				

The methodology for the sessions was designed and moderated by OWC's Communications Specialist, Anna Garleff, PhD *in proficio*. The method draws heavily on the broad theoretical framework behind discourse analysis (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The design incorporates aspects of Approval Voting (<http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/weber/papers/approval.htm>) and the Harvard Method (<https://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making>), also previously developed by Anna for leadership instruction at the Gustav-Stresemann Institut in Germany (<http://www.gsi-bonn.de/en.html>). Aspects of these systems were adapted for the VOTO roundtables as follows:

After registering at the front door, participants chose seats facing the front of the venue at random. Sessions began with a welcome and introduction by OWC's Executive Director, Shannon Frank. She then introduced a panel of 4 local experts who presented consecutively on their ongoing watershed stewardship activities and how their organizations were being innovative in adapting to the ever-changing landscape and demands on the agricultural industry. Speakers were chosen by OWC on the basis of their involvement with OWC and/or partners and the exemplary nature of their

watershed stewardship (whether as producers, policy-makers, researchers or sector organizations). No remuneration was offered for this role.

Participants were then instructed by the moderator to collect around discussion tables (which were set up around the perimeter of the room) according to numbers allocated at random on the backs of name tags (although an effort was made to ensure that: members of the same organization were allocated to different tables, there was an even distribution between men and women - and also between students and experienced producers). There were between 5 and 6 groups at each location. Each group of approximately 5-8 participants was facilitated by an OWC employee or a volunteer from a partner organization. Facilitators were provided with colored felt markers and flipchart paper, which was fastened to the wall at the end of each table. The moderator briefly explained the overall instructions to the participants.

Participants were then instructed by the moderator to brainstorm their ideas around the first of two questions in a timely fashion and to save discussion for the second question. Participants were urged to contribute as many ideas as possible in answer to the first question and to refrain from evaluating or critiquing others' input at this stage, and that they had 20 minutes for this task. Facilitators presented the first of two questions to their group and wrote the question at the top of one of the flipchart sheets. Facilitators wrote the ideas down as a list of outputs on the flipchart page(s).

The first question was:

1. What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing agricultural watershed stewardship?

At the end of 20 minutes, the facilitator gave a 5-minute warning and then called "Time!" at the end of the 5 minutes. The moderator then explained to everyone that the second question would ask them to provide solutions to each of the challenges they had just listed, this time within a 40-minute time frame. Facilitators drew parallel lines underneath each response from the first question across to a second flipchart paper.

The second question was:

2. What are possible solutions to address these challenges?

Facilitators re-iterated the question for each response to the first question (e.g. "What is a possible solution to X?"), and noted the suggestions in the appropriate area on the second flipchart paper. Pages were added as required, since multiple solutions to each question were offered.

The moderator called halftime at 20 minutes and again gave a 5-minute warning before the end of the 40 minutes.

The moderator then explained the next stage of the session. Remaining at their table groups, each individual member of that group was allocated three votes, and three votes only. Participants would be asked to raise their hand to vote for the top three challenges listed in response to question one. The moderator asked them to choose the three responses (their own or someone else's) which for them best described the top three challenges to watershed management and health within the

agricultural context. Ten minutes were allocated for this. The facilitator then read through the list of challenges aloud, and noted the number of votes as a tally behind each challenge. Facilitators then tallied the answers and identified the top three responses. Any ties were broken by voting again - once - for the number one challenge from the shortlist.

The moderator then instructed the participants and facilitators to categorize the top three challenges as to whether they were primarily economic, social or environmental in nature - bearing in mind that quite often the challenges had aspects of all three categories. Ten minutes were allocated for this. Interestingly, many of the same top challenges to watershed stewardship were brought up at all three VOTO locations.

Next, the moderator invited the facilitators from each group in turn to present their findings, and for members of each group to provide additional comments to the larger group if they wished. 30 minutes were allocated for this.

The top three results from each table were compiled by the moderator onto one sheet and all participants went through the three-vote voting procedure as one group to identify the top three challenges for the entire group. The moderator then tied these results into areas of current work that the OWC is doing and also identified main areas where there were clear opportunities to develop new programming and ways of support to agricultural producers.

The moderator drew attention to some of the more intriguing and promising solutions that the group offered and pointed the way forward to stronger OWC collaboration and solutions with the community.

OWC's Executive Director, Shannon Frank, then thanked the presenters, facilitators, partner organizations and participants for their time and indicated that the results would be provided to them personally via email and would also be made available on the OWC website.

Following the completion of all three VOTO sessions, the acting WLP Manager transcribed the flipchart sheets and compiled the results onto a spreadsheet. Eight different topics across the three locations emerged.