

Saskatchewan Alliance for Water Sustainability (SAWS)
Quill Lakes Watershed Association (QLWA)
Water Security Agency (WSA)
Meeting
Feb 13, 2020

Attending: Sam Ferris, WSA
Patrick Boyle, WSA
Sherry Forsyth, SAWS
Auralee MacPherson, SAWS
Dave Sutherland, SAWS
Murray Steffanson, SAWS
Rita Marcinowski, QLWA
Eugene Eggerman, QLWA
Raeleen Hamann, WSA (Recording)

Sherry began the meeting by outlining ground rules that would be followed. She then detailed that outcomes of the meeting were aimed at understanding what groups were trying to achieve and finding out if there was consensus amongst the groups. She mentioned that Minister Ottenbreit asked that the groups come together to work toward resolution. SAWS asked that presentations be shared with each other after the meeting.

Participants introduced themselves.

Sam confirmed that minutes of meeting will be shared with all participants.

Patrick provided building safety instructions to participants (as the meeting was held at WSA office).

QLWA Presentation:

Rita outlined the goals of the Association to be:

- Conducting a roundtable including government, QLWA, and community groups where information could be shared, and participants could work toward resolution.
- Determination of a flood mitigation project. Time has passed and little action has been taken. The Watershed Association has played a role in the issue and cannot manage the issue on its own.
- Determining how the project will be funded.
- Adhering to a targeted agenda including avoidance of irrelevant topics. Employing a strong, neutral moderator who will keep discussions on track and not monopolize conversations.

Dave: Asked if the group needed to talk about process recognizing all come with different philosophies and perspectives.

Patrick: What would be the ideal outcome according to QLWA?

Rita: A project that works for all stakeholders and outlines what roles each group would play, and how the project would be funded.

SAWS Presentation:

A comprehensive approach is needed that will protect quality of water, protect water levels, support agricultural producers and protect the environment.

The Quill Lakes don't drain because of the soil components (clay) and because they have no outflows.

The recommendations from SAWS for an approach are comprehensive and aimed at preventing further flood damage.

Dave outlined the goals of SAWS to be:

- Management of agricultural lands to prevent interbasin spillage from the Quill Lakes and tributaries;
- That WSA orders Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA);
- If another proposal is put forward by WSA, it would be subject to an EIA. Any other proposal put forward would have consultation with SAWS;
- Meeting UN Sustainable goals;
- Building partnerships;
- Protecting wetlands;
- Taking into account the 10 directives proposed by SAWS; and
- Justification for a roundtable. Fingers will continue to be pointed at the agricultural industry and how they contribute to flood damage.

What compliance has been achieved by permitting agricultural drainage?

Citing U of R recent reconstruction of water levels – how has agricultural drainage contributed to water levels?

The Pomeroy model is worthy of consideration and review – both the study and WSA agree that very wet periods contribute to water levels.

Does WSA support the QLWA point of view to lower lake levels?

Is there a basis to the level they want to lower it to?

What other possibilities will WSA consider?

What other incentives can be offered to agricultural producers?

How are wetlands assessed economically by WSA?

How do citizens know about what options are being considered by WSA for draining water basins?

Are there options to use the drained water for other things? e.g. potash mines

Eugene: A Reeve in the RM of Lakeside has recorded rainfall in the area for several years. One year he recorded four feet of rain, so there have been heavy rainfall periods in the past.

Patrick: What would be the ideal outcome for SAWS?

Dave responded that SAWS would like the recommendations they've brought forward addressed. KGS has recommended slow drainage out of the Quill Lake. The level comes up fast and evaporates very slowly. They would like the brightest and best brought together to work together. They would like the producers to be successful. They would like to find solutions.

Eugene: 519 metres above sea level would get all the agricultural land back.

Dave: The conclusions from the student research state that water levels have never been so high.

Auralee: Scientific information is needed from the government to recognize studies from elders and universities. The student conducting the research at the Quills wanted to continue but could not – perhaps it was a lack of funding? Could Rita post the study on the website?

Rita confirmed that study will be posted.

WSA Presentation

The Water Security Agency is responsible for managing the water supply, protecting water quality, ensuring safe drinking water, managing dams and water supply channels, reducing flood and drought damage and providing information on water. The Agency works to integrate all aspects of provincial water management to ensure water supplies support economic growth, quality of life and environmental well-being.

We strive to provide exceptional service and ensure that water management supports growth, productivity, a healthy environment and a high quality of life for Saskatchewan people. The intent of the Water Security Agency's Agricultural Water Management Strategy is responsible and sustainable drainage. **The Strategy seeks a balance**, where the impacts are mitigated, projects can be approved and will be sustainable and protect all interests. WSA carries a primary role as a regulator in consideration of any drainage or surface water works project. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to the Quill Lakes water levels. Quill Lakes (Big Quill Lake) is currently 1.3 metres below the natural spill point and 0.76 metres below peak spring (May) 2017 levels.

WSA is currently looking at water retention demonstration projects - primarily irrigation. These projects require testing - naming soil testing as just one aspect. WSA won't prevent stakeholders from bringing projects forward. Sam clarified that WSA does not bring EIA's forward – that is instead brought forward by the Ministry of Environment.

Patrick: To clarify the role of WSA, we are water managers and have our own set of approvals for any project, an EIA occurs before we approve a project. In the next 18 months our planned demonstration projects seek to find out what works on landscape for the environment and agricultural producers. Considering upland storage, perhaps federal funds will be required? Irrigation and other storage projects require testing and then who will support the projects and use them needs to be determined. Watershed Associations are also being created in the province to better manage water across the province and help implement the Agricultural Water Management Strategy and the regulatory requirements. WSA is primarily the regulator.

Sherry: Water quality and volume Information we receive speaks about water testing on the Kutawagan but not on Last Mountain Lake and the Bird Sanctuary. Will we see testing information on these also?

Rita: Remember, we are only at the preliminary stage of the process right now. That is the only information available simply because we are at the beginning stage. These named items will be tested as well, prior to an EIA being completed.

Dave: Does WSA have an interest in research being conducted on the agricultural producers' contributions to the issue?

Sam: Yes, but research takes time – sometimes it is years before data is available. In the meantime, weather and other events can dictate that immediate actions be taken.

Dave: As part of a roundtable all parties must review research that is currently available. What level of effort is put into alternatives to drainage? Are studies being conducted on alternate storage solutions?

Sam: Not currently although demonstration projects are being developed. Additionally, studies take time because funds and resources are not always available, for one thing. For another thing, the Strategy consumes (WSA) time and resources.

Previous studies on Kutawagan outlined potential work to divert water from entering Big Quill Lake, not draining water from Big Quill Lake. The concept did not receive acceptance by the stakeholders in the province, so the project was dropped. Previous studies on Lenore were financed by Watershed Associations – not by the government/WSA. Previous studies by Golder were not accepted. Often, science is not accepted by citizens if it doesn't support their position.

In relation to demonstration projects, could the federal government provide funds? Who will support and/or use the projects? A recommended approach would be to start small and get test results.

Auralee: With climate change what will happen? According to David Sawchyn we could be looking at 100 years of drought.

Dave: Asked if demonstration projects on the go now, could be shared.

Patrick: There is nothing specific to share currently. This is simply an approach.

Dave: For wildlife protection we need diversity. For nutrient protection we need a sustainable reservoir/basin. There is real value to discussion on scientific research and is what is required.

Patrick: The previous 2014-2015 diversion project was abandoned due to lack of support from stakeholders.

Eugene: I would like to see the Kutawagan project documents again. It had good science. Consultations should have support from producers and citizens and the cost was huge, so the project was dropped.

Auralee: PEI went through the same thing. Potatoes were wiped out by chemicals on land and their government brought everything and everyone together and put farmers first. The government should pick up the phone and ask PEI how to do this. This is how SAWS modelled their goals and objectives.

Rita: If WSA is the regulator, who is the proponent? The Watershed Association can't fund an EIA.

Patrick: Any project needs to be acceptable to all stakeholders involved.

Sherry: A roundtable needs both the federal and provincial government and they both need to commit funds to a resolution. Following this meeting, SAWS will report the goals from all three groups to the Minister and let the Minister know that we have consensus and need funds.

Sam: WSA was not certain a commitment could be gained.

Dave: Can we use this roundtable as a body for projects to be brought to? Could we propose that this stakeholder group can make decisions?

Sam: Our President needs to be consulted first and then eventually this will be taken to the Minister.

We are not in favor of a roundtable because many options were brought forward in the past, and all were very expensive. We are not sure there could be any solutions that are easy. They will be expensive, and reconsideration of these would likely leave us in the same place as in the past.

The federal government is talking about forming a Canada Water Agency. A federal flood mitigation program is also being considered.

Sherry: Having no solution means the alternative is worse because its reactive.

Eugene: Six groups and the Watershed Association were to bring a project forward. The groups didn't have resources or funds to bring a project forward.

Sherry: That's why we insist that both levels of government bring projects forward.

Auralee: Felt it was unfair that citizen groups and downstream people and agricultural producers had to bring solutions forward. We want WSA to show leadership and succeed. The province is broke. How do we do this? We work together.

Rita: If WSA can't attend a roundtable down the road how do we go forward? We suggest that next, the Minister be contacted, and he needs to bring people together and lead the group towards resolution.

Dave: Sam must talk to the President first, and then will they contact the Minister?

Sherry: Agreed.

Patrick: To clarify, SAWS will contact the Minister after WSA discusses the issue with the Minister.

Both groups agreed that the Minister will be asked to make a commitment to finding solutions.

This was clarified.

Dave: How much support does QLWA have?

Rita: The entire Board and the adjoining RMs are supportive.

Patrick explained that a group of municipalities join, and a Watershed Association is formed by Order in Council.

SAWS noted they were pleased with the meeting and it appeared that the group had moved forward by coming together.

SAWS & QLWA agreed to exchange goals with each other.