

Saskatchewan Municipal Best Practice

Wallace Creek Watershed Assoc. Board

CONTACT

Wallace Creek Watershed Assoc. Board (WCWAB) (Member municipalities: RM of Sliding Hills #273, RM of Wallace #243, RM of Calder #241, RM of Saltcoats #214, RM of Churchbridge #211, and the village of Rhein)

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THE PRACTICE

The Wallace Creek Watershed (WCW) is a sub-basin of the Assiniboine River Watershed located in East-Central Saskatchewan. WCW is approximately 692km², spanning just over 6 different Rural Municipalities: Good Lake (274, not a member), Sliding Hills (273), Wallace (243), Calder (241), Saltcoats (213), and Churchbridge (211). The only urban municipality located within the watershed is the village of Rhein.

Due to the unprecedented flooding this area of the province experienced in 2011, the municipalities within the WCW came to the realization that something needed to be done in order to mitigate the decades of maintenance neglect that had resulted in Wallace Creek becoming a braided stream network prone to severe flooding given the extreme lack of topography in the area. Thus, the planning for the formation of the WCWAB began in the summer of 2012. The association was officially formed under The Watershed Associations Act by an Order in Council on May 15, 2013.

The WCWAB has provided funding for over \$600,000 worth of funding to various projects

THE PROCESS

Following the formation of the WCWAB, each RM appointed 2 members to sit on the board of directors, while the village of Rhein has 1 council member on the board, for a total board size of 11 members. The board members now serve to bring forward to the board as a whole, the issues and concerns of their respective rate payers regarding water management within the watershed (i.e. the board operates much the same as any municipal council).

The involved municipalities approached the Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association (AWSA) to take that lead role. The AWSA is a private, non-profit incorporated entity dedicated to water management of the entire Assiniboine River Watershed (i.e. the east-central area of Saskatchewan, of which, Wallace Creek Watershed is a sub-basin within). The AWSA is 1 of 11 such watershed groups across the province that collectively form the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW). All 6 municipalities were already paying members of the AWSA at the time of planning, so it seemed a natural fit to have the AWSA act as managers of the newly budding watershed association. The AWSA lead the municipalities through several initial planning meetings as well as the initial establishment process with the Water Security Agency. Once the WCWAB became established, the board officially appointed the AWSA as their project manager and administrator.

The WXWAB adopted the following funding scheme for its projects and activities: each RM contributes from its general coffers to a predefined annual administration and project operating budget according to what percentage area that particular RM makes up of the entire Wallace Creek Watershed.

THE RESULTS

There have been no significant negative impacts due to flooding in any year following the completion of the above-mentioned channel clearing and infrastructure work performed by the WCWAB within the watershed. This is a remarkable achievement considering that in 2014, a vast majority of Saskatchewan was devastated by extreme flooding, including many areas around the Wallace Creek Watershed. We have heard from many long-time farmers that have lived their entire lives in the watershed that not only did they never think anything would ever be done to mitigate the problems associated with Wallace Creek, but that since the work completed by the WCWAB, they have for the first time in their lives, seen spring snowmelt seasons where not a single road was overtopped or closed due to water! The activities undertaken by the WCWAB have drastically improved the water conveyance capacity throughout the entire Wallace Creek Watershed, and as a result, both municipal infrastructure and private agricultural land are at an extremely small risk of being impacted by future flooding compared to prior to any work being done. The WCWAB's activities have increased the resiliency of the Wallace Creek Watershed in regard to flooding and the associated impacts on the livelihoods of the people within the watershed.

LESSONS LEARNED

We would recommend that anyone looking to replicate what we've done, seek out their local SAW watershed association to act as their "champion" throughout the whole process. It has been invaluable to have the AWSA guiding the municipalities through this entire process. The neutral perspective they bring to the table further adds to the transparency of the WCWAB's activities, and the knowledge and expertise watershed associations such as AWSA have will ensure that similar initiatives operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Through the entire process of establishing and operating the WCWAB we have learned that when municipalities (rural and urban) come together to tackle issues regarding water management, they can achieve so much more than each municipality working in isolation of one another and just worrying about themselves and "doing their own thing". With that in mind, because we are dealing with water issues, it has made sense to tackle those issues from a watershed perspective, using the natural watershed boundaries rather than arbitrary municipal Boundaries.