

Elbow Partnership News

Elbow River Watershed Partnership (ERWP) Newsletter
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Local Government meets with ERWP about Water Quality

The ERWP Coordinating Committee met with members of the local governments recently to discuss the report "Impacts on Water Quality in the Upper Elbow River" (Alberta Environment and The City of Calgary, 2004). Attending from the Local Government Committee (LGC) were MD of Rocky View Councillors **Gordon Branson** and **Bob Everett**, Redwood Meadows Councillor **Bob Gregor**, MLA **Ron Liepert** and assistant to MLA **Ted Morton**. Regrets from Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier, Premier Ralph Klein (MLA Calgary-Elbow) and Tsuu Tina representatives.

Outcomes of the meeting:

- 1) ERWP Coordinating Committee to meet with Local Government twice per year.
- 2) ERWP will request to be on the agenda of a provincial Standing Policy Committee to help bring more importance to Elbow River water quality.

Volunteers in Motion 3

You are invited to attend the 3rd annual **Volunteers in Motion** workshop focusing on "Building Communities Through Innovative Environmental Stewardship". This is an opportunity to link stewardship groups, celebrate their successes and provide tools for groups to build on their achievements.

March 9th, 2005
9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Lincoln Hall, Crestomere, Alberta
(north of Red Deer)
Register by phone at (403) 340-7607

Bow River Basin Council Icebreaker Gala

The Bow River Basin Council (BRBC) is formally recognized as a Watershed Planning Advisory Council under Alberta's *Water for Life* Strategy. Come and celebrate their great work at the first ever BRBC fundraising gala. They will launch the much anticipated *State of the Basin Report* with special guests Premier Ralph Klein, Minister of the Environment Guy Boutilier, Mayor Dave Bronconnier and more. Tickets are \$125 per person or \$1000 for a table of 8. Contact BRBC at 254-3419 to order your tickets.

Icebreaker Fundraising Gala
Friday, April 29th, 2005
6:00pm to Midnight
Westin Hotel, Calgary

Elbow River in Calgary

The *Elbow River in Calgary* (ERIC) held their third meeting on March 2nd hosted by the Environment Committee of the Stampede Grounds. This stewardship group is made up of businesses and land owners of the lower Elbow River below the Glenmore dam and are at the stage of getting to know their watershed. Jamie Dixon, water quality specialist with the City of Calgary Waterworks presented the history of the Elbow River and some of the more recent water quality issues. The watershed area below the dam is only 2% of the entire Elbow River watershed, it has 66 storm sewer outfalls and it faces water quality problems related to an old system of urban runoff. High counts of bacteria have been found in the storm sewer under non-storm flows suggesting that there is a lot of animal waste (wild or domestic) being deposited on the grounds of the City. Members of *ERIC* will meet again in late Spring to gather more information about water quality and quantity. For information contact ERWP Coordinator (see below for phone and email).

Water for Life Update

Three partnerships were set up under Alberta's Water for Life Strategy: The Water Council, Watershed Planning Advisory Councils (WPAC) and, Watershed Stewardship Groups (WSG). The ERWP is considered to be in the latter group. The Strategy calls for these partnerships to work together to make recommendations on improving water management in Alberta's watershed. I (Monique) am pleased to report the three partnerships are communicating and thanks to Bill Berzins, Bow River Basin Council Chair and member of the Water Council, the ERWP voice is being heard. Bill has organized monthly conference calls with several of these partners including the ERWP, the Oldman Basin Council, the Parkland Community and the North Saskatchewan Water Alliance and others. As a direct result of the last conference call on Feb. 27th, it was decided that a member of the Alberta Council shall attend the annual general meetings of the WPAC and the WSG. Also, look for a workshop/conference, possibly in December for another method of communication. **Water for Life Strategy is working to build linkages between all the partnerships.**

Fostering Sustainable Behaviour

Dr. Doug McKenzie-Mohr, an environmental psychologist, held a workshop recently to introduce the concept of Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM). His tools are effective for changing public behaviour. In his book on the same subject, he writes "As consumption patterns threaten to outstrip the Earth's ability to support humanity and other species one thing becomes clear: we can not continue to live in the same old ways." While some programs aim to create public awareness, McKenzie-Mohr's methods involve community interaction to identify barriers and create long-lasting behaviour change.

Attitude has nothing to do with behaviour.

To really change behaviour, you need to remove the barriers and make it easy for people to adopt the new behaviour. For example, if you want to increase household recycling and you have learned by communicating with non-recycling households that it is too much of a hassle to haul recycling to the depot then your focus should be on making it more convenient, maybe by providing curbside pick up. Non-recycling community members may agree that they should recycle but the barriers prevent them from adopting the behaviour. If you don't find out why the community is not recycling then your choice may be to increase the depot drop off stations only to find that it does not increase recycling behaviour.

Other tools include **incentives** such as the toilet rebate program offered by the City of Calgary. Their aim is to increase the number of low flow toilets in the City. Incentives provide a good tool under the right circumstances.

Your Sewage, Your Responsibility

On-site sewage disposal has come a long way from the old buried car in the ground. Today they are highly specialized personal sewage treatment systems (PSTS) designed for the unique conditions of each site. Some systems in place today are not considered suitable and are actually harming the environment by *disposing* of sewage in your backyard rather than *treating* the sewage. A *cesspool*, used often in the past, is not a good system because they are dug deep into the ground where there is little oxygen and biological activity to consume organics and pathogens in the sewage. Also, the seepage pit is often located so deep that it is below the water table allowing a transfer of sewage effluent into the groundwater.

The PSTS is composed of a septic tank to provide primary and secondary treatment and a soil field to complete the process with tertiary treatment. The experts refer to the soil as **the most important factor** for providing complete sewage treatment. Not all soils are created equally. In fact, in the assessment of a site for sewage disposal, the evaluation begins with the soil. If the soil is not suitable to treat effluent then the house should not be built! A good soil will have extensive particle surface area which provides more opportunity for biological activity. The surface area in one pound of loamy soil amounts to an area of 15 acres whereas the surface area of sand is only 3 acres. In addition to a high surface area, it is critical for the effluent to flow slowly through the soil treatment field.

If you own a private sewage treatment system...

- You must have it serviced and the tank pumped out regularly (once every year or two) by a certified private sewage installer.
- You can obtain a Public Sewage Systems Standards of Practice Handbook (\$12.50 +GST) from Alberta's Learning Resource Centre at (780) 427-2767 (for toll free go through the government RITE line at 310-0000). This publication provides the minimum standards and is being considered for an update in the near future.
- New technologies exist to make your system operate better for you and for the environment. Contact a certified private sewage installer for the right system for your site. Your upgrades could directly improve the quality of ground water and surface water in your watershed.

New Technologies in Alberta

- Improvements in site evaluation by soil structure analysis to a depth of 8 feet
- Packaged treatment plants
- System controls and monitoring can detect leaky toilets
- Flow equalization and pressure distribution
- Drip tube dispersal/irrigation
- Phosphorus removal units

The cost of PSTS range from \$7000 - \$25,000.

Alf Durnie, Private Sewage Technical Administrator from Alberta Municipal Affairs spoke on this subject at a recent ERWP Stakeholder Committee meeting. You may contact him at 1-866-421-6929.

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