



The Board's Vision: A healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystem for the benefit of present and future generations.

## Mackenzie River Basin Board Secretariat

### Mackenzie River Basin Board Meeting No. 78

Day 1 December 5, 2023

Virtual Meeting

9:00 am to 12:00 pm PST; 10:00 am to 1:00 pm MST; 11:00 pm to 2:00 pm CST

#### Attendees

|                           |                      |                       |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ella Parker               | Government Alternate | Yukon                 |
| Jonah Mitchell            | Government Member    | Parks Canada          |
| Thon Phommavong           | Government Member    | Saskatchewan          |
| Patrick Cherneski         | Government Alternate | ECCC                  |
| Nadine Stiller (day 1)    | Government Member    | ECCC                  |
| Vice Chief Joseph Tsannie | Indigenous Member    | Saskatchewan          |
| Heather Jirousek          | Government Member    | Yukon                 |
| Stanley Njootli Sr.       | Indigenous Member    | Yukon                 |
| Laurie Wein               | Government Alternate | Parks Canada          |
| Ted Zimmerman             | Government Member    | British Columbia      |
| Meghan Beveridge          | Government Alternate | Northwest Territories |
| Alden Armstrong           | Indigenous Member    | Alberta               |
| Leon Andrew               | indigenous Member    | Northwest Territories |
| Carmen de la Chevrotière  | Government Alternate | Alberta               |
| Lana Lowe                 | Indigenous Member    | British Columbia      |
| Sean Moore (day 2)        | Government Alternate | British Columbia      |

#### Secretariat

Paula Siwik MRBB Executive Director

#### Guest

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Avery Deboer-Smith              | Government of British Columbia                |
| Lana Miller (day 2)             | Government of British Columbia                |
| Merrell-Ann Phare (day 1)       | Center for Indigenous Environmental Resources |
| Richard Farthing-Nichol (day 1) | Center for Indigenous Environmental Resources |

#### 78.1 Welcome Roundtable

- Alden Armstrong joined the meeting. Alden is soon to be appointed Indigenous MRBB member for Alberta.
- Alden has 39 years of experience with Aboriginal Governments. Most recently he was elected as the chairman of the Paddle Prairie Metis settlement. He has been on the board of directors for Northern Alberta Development Council, the Alberta outfitters Society, and Manning Diversified Forest Products. Alden has worked closely with Alberta

government ministries in policy development and has been involved in key projects such as the Metis Settlements Long Term Arrangement, Fox Lake Community School, Garden River Road, Wentzel Bridge Project, Paddle Prairie Recreation Complex and Housing Program. Alden has been elected five times to the Paddle Prairie Council, is serving a fourth term as Chairman and spent one term as Vice-Chairman. He was also elected President of the Metis Settlements General Council for one term. Because of his election to office, he was able to provide the northern perspective to Alberta's Water for Life Strategy and ensured that the north was served while he was director on the Rural Alberta Development Fund. His community service has been recognized in 2022 with the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Medal and 2005 with an Alberta Centennial Medal. Alden served for two terms on the Mackenzie River Basin Board between 1998 and 2006. Alden is a lifelong hunter and registered trapper, as well as a traditional knowledge keeper.

## **78.2 Agenda**

### **78.3 Approval of Minutes**

- i. Meeting 76 minutes
  - Meeting 76 minutes will be approved over email in January 2024.
- ii. Meeting 77 minutes – MRBB business the morning of day 1
  - Minutes from the MRBB business portion of Meeting 77 will be approved over email in January.

### **78.4 Meeting 78 Activity Table**

- Some longer-term items moved to an “ongoing” table so as not to lose track of them. This includes items linked to Strategic Plan and work plan discussions and some topics that are evolving such as the SOAER and the BWMA's.

### **78.5 Sept 23 Meeting Report and next steps in SP development**

- Draft workshop report captured the big ideas and themes.
  - **Reconciliation:** Advance reconciliation through meaningful work of the Board, by realigning and modernizing governance, and through braiding multiple knowledge systems.
  - **Climate Change:** We need to develop an understanding of the impacts of current and future climate change at the basin scale for the purposes of adaptation.
  - **Communication, Education and Outreach:** The Board will be a conduit for the voices of the basin so we can take action to amplify the issues at the basin scale, raise the profile of our work, and ensure ongoing relevancy.
  - **Strategic Investment and Partnerships:** Strategically position the MRBB to shape and influence how funding and investments are distributed in the Mackenzie basin, including through partnerships.

- **Social Health and Well Being:** Building a better understanding and raising awareness of the risks to the social health and wellbeing of communities in the basin, as well as recommending potential strategies to reduce or mitigate the risks.
- The report also included a proposed Strategic Plan outline and flagged areas that require longer term consideration and discussion.
- Would appreciate feedback on a) the report overall, b) are the pieces in the report at the right scale to “lift and shift” into a stand-alone Strategic Plan? Would appreciate suggestions on a path forward and comments on whether the MRBB should procure services of a contractor to move this forward.
- Previous Strategic Plan included an emphasis on Traditional Knowledge.
- Reconciliation is a massive undertaking. MRBB members will need to pay attention to how the guiding principles are implemented. The MRBB should develop principles and protocols around IK and TK that consider reconciliation.
- This work requires that we think through different pieces. It is important for the MRBB to articulate intentions around reconciliation and be honest about obstacles.
- The government of British Columbia established a water table that included Indigenous voices from across the province in the development of a common framework. This approach has helped advance projects with Indigenous peoples across B.C.
- The Strategic Plan is a signal. It sets a foundational context on how we work on joint matters. The guiding principles add more work but are worth having as a foundation.

#### **78.6 Secretariat Update**

- In addition to the Executive Director, the MRBB Secretariat currently a term employee, a casual employee who provide website support, and an Interchange employee from the Government of Alberta.
- The MRBB WordPress site went public in October 2023.

#### **78.7 Collaborative Leadership Initiative – CIER**

- CIER is a national Indigenous organization. The Collaborative Leadership Initiative (CLI) grew out of a collaboration in Manitoba.
- Transboundary cooperation is required for water. Everyone has decision-making authority on water at different levels and in different ways. Reconciliation and consent are the two big drivers when discussing water. Limits and boundaries exist which make it challenging to discuss water without raising expectations.
- The process includes a series of conversations and activities that explore what we have in common and identify areas that we can work on.
- CIER has funding to support four CLI projects and the hope is to include four different governance relationships. The MRBB is an existing governance structure within an evolving context. CIER can fund the work and will require 3 meetings to talk through issues.
- The process will start with personal interviews. Feedback will be compiled into a report that will be used as a starting point to explore possibilities.

- The commitment in this process is to be straightforward. At points there may be ideas that an individual likes, but in providing support they are not committing the system to adopt it. The process may explore topics that can't be changed but in discussing them we may discover areas of flexibility. The idea is to look at what is possible.
- Reconciliation is a process and this work could offer new ideas on how we work for water and what we bring to the table. This process is not focussed on changing the Master Agreement but the information we learn could feed into future discussions.
- MRBB members will embark on a CLI process.

## 78.8 2023 Agency Reports – Part 1

Agency reports are available to the public on the MRBB website under the Resources section ([Government Agency Reports • Mackenzie River Basin Board \(mrbb.ca\)](#))

### a) Yukon

- Northwest Territories and Yukon Governments organized a meeting in Inuvik to work on implementation of the 2022 agreement for the Peel.
- A flood mapping initiative is planned for the upper Liard. The current focus is the Yukon River basin.
- Yukon State of the Environment report was released last week.
- Regional land use planning is underway that includes legal designation and management plans for protected areas.
- Three new wells were installed in the Watson Lake area in 2022 to support aquifer mapping. This work was carried out in collaboration with the Liard First Nation and the Dena Kayeh Institute.
- There are water quality monitoring stations in Old Crow and Watson Lake.
- From a hydrology perspective, Yukon Territory typically augments federal sampling with a territorial network, but that network was wiped in 2023 as a result of ice jamming.
- A flood atlas web portal was launched in spring 2023. Draft flood maps will be posted on this site. [Flood Atlas \(yukon.ca\)](#).
- Water is low on the Porcupine River that flows into Yukon. Twenty years ago, biologists said that rising temperatures would affect the salmon. Temperatures are now higher. There was a good run on Chinook and Chum this year and currently the freshwater fish are doing ok. Interested to know how the Inconnu (coney) are doing?
- There is a lot of slumping in the headwaters of the Peel River especially on east facing hills.

### b) British Columbia

- The agency report shares a lot of detail so will focus on some highlights.
- Drought was very consequential in 2023 and exposed some vulnerabilities around social connection. The long-term forecast is a concern.
- The Government of B.C. implemented a 100 million water security investment fund. It is a collaboratively managed fund with Indigenous governments in B.C.
- Advancing regulatory governance in B.C. which includes a water sustainability plan under the Water Stewardship Act.

### c) Northwest Territories

- There was a water strategy camp by Fort Good Hope this summer. There was very little rain this spring. People were monitoring rain in the high mountains. Water is typically high at this time but, after being at the river for 10 days, the water dropped instead of rising. The rain in the Nahanni, Keele, Redstone etc. did not show up in the Mackenzie.
- The spring barges arrived but water was low. Water level is down everywhere in the Sahtu region.
- This fall there has been very little snow. It is still relatively warm, but the river has frozen. Right now, there is hardly any snow.
- Territorial election was held on Nov 14, 2023. MLAs will choose the new premier soon but the government is still in a blackout period at the moment.
- The NWT/Saskatchewan BWMA has made a lot of progress. NWT is also working on a transboundary agreement with Nunavut. Work continues with British Columbia, Yukon and Alberta.
- NWT Water Stewardship Strategy: Mid-way point of the current action plan.
- Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-28 includes plans to establish protected areas.
- The Government of NWT is nominating the Mackenzie River to the Canadian Heritage River Systems. The nomination documents are being drafted.
- Climate change: The Northwest Territories has a climate change council made up of Indigenous representatives.
- Water levels have been low since July 2022. The Hay River is low, and the Great Slave Lake has gone from a record high to low levels.
- The fishermen in Great Bear Lake check their nets twice a day now. If fish stay in the nets they get mushy so they need to check more often. They did not have to do that before. Cisco herring used to be in the river around Fort Good Hope. Residents have not seen them these past few years.

### **Draft Agenda, Mackenzie River Basin Board Meeting No. 78**

Day 2 December 6, 2023

Virtual Meeting

9:00 am to 12:00 pm PST; 10:00 am to 1:00 pm MST; 11:00 pm to 2:00 pm CST

#### **78.9 Welcome Back**

#### **78.10 SOAER documents**

##### Updated Committee Terms of Reference

- An updated ToR for the SOAER Committee was included for review in the meeting package.

##### SOAER Operations Document

- P. Siwik: An operations document is being developed that will guide updates to the SOAER. This is an evergreen working document.

- MRBB members would like to see a clear articulation of the information that will be included on the SOAER update. The SOAER Committee chair will give an update to MRBB members at a future meeting.

#### **78.11 Shared science:** clarify next steps and expectations.

- MRBB members identified flood mapping and climate modeling as topics that may require follow up discussion. This agenda item is intended to allow members to share additional information and identify actions for the MRBB Secretariat if required.
- *Flood mapping:* NRCan has recently released new flood mapping work. ([Federal Flood Mapping Guidelines Series \(canada.ca\)](#))
- Alberta government and the government of NWT are working on flood maps.
- Paddle Prairie undertook a flood study. Community members have questions about the focus on floods during a drought. Need to consider how to keep people informed and aware. The climate controls everything.
- Communities need a toolbox that empowers them to share information and that supports decision making. Realtime information on water levels is important. How do we get timely information and communicate that to communities?
- *Climate Modeling:* The government of Alberta shared the transboundary climate model currently under development at Meeting 77; further updates can be presented if people are interested..
- Many jurisdictions are using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). LiDAR information could be considered for the next SOAER.

#### **78.12 Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the BWMA**

- Appendix C is included in all of the BWMA signed to date. It is the part of the BWMA that reference Traditional and Local Knowledge. It includes a preamble, a list of practices, and a commitment to the development of a framework that would guide the meaningful inclusion of Traditional Knowledge. There are differences in how Appendix C is being approached and implemented.

##### *Alberta/NWT BWMA – TK Framework*

- The Alberta/Northwest Territories BMC members are working with an advisory circle to develop an approach that will support inclusive and meaningful inclusion of Traditional Knowledge.
- At the first meeting participants developed a shared understanding and planning context. Advisory circle members offered reflections and gave direction.
- The April 2023 meeting focussed on co-development of a declaration by Indigenous members. Circle members are working together to generate a vision and guiding principles to inform the draft TK framework document which the participants refer to as a wayfinding guide.
- Participants discussed how the language in the BWMA does not align with current thinking or good practices. As a result, the language in Appendix C attached to the 2015 BWMA has been amended to reflect the shared understanding of “meaningful inclusion” at the direct request of Advisory Circle members.

- A space of trust has been created. The process models a collaborative process and is working at the speed of trust.

*Yukon/B.C. BWMA – river classification*

- The Yukon/B.C. BWMA also has Appendix C but it is being applied in different context. People living in that area of the basin have seen an unprecedented level of change. Considering Indigenous Knowledge in a contemporary context.
- Initial classification work in the Liard subbasin was done quickly and did not reflect a holistic understanding. The first approach was a bit rigid, limited and did not consider adequately Indigenous considerations and Knowledges.
- In February 2021 a new approach that included qualitative and quantitative information was included in the assessment. The Dena Kayeh Institute supported the approach and worked collaboratively to develop and share a survey with the public. Received 39 responses from community members. The Bilateral Management Committee reflected on the feedback and input, created a worksheet, and developed an overview. The surveys turned attention toward what Indigenous nations were seeing on the ground. The Upper Liard was reporting as being in good shape but further downstream was considered “fair”. Given that feedback, the Liard was reclassified as a class 2 river. This triggered the need for a learning plan for the Liard. This is a good example of collaboration and the benefit of using different tools to get different information and better reflect the Liard subbasin.
- Currently working with Fort Nelson First Nation to assess watersheds and potential concerns and changes in that assessment. Lots of layers to weaving.

*Liard multi-lateral process – Land and Peoples Model*

- Work in the Liard subbasin is being guided by the Land and Peoples Relationship Model. Elder Copper Joe Jack is leading the process with the support of 2 Bilateral Management Committees (BMCs).
- At the core of the process are the rules of engagement – Respect, Care, Share and creating a space for “No Voice”. This process is also working at the speed of trust.
- The BMCs agreed to move ahead together in May 2022 and coordinated an elders circle in November 2022. The group worked through institutional barriers to allowing IK holders to retain IP rights to knowledge.
- Elders were grateful for the event and saw it as progress. There will likely be other opportunities for elders across the basin to connect during this process.
- Some of the challenges encountered included:
  - Institutions are not well set up to protect IK. Elder Copper Joe Jack had to hold the IK until government lawyers could ensure that IK was not subject to ATIP.
  - The process is expensive and different government systems/processes do not work well together.

**78.13 Agency Reports – Part 2**

Agency reports are available to the public on the MRBB website under the Resources section ([Government Agency Reports • Mackenzie River Basin Board \(mrbb.ca\)](#))

d) Alberta

- The Government of Alberta report is prepared to satisfy the needs of both PPWB and MRBB. This year, the agency report includes an overview of the regulatory compliance program review, and a flood hazard overview. The report will include an update on the Community Based Monitoring program in the future.
- e) Saskatchewan
- Continue working on Bilateral Water Management Agreements with the province of Alberta and the Northwest Territories.
  - The government of Saskatchewan has established growth targets and that could have implications for water use.
  - The 2023 Critical Mineral Strategy could be important for Northern Saskatchewan pending the results of exploration work.
  - The government of Saskatchewan has launched Geo Hub - [Government of Saskatchewan](#). Hope to include flood maps in the future.
- f) ECCC
- The ECCC report follows the standard template of past reports and includes an update on Wood Buffalo National Park and a summary of water quality and water quantity information.
  - The Mackenzie River Basin is a priority for the Water Agency. Currently awaiting information on available resources.
- g) Parks Canada Agency
- Long-term drying trends continue. There are discussions and planning to explore whether water levels can be manipulated in order to benefit the Peace Athabasca Delta. Considering water adaptation and mitigation could look like.
- h) CIRNAC
- Member and alternate were not able to attend the meeting.

#### **78.14 Look Ahead**

Meeting 79 - virtual administrative meeting – late April/early May  
Meeting 80 – either an in-person meeting in Yukon or virtual

#### **78.15 Meeting Close**

**Goal 1. Evaluate the health of the whole basin**

**Goal 2. Investigate matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin**

**Goal 3. Advocate for the maintenance and improvement of the ecological health of the whole basin**

**Goal 4. Educate the public, share information, and learn from others about matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin**

**Goal 5. Support and facilitate the increased participation of Indigenous Peoples in MRBB activities**

**Goal 6. Encourage the development and implementation of bilateral water management agreements**

**Goal 7. Ministers, Indigenous leaders and appropriate staff of jurisdictions are informed of and engaged in MRBB activities**

**Goal 8. Information, knowledge and research are shared among jurisdictions – written reports**

**Goal 9. MRBB affairs are administered effectively.**