

Annual Report to the Ministers

2006
- 2007



Mackenzie River Basin Board Annual Report 2006-2007

This is the Annual Report to the Ministers on the activities of the Mackenzie River Basin Board (MRRB), which was established under the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement. The Report covers fiscal year April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Introduction

During the summer and fall of 2006, the Athabasca, Peace and Slave Rivers experienced extremely low flow conditions. These abnormal conditions captured a great deal of public attention and raised concerns amongst the residents of these sub-basins and in downstream regions of the Mackenzie Basin.

Mackenzie River Basin Board Business

The Board met face-to-face on October 23-25, 2006 at the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife, NWT.

On the morning of October 25, 2006, the Board received a visit and presentation from Michael Miltenberger, Member of the Legislative Assembly of the NWT from Thebacha (Fort Smith). Mr. Miltenberger informed the Board of conclusions he had formed after hosting a meeting of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment in early October 2006. He observed that in every forum and conversation, two issues were prominent - the impacts of climate change, and water quality and quantity. He gave the Board a “heads up” warning that water issues, particularly water issues in the Mackenzie River Basin, were becoming increasingly political.

He recognized that the MRBB was an important vehicle for informing the public in the Mackenzie watershed. He told the Board of preliminary discussions for a Water Summit meeting of Ministers and governments that are participants in the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement. He advised the Board to re-think its mandate, develop a list of things that need to be done and to be ready for increased interest and support by decision makers for work on watershed issues in the Basin.

The Members agreed that an increase in awareness and attention was welcome and the bi-lateral processes needed to “ramp-up”.

MRBB Operations Committee

Jim Vollmershausen, Chair of the MRBB, informed the Board of his involvement as a Member of the Alberta Oil Sands Multi-stakeholder Committee. An MRBB intervention had been received and distributed to Members of the Multi-Stakeholder Committee. The intervention directed the committee to relevant issues and Board documents, including the Board's guiding principles, Strategic Plan, and State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report.

The Board discussed the issue of intervention in environmental assessment processes within member jurisdictions. It was agreed that generally the Board might intervene in processes at the EA or Review Panel stage of assessment, but not in preliminary or screening stages of assessment. Members agreed to keep the Board informed of processes where a Board intervention would be appropriate.

- **Strategic Plan**

The Secretariat and the Operations Committee reviewed the Strategic Plan with a focus on the need to either rewrite the plan or remove the “draft” designation. During the spring and summer of 2006, Robert Harrison and Jack Van Camp redrafted the Plan and presented a new draft to the Operations Committee for recommendation to the Board. The original “Draft Strategic Plan” had received a great deal of attention from the Board and had generated general support from the members. Members discussed the new draft in detail, with the objective of generating the same level of support for it.

The most important changes to the Strategic Plan were the explanation of the roles of the Board (Table 1) and the identification of basin-wide and transboundary issues (Table 2) to focus the work of the Board for the next five years.

Table 1

Roles of the Board

The following actions define the Board's role in water management in the basin and support the achievement of the Board's goals. These actions may focus on local, regional, basin-wide, national and international issues. Smaller scale issues at the local and regional levels are generally best handled by individual jurisdictions. It is the larger scale issues that affect the entire basin or cross boundaries between jurisdictions that require the advocacy and cooperative focus of the Board.

- *The Board will **evaluate** the ecological health of the whole basin.*
- *The Board will **investigate** matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin.*
- *The Board will **advocate** for the maintenance and improvement of the ecological health of the whole basin.*
- *The Board will learn from others, share information and **educate** the public about matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin.*
- *The Board will encourage and **facilitate** the development of **Bilateral Water Management Agreements**.*

Table 2

Five Year Strategic Focus

These are the basin-wide and trans-boundary issues that will focus and direct the Board's business plans for the next five years.

- *Improving Knowledge*
- *Including Traditional Ecological Knowledge*
- *Responding to Climate Change*
- *Understanding Contaminants in Drinking Water and Country Foods*
- *Protecting Aquatic Ecosystem Biodiversity*
- *Developing a Watershed Approach*

MRBB Communications Committee

Progress was made in communicating the key messages from the State of the Aquatic Ecosystem report (SOAER). This includes; distribution of printed copies of both the highlights version and the full report; presentations to various stakeholder groups; submission interventions to the Oilsands Multi-stakeholder Committee and the Joint Review Panel for the Mackenzie Gas Project; responses to telephone requests for information; and electronic distribution of reports via the Board's website and those of member jurisdictions.

Presentations about the Board and the State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report were made to the Water Keepers forum in Fort Simpson September 06, 2006; to the Parliament of Canada Standing Committee on Natural Resources on November 09, 2006; and to the NWT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development on January 16, 2007. The Secretariat will continue to circulate the Board's documents and respond to invitations for presentations and interventions. The Board's website will be maintained and updated.

MRBB SOAER Committee

The MRBB SOAER 2009 Framework for Development was prepared by the Board's SOAER Steering Committee. The framework calls for a three to five person steering committee of board members, including at least one Aboriginal member (no delegates). The Steering committee will develop objectives, determine timelines and approve work-plans including budgets developed by the working group.

The working group will consist of representatives of all signatories to the Transboundary Waters Master Agreement and a minimum of two Aboriginal members of the Board. Non-member Aboriginal people may be considered for membership on the working group. The Chair will be selected by the Steering committee. The working group will report, through its Chair, to the SOAER Steering Committee.

The working group is expected to work closely with the Technical Committee and may seek information from that group. It is expected that the working group will also work closely with the Communications Committee. The next report is an important communications tool for the Board and messages need to be timely, consistent and appropriate. This working group is ultimately responsible for the preparation of the next SOAER.

MRBB Technical Committee

The Technical Committee has formed three sub-committees:

- **Hydrology Sub-Committee**

During 2006, the Hydrology Committee held a number of meetings to develop the Terms of Reference for the "Development and Operationalization of a Single, Integrated Flow Simulation Model for the Peace, Athabasca, and Mackenzie River System". The Terms of Reference for the study were approved by the Board in July and Phase I was contracted to Dr. Al Pietroniro. The Phase I component was an evaluation of already existing modeled reaches, and data gaps. It contains an assessment and recommendations regarding the model and modeling platform to be used for reaches that have not been modeled, or are not at an acceptable level of accuracy. The report would essentially form the Terms of Reference for the Phase II component in fiscal year 2007-08, when the actual model will be developed. The Board has reserved the total of its carry forward funds to support Phase II of the study.

- **Water Quality Protocol/Standards Sub-Committee**

This sub-committee is evaluating differences in jurisdictional protocols and standards for measuring water quality. During 2006, nominations were made to the Water Quality Protocol/Standards Sub-Committee. A draft work plan was developed and circulated to

members. It is not likely that this sub-committee will have results in time for the next SOAER.

- **Information Sub –Committee**

During 2006, representatives from each jurisdiction were named to the Information Sub-Committee. In addition, a list was developed, outlining information sources and libraries with information on the Mackenzie River Basin relevant to the MRBB. In January 2006, this list was distributed to the Information Sub-committee for review. It was also recognized that Traditional Knowledge information resources should be included in this exercise.

Progress on Bilateral Agreements

- **BC/ Alberta**

The parties had regular conference calls or meetings throughout the year including a meeting in July 2006 involving BC Hydro, to address the question of “What would a successful Bi-lateral Agreement look like?” A draft framework agreement has been prepared. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Negotiations was signed in March 2005 that set out four key phases of development, including: information gathering and sharing; negotiations and drafting; consultations; and approval. The first of these phases was substantially completed in 06/07, culminating in a workshop in Victoria in January 2007. The first negotiation session occurred in March 2007. The MOU targeted completion of the agreement for March 2008. Resources have been assigned and the process is on track.

- **Alberta/ Canada/ NWT**

The parties agreed on a process to develop an MOU in November 2006. The agreement was forwarded for a legal assessment by GNWT.

- **NWT/ Yukon**

This is the only completed bi-lateral agreement. A meeting between parties to discuss the agreement was held in Dawson City in the summer of 2006.

New Business – Traditional Knowledge Workshop

Crosscurrent Associates Ltd. was contracted by the Board to facilitate a workshop on Traditional Knowledge (TK) on October 24, 2006. The services of Francois Paulette of Fort Fitzgerald, Sonny Flett of Fort Chipewyan, and Elmer Ghostkeeper of the Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement were engaged as resource people for the workshop. Gabrielle

Mackenzie-Scott, chair of the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (MVEIRB), also participated as a resource person. The MVEIRB has experience integrating TK into environmental research and assessments.

The resource people had the following initial comments / concerns:

- the land is a powerful teacher;
- TK encompasses the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of life;
- TK compliments and enhances Western scientific information;
- scientists and TK holders must work in partnership to gain a more thorough understanding of the natural environment;
- Francois Paulette shared an illustration of his world view the Dene Ch'anié - The Path We Walk. (Figure 1).

One of the key issues discussed was the degree to which the MRBB 'values' TK rather than addressing it solely as a 'duty'. Aboriginal members did not feel that the Board has demonstrated, through its actions, a real commitment to the inclusion of TK as a valued component of Board business. Methods of demonstrating a stronger commitment to TK were discussed.

The discussion that took place was frank, heartfelt, and, sometimes intense. It was also very productive and resulted in the identification of steps that could be taken by the MRBB to enhance the incorporation of TK into its activities (Table 3).

Table 3

Conclusions and Advice from the MRBB Traditional Knowledge Workshop

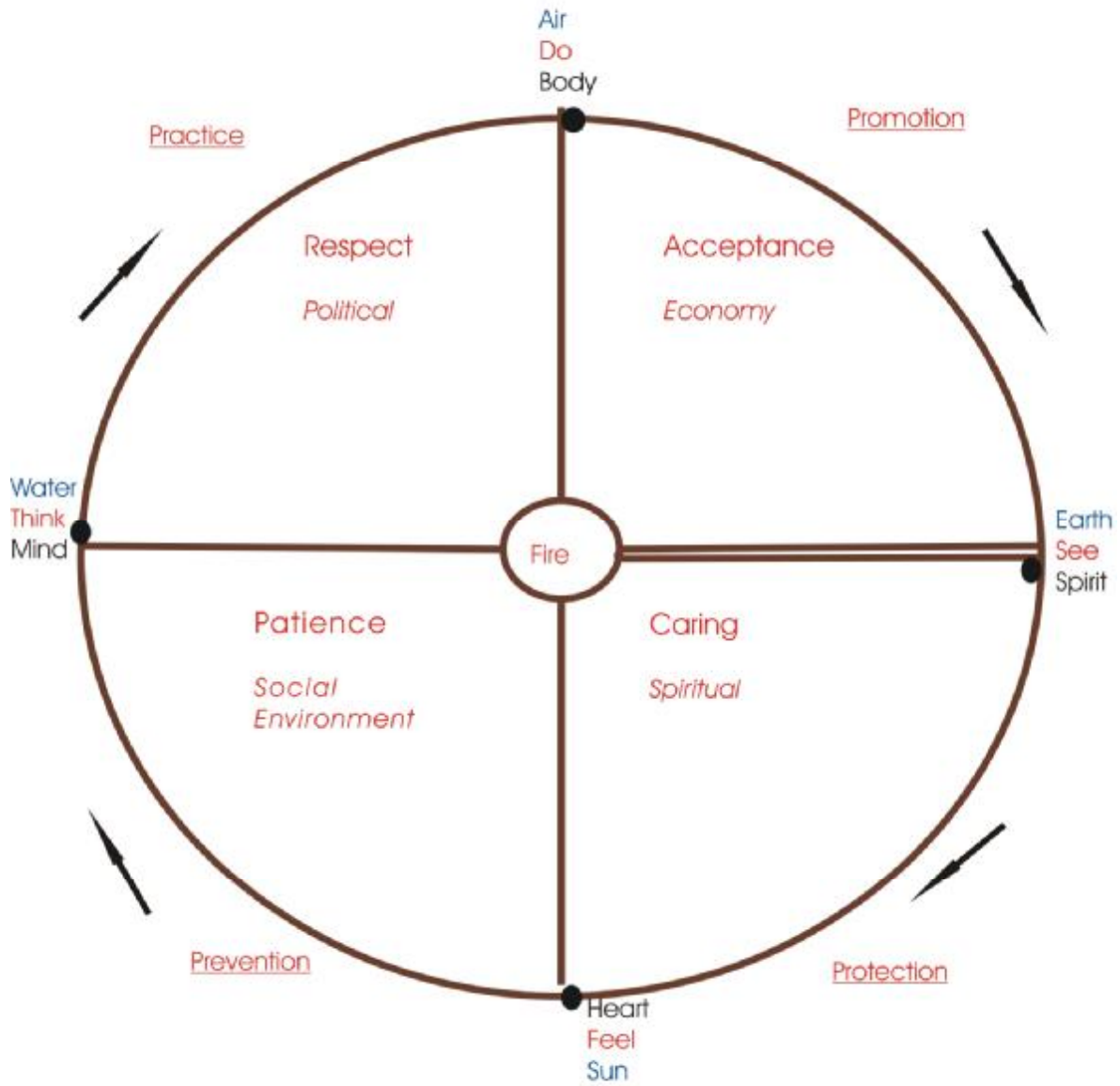
The MRBB acknowledged that it needs to take more proactive steps to demonstrate its commitment to Part D, Section 2c of the *Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement* (ie. providing culturally appropriate communications and incorporating traditional knowledge and values). The workshop facilitator summarized the following actions for consideration by the Board.

- 1) **The MRBB** should acknowledge and promote the value of TK to a greater extent at the 'policy' level, by ensuring that specific mention of TK is made in formal documents, such as the strategic plan and research-project 'terms of reference' (ex. hydrology study). The Board should also ensure that guidelines for the incorporation of TK into MRBB research activities are formulated and implemented.
- 2) **The MRBB** should identify existing sources of TK information and resources (including human resources) and establish relationships and formal protocols (such as TK access-usage agreements) that would allow for the incorporation of this information into MRBB activities and processes. (The MRBB does not have to be a 'clearinghouse' for this information but can be a portal to advise researchers and other stakeholders of the existence of these materials and the value of utilizing them for research, planning, and assessment purposes.)
- 3) **The MRBB** should establish and implement mechanisms for TK holders and Western researchers to dialogue and work cooperatively to address and more fully understand changes to the aquatic ecosystem. For example, the Board could organize and/or support round table discussions between TK holders and scientists / technicians regarding issues of importance to the Basin.
- 4) **The MRBB** should establish closer liaison and working relationships with the Aboriginal communities within the Mackenzie Basin (perhaps through established First Nation and Métis councils) in order to bring TK-based concerns to the table on an ongoing basis.
- 5) **The MRBB** should develop strategies to raise the awareness of its member governments with respect to the value of TK and promote TK usage at all levels of research and assessment.
- 6) **The MRBB** should strike an internal Traditional Knowledge Committee to oversee the implementation of these recommendations (and others, as they arise) once they have been further discussed, refined, and adopted.

Figure 1

Dene Ch'anié (The Path We Walk)

(c) Francois Paulette 2006



Way of Life
Code of Conduct

Table 4 presents a summary of the Board's expenditures during the 2006-2007 fiscal years.

Table 4	
2006-2007 MRBB Financial Report	
06-07 Receipts	Amount
Year End 2005/2006 - Carry Forward	\$60,890.11
Government of Saskatchewan	\$40,000.00
Government of Alberta	\$40,000.00
Government of North West Territories	\$40,000.00
Government of Yukon	\$40,000.00
Government of B.C.	\$40,000.00
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development	\$40,000.00
Environment Canada	\$40,000.00
(a) Total 06-07 Receipts	\$340,890.11
06-07 Expenditures by Standard Object	Amount
Stand.Obj. 01- Personnel	\$149,611.22
Stand.Obj. 02- Transportation and Telecommunications	\$20,777.81
Stand.Obj. 03- Information	\$5,190.50
Stand.Obj. 04- Professional and Special Services	\$27,497.90
Stand.Obj. 05- Rentals	\$21,550.59
Stand.Obj. 07- Utilities, Materials and Supplies	\$2,730.05
Stand.Obj. 09- Acquisition of Machinery & Equipment, incl.parts and consumable tools	\$554.99
Stand.Obj.12- Other Subsidies and Payments	\$19.44
(b) Total 06-07 Expenditures by Standard Object	\$227,932.50
(c = a-b) 06-07 Carry Forward	\$112,957.61