



Preparing a Vision for the Lesser Slave Watershed

We want your help in shaping the Lesser Slave Watershed

The Lesser Slave Watershed Council is working with communities to improve the Watershed through sustainable water management and land use practices. The first step of this process involves building a shared vision for the watershed's future. We are inviting all watershed residents and stakeholders to participate in defining this vision, and to contribute the ideas, commitment and enthusiasm that will help us achieve it. HAVE YOUR SAY TODAY.

What is a watershed?



Water is a uniting force. It cycles around the globe, falling from the sky, moving across the land sinking into the soil, travelling down our rivers, or up our wells. A **Watershed** (or basin) is an area of land that catches precipitation and drains into a larger body of water such as a marsh, stream, or river, or lake. A watershed is often made up of a number of sub-watersheds that contribute to its overall drainage. No matter where you are, you're in a watershed. The Lesser Slave Watershed covers High Prairie, AB to Smith, AB. Watersheds can range in size from a few hectares to thousands of square kilometres. Lesser Slave Lake is the largest lake in the province, a popular tourist destination and a recognized biologically significant area for bird life.

The lake is a source of water for agriculture, forestry, and recreation/tourisms, domestic and municipal uses. It supports major sport, commercial and domestic fisheries. There are several beaches, campsites, recreation areas, cottages and two large provincial parks around the lake. Communities located on the shores of the lake include the Town of Slave Lake, the hamlet of Kinuso, the hamlets of Grouard, Jousard, Faust and Canyon Creek and the First Nation communities of Kapawe'no, Sucker Creek, Driftpile, Swan River, and Sawridge. Lesser Slave Lake has a surface area of approximately 1150km² and has a drainage area of approximately 12700 km². Much of the inflow water enters the western end of the lake at Buffalo Bay via the South Heart River and the East and West Prairie Rivers. On the southern shore the three largest tributaries are the Driftpile, Swan and Assineau rivers, which drain the southern part of the watershed. The outflow to the Lesser Slave River is located at the lake's east end. The Lesser Slave River joins the Athabasca River about 75 km downstream of the outlet. Our Watershed does three very important jobs 1) it captures water in form of snow and rain, 2) it filters and stores the water in the soil, and 3) it releases water, as surface run-off or groundwater, into Lesser Slave Lake and its tributaries.

The Lesser Slave Watershed Council

The Lesser Slave Watershed Council is a non-profit group of volunteers who work with the provincial government to maintain the health of the Lesser Slave Watershed. The LSWC is recognized as the Watershed Planning and Advisory Council by the Government of Alberta. Members of the council are representatives from towns, municipalities, first nations communities, industries, cottage owners, non-profit organizations as well as recreation and tourism groups who have an interest in how the waters of Lesser Slave Lake and its tributaries are managed. One of our roles is to lead our communities and stakeholders through the process of developing a watershed management plan for the basin. We work together with our members and partners to provide leadership and guidance in watershed planning and management, water quality monitoring and stewardship.

Integrated Watershed Management

Integrated Watershed Management is a comprehensive approach to managing water and land resources. This involves looking at what affects the health of rivers, wetlands, and riparian areas, particularly in relation to water quality and quantity. It combines local and scientific knowledge watersheds in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways. This means bringing scientists together with the people who live and work in a watershed, to identify watershed issues and goals, and to develop and implement plans for improving watershed management.



Forests, wetlands and riparian areas act as giant sponges that store and filter water. When we damage these ecosystems, we lower water quality, increase flood risk, and reduce the amount of water stored naturally in the watershed.



Preparing a Vision for the Integrated Watershed Management Plan

This will involve defining a shared vision for the watershed's future; one which is grounded by the values of those who live in the Lesser Slave Watershed. This means asking watershed residents and stakeholders some very important questions. How do we want our watershed to look in the next 10 to 50 years? How should we get there? What local skills and knowledge can help us better manage our watershed?

Over the summer and fall of 2012 the LSWC will be seeking answers to these questions by conducting surveys and interviews with the people of our watershed. The survey results will be used to develop a draft vision plan for the watershed. We will then use these interview and survey results to develop a draft vision for the watershed. This draft will be taken then to focus group meetings around the watershed for review and discussion. In the spring of 2013 a final Watershed Vision will be released and it will reflect what we heard from the people in the watershed.

In summary, the Watershed Vision achieved through this process will tell us how we want our future watershed to look. Reviewing and updating the State of the Watershed Report and conducting a watershed risk assessment will let us know how close or far from this vision we are. In the long term an integrated Watershed Management Plan signed off on by all stakeholders will outline what we need to do to reach our vision.