

Introduction

Through a contractual arrangement with Manitoba Water Stewardship (October 15, 2004 to June 15, 2005), the Manitoba Eco-Network (MEN) created a structure that brought together various environmental groups working on water issues to share information and resources, prioritize issues, and support positive actions for improved water stewardship. This caucus had water-related member groups of the Manitoba Eco-Network for its core, but actively sought out and interacted with other environmental water groups around the province. These groups have constituencies and memberships that reach into communities and serve a valuable role in gathering and conveying information to a broad cross-section of the public. A key function of this caucus was to encourage and facilitate broader environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) and citizen involvement in water stewardship activities.

As a result of this partnership a final report, *For the Public Good (September 2005,)* was presented to Steve Ashton, Minister of Water Stewardship, as a consensus of some of the main issues deemed important to the environmental groups working on water issues.

This report is a result of a continuation of the partnership between Manitoba Water Stewardship, the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation and the Manitoba Eco-Network for a second year of operation. It covers the work and activities of the water caucus coordinator and member groups who comprise the water caucus for the period November 15, 2005 to November 15, 2006.

Objectives

For the second year of funding, project objectives were not formalized, as the Water Stewardship Fund was not in existence at the time. An April 26, 2005 letter of correspondence (**Appendix 1**) from the Manitoba Eco-Network to the Minister of Water Stewardship identified specific areas on which we wished to focus our efforts.

- developing a community based water monitoring pilot program
- continued engagement of community members in education on watershed planning
- providing on-going opportunities for urban and rural ENGOs to meet, share information, partake in educational opportunities and consult with government
- participate in the regulation development process for the Water Protection Act
- develop a water bulletin to carry news, resources events and information to engage the public

The proposal required a full-time coordinator along with activity expenses and a request ranging from \$50,000 to 60,000 was stipulated in the April 26, 2005 letter. Based on this request, and a number of assurances from the Minister's office and senior bureaucrats over the months that followed, the Manitoba Eco-Network received a cheque originating from the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, January 2006, for \$25,000. A cover letter and list of deliverables were not contained in this mail-out, therefore agreed upon objectives were never finalized.

Methods and Results

The water caucus encouraged ENGO participation in and helped influenced decision-makers on public policy water issues in the following areas:

- **Water Quality Management Zones, Phosphorus Regulation and Watershed Planning**

The water caucus met with senior government bureaucrats on two occasions to discuss the Water Protection Act and, in particular, the section under the act that calls for watershed planning. While water caucus participants were pleased that Manitoba will move towards integrated watershed planning, many were disappointed at the time line to implement the strategy and the overall lack of resources invested to carry out any meaningful change at the ground level.

Water caucus participants met with the Minister of Water Stewardship on two occasions. The first meeting, Mr. Ashton was invited to address the water caucus at its November 2005 monthly meeting. At this meeting, participants requested feedback from Mr. Ashton on the report "*For the Public Good*", which critically assessed the Manitoba government's performance on water stewardship. Mr. Ashton acknowledged many of the concerns revealed in the report and encouraged many of the participants to continue their quest for improved water protection.

The second meeting with Mr. Ashton involved a small working group of the water caucus and focussed on the proposed regulation designed to create water quality management zones for nutrients and the proposed regulation to control phosphorus application. A follow-up meeting with the New Democratic Party Caucus included six water caucus participants, three cabinet ministers and five back-benchers. The discussion centered on a draft sign-on letter (**Appendix 2**) which listed key principles that water caucus participants thought ought to be contained in the nutrient regulations. The intent of the meeting was to solicit feedback from the NDP Caucus, so that a final sign-on document could be formulated. The water caucus nutrient working group extended an invitation to consult with Manitoba's general farm commodity group, the Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) and the Manitoba Pork Council (MPC). Both KAP and MPC declined the invitation.

During the public comment period, e-notices were sent to water caucus participants to encourage submission of comments in response to "Manitoba Water Stewardship's Consultation Document for Initial Review". Eight organizations involved with the water caucus submitted comments. Two public meetings, one in Brandon and one in Winnipeg, were organized through the water caucus with the Manager of the Water Quality Section of Water Stewardship. The meetings solicited concerns relating to the consultation document and stimulated further ideas and discussion. In response to a large agricultural business lobby, Manitoba Water Stewardship responded with an "Issues and Options" document and conducted further

public regional meetings in Manitoba. The public regional meetings were stacked with agribusiness farming interests. The water caucus responded with a finalized sign-on letter and principles and delivered copies to Premier Gary Doer and all 57 Members of the Legislative Assembly. A draft regulation was released in early November 2006 extending a public comment period to January 22, 2007. At this same November 2006 release, Manitoba Conservation amended the Manure Management and Mortality Regulation and placed a temporary pause on the expansion of new hog barns.

Appendix 3 provides a brief news story covering the release of the ENGO sign-on letter that went to Legislature.

- **Red River Valley Water Supply Project**

A cross border working group was established in the fall of 2005 to monitor, share information on, raise awareness of, and encourage participation in the US Bureau of Reclamation's (BOR) task of determining the needs and options for a water supply for the Red River Valley within North Dakota. The BOR solicited public comments to the Needs and Options report as well as the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Public hearings were held in eight communities across North Dakota and Minnesota. The DEIS identifies seven options for a new water supply. Two options are in-basin (ie, within the Red River Basin), one option involves an international body of water (Lake of the Woods) and four options resemble the Garrison Diversion Project of the 1970's which was withdrawn as a result of recommendations from the International Joint Commission (IJC). The Garrison Diversion option transfers water from the Missouri River into the Red River, crossing the continental divide. Many observers and interveners predict that the BOR will recommend a Garrison option, which has already been selected by the State of North Dakota.

The Garrison Working Group (**Appendix 4**) encouraged ENGO's on both sides of the border to submit comments to the Needs and Options report and DEIS. In February, the working group engaged in a public information tour which featured: a public forum on Canada/US water relations held in Winnipeg; a press conference in Fargo, North Dakota; a public forum in Bemidji, Minnesota; and, oral presentations to the BOR public hearing (**Appendices 5 and 6**). Two hundred and forty-nine postcards asking for an IJC reference were also distributed to public (**Appendix 7**).

It is anticipated that the BOR will complete the final environmental impact statement by the end of February 2007, and, along with the state of North Dakota, select a final option for implementation. In anticipation of the release of the final DEIS, the Manitoba Eco-Network contracted with a consultant to develop a policy statement intended to garner sign-on support from organizations throughout the basin. This policy statement will emphasize an in-basin solution to North Dakota's water proposal, respect First Nation and Tribal Water Rights and adhere to the principles of the Boundary Water Treaty of 1909.

- **Pembina Valley Water Cooperative Supplementary Water Supply Project**

The first phase of the supplementary water supply project under consideration plans to move groundwater approximately 96 kilometers by pipeline from the Sandilands Provincial Forest to Morris, Manitoba. The water will then be distributed through the Pembina Valley Water Coop (PVWC) network, which supplies 45,000 customers in the south central area of Manitoba. Their objective is to "alleviate water shortages during periods of drought or contamination due to accidental spills".

The Agassiz Sandilands Uplands aquifer complex (located in south-eastern Manitoba) is of significant ecological importance as it is the source of freshwater for five major watersheds in the province (Brokenhead River, Whitemouth River, Rat River, Seine River and Cooks Creek). It is also known that the Sandstone and Carbonate Aquifers (two major bedrock aquifers in south central Manitoba) receive most of their recharge from the Sandilands upland area. The first phase plans to divert 50 liters per second (or about 1200 acre-ft annually). PVWC's "ultimate annual water requirement" (not under consideration in this application, but mentioned in their proposal) is 300 liters per second (or about 7300 acre-ft annually).

In response to PVWC's intent to apply for an Environment Act license in January 2006, a working group of concerned parties was established through the water caucus to raise public concern about the proposal. Many individuals, organizations and rural municipal governments submitted their concerns asking that the plan be rejected or, at a minimum, conduct a Clean Environment Commission (CEC) hearing on the proposal. In June 2006, the Minister of Conservation, Stan Struthers, called for a CEC investigation and established a fund so that participants could hire expert witnesses. The Manitoba Eco-Network successfully qualified for funds and coordinated an intervention at the hearings in early November 2006. The group intervention represented the interests of the RM of Piney, RM of Reynolds, Manitoba Wildlands, Save Our Seine Inc and the Concerned Citizens of the RM of Piney and Buffalo Point First Nation. The CEC is expected to release their final report of recommendations to the Minister of Conservation at the end of January 2007. A copy of our closing remarks can be found in **Appendix 8**.

- **Water for Life Declaration**

In February 2006, a working group was established to develop and implement a political strategy to urge the City of Winnipeg to pass a resolution endorsing the Water for Life Declaration (**Appendix 9**). More than 100 Canadian municipalities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities have endorsed declarations that oppose the privatization of water and support the Water for Life Declaration. The campaign called for the Mayor and/or two council members of his Executive Policy Committee to introduce a motion to support the declaration at the March 22nd general council meeting – which coincides with World Water Day. The strategy included a celebration of World Water Day to take place outside of the council chambers.

The political strategy was successful and there was unanimous support for the motion on the council floor. Approximately 150 citizens attended the celebration which featured the following guest speakers: Katherine Whitecloud (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs); MLA Rob Altemeyer (Government of Manitoba); Kevin Rebeck (Canadian Union of Public Employees); Councilor Gord Steeves (City of Winnipeg); Elder Art Shofley; Barry Hammond (Council of Canadians); Diana Ludwick (Development and Peace); Reverend Ray Shultz (KAIROS) and the Raging Grannies.

- **National Water Questionnaire to main Federal Parties in Western Canada**

During the federal election (December 2005 – January 2006), the water caucus embarked on a project to solicit feedback from the main federal political parties who were running candidates in western Canada (Conservative Party of Canada, Green Party of Canada, Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada).

A questionnaire was designed which asked the parties seven pointed national water questions, which we felt were of importance to this region (**Appendix 10**). The questionnaire was also circulated within the ENGO community for sign-on support. Unfortunately, one political party declined to respond to the questionnaire and we were advised that the release of any public information from this exercise that would single out a political party in an unfavorable way would be deemed as inappropriate lobbying for a charitable organization.

As a follow-up, a modified version of the sign-on letter and questionnaire was sent to the Manitoba Caucus Chair of the Conservative Party of Canada, Joy Smith and carbon copied to Minister Rona Ambrose, Minister of Environment. A meeting was held with Ms. Smith in August 2006 where those in attendance were assured that the new government is very interested in protecting Canada's water resource.

- **Town of Minnedosa water supply upgrade project**

The Town of Minnedosa put forth an Environment Act proposal to increase its withdrawal of groundwater to supply homes, businesses and industry. The expansion was fueled by additional water needs for the new Husky Ethanol Plant. The water caucus coordinator assisted a regional working group in the Little Saskatchewan River watershed region with the concern that the additional water use may impact the instream flow requirement for protecting the aquatic ecosystem. The group released a media advisory asking that the Minister of Conservation conduct a CEC hearing (**Appendix 11**) and numerous letters were submitted, asking for the same. An environmental license was issued, shortly thereafter and a number of the organizations have since appealed the license. No response to the appeal has been given to date.

- **Correspondence to Decision-Makers**

Six letters of correspondence were sent by the Manitoba Eco-Network (MEN) to various levels of government dealing with water issues. Briefly, they are:

- i) Letter addressed to The International Rainy River Pollution Control Board (IRRPCB) and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency asking for further investigation on a potential project which will emit mercury into the Rainy River. The IRRPC Board responded favorably to the request and indicated that they highlighted this issue in their semi-annual report to the IJC and their Board appearance before the IJC. The Board also indicated that a more thorough assessment of the status of the project will occur in the fall of 2006 and they acknowledged trans boundary communication gaps on proposed projects.
- ii) Letter addressed to Minister Stan Struthers and Ms. Tracey Braun, Director of Environmental Approvals in respect to Manitoba's desire to amend the Classes of Development Regulation under the Environment Act. MEN asked for the inclusion of numerous developments into the Act that are now exempt from environmental assessment. Many of these developments impact Manitoba's water resources. Citizens are currently waiting for the release of the amended regulation.
- iii) Letter addressed to Keith Grady, Senior Advisor, Environmental Review and Approvals, Infrastructure Canada asking that Section 18 of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act be invoked to allow for a public participation program on the screening of the City of Winnipeg's Wastewater Treatment Improvement Project. To date, a Section 18 (2) has been granted allowing for the Responsible Authority to consider public information. As well, a meeting with city officials occurred in July 2006.
- iv) Letter addressed to Minister of Agriculture and Rural Initiatives, Rosann Wowchuk, asking that any amendment to the Farm Practices Guidelines, consider a public consultation program that includes the public-at-large and environmental non-governmental organizations. The Minister responded unfavorably to this request.
- v) Letter addressed to Minister Steve Ashton requesting a thorough investigation of the water supply in the Little Saskatchewan River watershed (ground and surface) and ecological in-stream flow needs of the Little Saskatchewan River. Husky Oil was given an Environmental Act license last fall to construct a 130 million litre/year wheat-based ethanol plant. However, the environmental assessment did not consider the source of water required for this plant.
- vi) Letter addressed to Minister Stan Struthers appealing Environment Act License 2737 allowing for the Town of Minnedosa to obtain additional groundwater. The appeal called for additional precautionary principle clauses to be added to the license, such as the establishment of a drought plan, water conservation plan, financial compensation program and improvements to the water- monitoring program.

Extension, Outreach and Education

- **Monthly Water Caucus Meetings**

The water caucus held twelve meetings over the period of November 2005 to November 2006. Only one was held outside of Winnipeg. Guest speakers and topics included:

- Fay Ash (Calgary) – The need to reduce the input of fluoride in drinking water
- Elaine Shipley (Uof M Graduate Student) – Status of trihalomethane standards in Canadian drinking water
- Holly Mackling (Concerned Citizens Coalition) – Potential impacts of the OlyWest Hog Slaughtering Plant proposed for Winnipeg
- Lorimer Thompson and Barry Oswald (Manitoba Water Stewardship) – Update on watershed planning in Manitoba
- Terry Duguid and Norm Brandson (Lake Winnipeg Implementation Committee) – Restoring the Health of Lake Winnipeg
- Dr. Eva Pip (University of Winnipeg) – State of Water Quality in Manitoba
- Dr. Bill Paton (Brandon University) – Water quality problems in the Little Saskatchewan River
- Dwight Williamson (Manitoba Water Stewardship) – Water Quality Management Zones for Nutrients
- Steve Hamm (Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District) – Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) pilot project in the RM of Blanchard
- Rhonda McDougal (Manitoba Water Stewardship) and David Neufeld (Intergovernmental Affairs) – Land use planning and water protection

All meetings offered the opportunity for water caucus participants to update the group on their organizational activities and discussions usually focussed on problem solving and information sharing. Attendance ranged in size from ten to twenty-five participants. Teleconferencing and the use of a speakerphone was successful in garnering much welcomed participation from those living outside of Winnipeg.

- **Public Forums**

Three public forums sponsored by the Manitoba Eco-Network were held in Winnipeg over the twelve month period.

As mentioned earlier, a forum on Canada/US water relations, entitled, “This is not a Love-in” was held to alert concerned Manitobans on the implications of diverting water from the Missouri River across the continental divide into the Red River basin. Approximately seventy-five citizens attended the forum and two hundred and forty-nine postcards were distributed, which ask Prime Minister Harper to take action on the Red River Valley Water Supply Project.

A transcript of the event was developed and is available on the Manitoba Eco-Network website.

The second public forum was co-sponsored with the National Farmers Union and Winnipeg Humane Society and featured Rick Dove, Waterkeepers Alliance of the Neuse River, North Carolina, Marlene Halverson, Animal Welfare Institute, Minneapolis and Dr. Michael Broadway, University of Michigan. The guest presenters revealed some of the implications of modern hog production and processing prevalent in North America and how these impacts might manifest in Manitoba with the OlyWest slaughterhouse. Over three hundred and fifty citizens attended the forum and a press conference held prior to the event was very well attended. A copy of the promotional poster and news article covering the event, are attached as **Appendix 12 and Appendix 13**.

The third public forum was co-sponsored with the University of Winnipeg, Department of Geography and Department of Environmental Studies and featured a guest lecture by Dr. David Brooks, Friends of the Earth Canada. Over fifty citizens heard Dr. Brooks lay out the concept of a soft path approach to managing water within any given watershed, eco-region or district. Water soft paths stress water efficiency, conservation, equity and ecological economics. As part of his tour, Dr. Brooks gave a lecture at the University of Manitoba. On his stopover, the Manitoba Eco-Network arranged a meeting with Green Manitoba, a special operating of the Department of Energy, Science and Technology. While not a direct result of the undertakings of the water caucus, it is our understanding that Dr. Brooks will be hired as a consultant by the International Institute for Sustainable Development to conduct a water soft path analysis for the prairies.

- **E-bulletins and Eco-journal Water Stories**

In an effort to limit excessive emails to water caucus participants, e-bulletins were sent to a list of approximately one hundred addresses two times per month (**Appendix 14**). The bulletins highlighted regional events and meetings, advocacy actions and consultation exercises, and new resources, such as reports, studies and contacts that may be of interest to water caucus participants.

The Manitoba Eco-journal featured a water issue story in every publication over the past year. Copies of stories can be obtained by visiting the Manitoba Eco-Network website at: <http://www.mbeconetwork.org>. Future plans include the development of an educational water newsprint tabloid designed for mass distribution in Manitoba.

- **Networking and Presentations**

The water caucus coordinator attended ten conferences/workshops over the course of the project and made presentations to seven other similar events. The conferences provide a valuable venue to meet new colleagues, build associations and learn what is happening across the country. The coordinator sits as a regional representative on the water caucus of the Canadian

Environmental Network (CEN) and Council of Canadian Water Commons Network, which have been both inactive over the course of the last year. The coordinator also sits on the steering committee of the CEN Agriculture Caucus and is an alternate environmental board representative to the Red River Basin Commission, a forty-one board organization which includes members from South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba, Tribes and First Nations.

Future collaboration in the prairies will be a major focus for the new year, as four organizations (Alberta Environmental Network – Water Caucus, Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Manitoba Eco-Network Water Caucus and Sierra Club – Prairie Chapter) were successful in obtaining a grant for working together on some key prairie watershed issues. The Sierra Club will facilitate and manage this project.

The Manitoba Eco-Network held an environmental retreat in conjunction with a water caucus meeting in March 2006 near Riding Mountain National Park. The very successful and invigorating event helped draft a strategy and the required partnerships to develop a “community based watershed planning model” within the overexploited Little Saskatchewan River watershed. This model will be used as the basis for acquiring future funding so that a local coordinator can be hired in the Little Saskatchewan River region. A brief synopsis of the retreat can be found in **Appendix 15**.

The water caucus coordinator also sits on the Lake Winnipeg Forum Advisory Committee which is planning a governance workshop for mid-February to push forward the Healthy Lake Winnipeg Charter concept recommended by the Lake Winnipeg Implementation Committee.

Conclusions and Project Evaluation

Given the vast range of interests that intersect with water, undertaking issues with working groups proved to be an effective method for engaging citizens and organizations into the political realm. As indicated, there was moderate success in some instances in influencing decision-makers (Water for Life Declaration, CEC hearings for Pembina Valley Project, Manure Management Regulation amendment). Combined, the agribusiness lobby in Manitoba has access to over six million dollars annually. They ran an extensive lobby over the course of the year in efforts to weaken any proposed regulations, which many organizations felt were ineffectual to begin with.

It is anticipated that a provincial election, which may be called in the spring of 2007, will close the door for the introduction of any new environmental initiative. A recent poll conducted before the 2006-2007 provincial budget by the Finance Minister indicated that 80 per cent of Manitobans believed that protecting the water quality in Manitoba’s lakes and rivers is a high priority. This was the highest-ranking priority in the survey, surpassing health-care and road fixing. Unfortunately this finding was not reflected in the 2006-2007 provincial budget as Water Stewardship remains under staffed, under funded and unable to implement many aspects of Manitoba’s water strategy.

Our aim was to provide pertinent, user-friendly information and tools to assist ENGOs in their engagement in the policy process and assist the general public in learning about and understanding the importance of water issues in Manitoba. We also wanted to ensure that government got the best advice possible from community members with knowledge and experience of water-related issues. We feel that we have accomplished these goals, but realize that more can be done. General public information tabloids for mass distribution may be useful in engaging the general public. Mobilizing those citizens who care about our water may also be worth considering for the upcoming provincial election.

The Manitoba Eco-Network water caucus tackled many water issues over the last year. We believe that this project does enhance public understanding and engagement by playing a facilitative and clearinghouse role amongst environmental groups and other water interests, including government. It is our hope that decision makers see merit in this project and continue the partnership over the years to come.