More than 40 enthusiastic people had gathered in the Weaselhead parking lot when the sun broke through – a good omen for ERWP’s 2015 AGM and Bus Tour: Heading to the Headwaters.

At our first stop beside the Elbow River, near the site of the proposed (and controversial) Springbank Off-Stream Storage Reservoir (SR1), two speakers presented their views on the current status of flood mitigation on the Elbow. Mary Robinson from DontDamnSpringbank (www.dontdamnspringbank.org), a local rancher whose family has rannedched on this land for more than 120 years, described local landowners’ point of view regarding SR1. Megan van Ham from Alberta WaterSMART (albertawatersmart.com) summarized their December 2014 Room for the River report to the Government of Alberta, including the Room for the River concept and options for water diversion, conveyance and detention. The Alberta Resilience and Mitigation Branch of AESRD, and their SR1 consultants Stantec, were also invited to speak but declined, citing delays due to the recent change in government.

Back on the bus, on the drive to the Elbow Pass trailhead, local author and naturalist Kevin van Tighem spoke on “Land Management and Water Security”, with specific reference to the Elbow watershed. Kevin’s point of view is covered extensively in the accompanying feature article by C. Lacombe. Liz Breakey, Division 1 Councillor from Rocky View County and long-time Bragg Creek area resident, then updated the group on the Revitalize the Creek program currently in progress in Bragg Creek. Sustainable business growth possibilities for the hamlet are currently being reviewed (http://www.rockyview.ca/BuildingPlanning/PlansUnderReview/BraggCreekRevitalizationPlan.aspx).

After lunch on the bus during an intense rain shower on Highway 40, we arrived at the Elbow Pass trailhead for a short hike up to scenic Elbow Lake. Here in the Elbow’s headwaters, Dr. John Pomeroy, Canada Research Chair in Water Resources and Climate Change (University of Saskatchewan), spoke to the group, summarizing his paper on The 2013 flood event in the Bow and Oldman River basins: Causes, assessment, and damages (see http://www.erwp.org/index.php/flood/publications). Explaining the hydrologic and meteorological reasons for the flood, he stated that the 2013 flood was not exceptional and that larger flood events should be expected in future. Implementation of intergovernmental river basin
management and flood prediction services, not only in the South Saskatchewan basin, but across Canada will be critical parts of any future flood management initiatives.

On the return trip to Calgary, we held the ERWP’s 2015 Annual General Meeting. The six current Directors (Dan Brown, Diane Coleman, Mark Giesbrecht, Mark Kolentsis, Natasha Kuzmak and Mike Murray) were elected for another term, and the Chair outlined several potential initiatives for the coming year. The final presentation of the day was made by ERWP’s Watershed Coordinator, Flora Giesbrecht; she described ERWP’s 2014-2015 projects to the group, many of whom were still awake. Our tour ended at the Weaselhead parking lot at 3:30 pm.

Thanks to all who made presentations and to those who attended, had interesting conversations and asked lots of questions. The Head to the Headwaters tour was deemed a success – great information plus great scenery! Next year – the Floating Down the Elbow tour (just kidding). But stay tuned.