

Vermilion River

WATERSHED ALLIANCE



2016-2017 annual report



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ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017

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9 June 2017

Prepared by:



North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

INTRODUCTION

The Vermilion River Watershed Alliance (VRWA) was incorporated as a non-profit society in 2015. The alliance is made up of local volunteers working side by side in the watershed (Figure 1). General members come from local towns and counties, federal and provincial governments, conservation groups, and the general public. The VRWA also has a strong partnership with the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA).

The VRWA is guided by the goals, directions, and actions of the Vermilion River Watershed Management Plan (2012). This plan was designed with input from the public to define what the watershed means to those who live, work, and play here. The VRWA believes the watershed is the unit of management for human activities that affect the environment, including air, land, water, and wildlife.

VRWA Goals (as listed in the 2012 VRWMP)

- Develop capacity and knowledge in the watershed
- Improve reliability of surface water supply
- Improve and maintain surface water quality
- Improve and maintain water ecosystem health
- Protect and sustain groundwater quality and supply

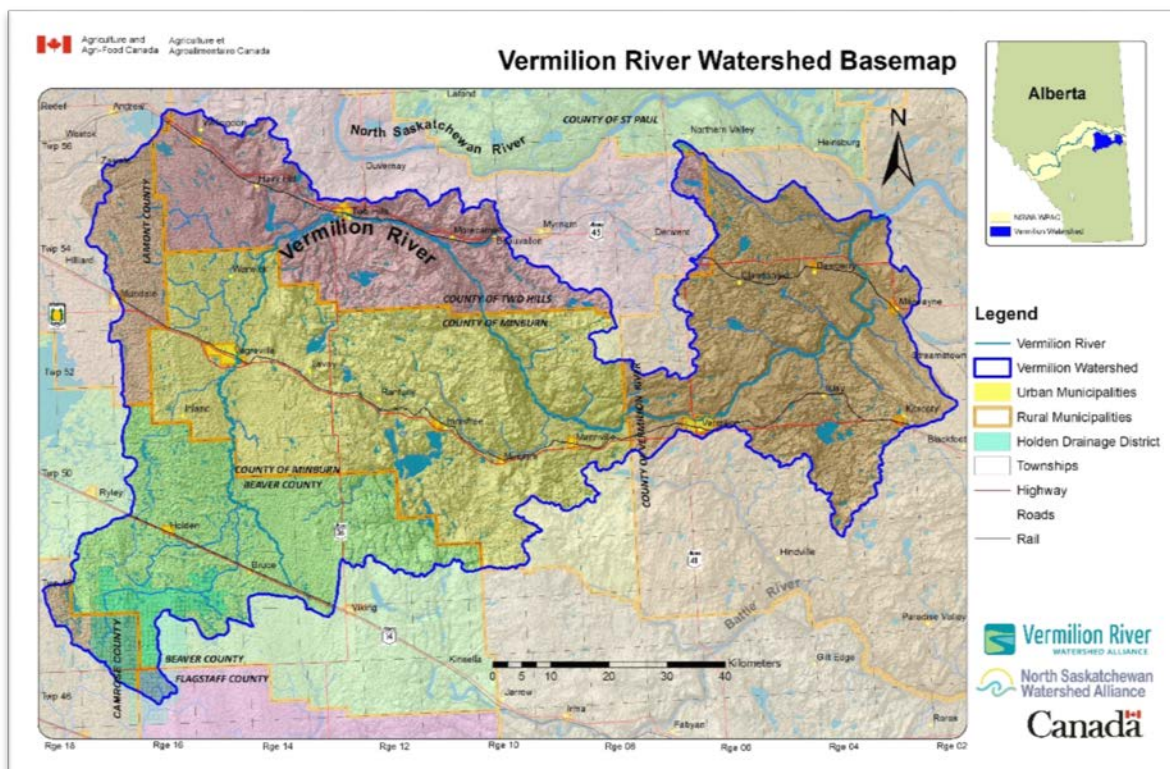


Figure 1: Vermilion River Watershed

2016-2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The VRWA is governed by a Board of Directors elected from and by the membership to serve a minimum two-year term. The Board is structured to represent all major stakeholder sectors. The current VRWA Board of Directors is comprised of the following individuals/organizations:

Position	Name	Organization
President	Ed Parke	County of Vermilion River
Vice-President	Pat Gordeyko	Two Hills County
Treasurer	Bill Babiuk	Town of Two Hills
Secretary	Dave Berry	Town of Vegreville
Director	Candace Vanin	Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada
Director	Michael Barr	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
Director	Roger Konieczny	County of Minburn
Director	Stacey Hryciuk	County of Vermilion River
Director	Richard Yaceyko	Town of Vermilion
Director	Dale Collison	Beaver County
Director	Dwight Dach	County of St. Paul
Director	Chris Elder	Alternative Land Use Services
Director	Al Corbett	Alberta Drainage Council; NSWA
Director	Carlin Soehn (ex-officio member)	Alberta Environment & Parks; VROAC
Director	Tim Knudsen	Holden Drainage District

Support Staff

The VRWA Board is supported by NSWA staff, namely, the NSWA's Executive Director and the Extension & Stewardship Coordinator:

- David Trew, Executive Director, NSWA
- Mara Erickson, Extension & Stewardship Coordinator, NSWA



VERMILION RIVER WATERSHED RESTORATION & ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

The NSWA is partnering with the VRWA to restore and enhance wetlands and riparian areas in the Vermilion River watershed (Figure 1). With funding from the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program as well as two grants from Environment & Climate Change Canada, activities under these grants are collectively managed by the NSWA as the Vermilion River Watershed Restoration & Enhancement Project (VRWREP).

*Table 1: VRWREP Funding Sources, deliverables, goals and **total** grant amounts* for the period 2015-2018*

Funding Source	Deliverables	Goals	Grant (\$)
Watershed Resiliency & Restoration Program (WRRP), Government of Alberta	Restore degraded or lost, or enhance existing wetland and riparian areas in the Vermilion River watershed: Wetlands = 40 ha total Riparian areas = 10 km total (20 ha equivalent)	Improve watershed resiliency to floods and drought	1,445,000
National Wetland Conservation Fund (NWCF), Environment Canada	Restore degraded or lost wetlands in the Vermilion River watershed = 24 ha total	Improve biodiversity and watershed function	534,254
EcoAction Community Funding Program (EcoAction), Environment Canada	Restore degraded riparian areas in the Vermilion River (main stem) = 2 km (equivalent 4 ha), and conduct a survey of aquatic species & habitat	Improve water quality, assess aquatic condition	100,000

*Grants managed and reported on by NSWA

VRWREP Highlights

The *Survey of Aquatic Species and Habitat in the Vermilion River, AB* was completed in the 2016-17 fiscal year. This study found the Vermilion River to be diverse and rich in aquatic life. Longitudinal variability in aquatic life and habitat was associated with hydrology and its alterations, and consequently water quality. The report [is available](#) on the Vermilion River Watershed Alliance website.

A Vermilion River Water Quality Survey report was presented to the VRWA Board on 13 January 2017. This report draws upon historic (1970s and 1990s) assessments of Vermilion River Water quality while presenting updated water quality data collected in 2014. As per its Executive Summary, the report

“...describes the patterns of various water quality parameters observed in the Vermilion River and Stretton Creek (a tributary of the Vermilion River) during three sampling periods in summer and fall 2014. The data collected is intended to determine the current water quality condition of the Vermilion River compared to previous years and provide a baseline for the effect of future Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) on water quality in Stretton Creek as part of the broader Vermilion River Watershed Management Project.”





VRWREP Landowner Projects

Nine projects (6 riparian, 3 wetland) were completed in 2016 out of 14 projects accepted by the VRWREP selection committee (Table 4, Figure 2). Of the five uncompleted projects, one is in progress and four were deferred to summer 2017 at the landowners' request due to issues stemming from inclement weather. Generally, project sites were in pastured land except for one in cropland (canola). A pre-works health assessment summary

was completed for each project, which followed an adapted version of [Cows & Fish's](#) riparian health assessment protocol. Site visits were conducted at the end of the field season to determine progress, with a plan to conduct a full site/project review and post-works assessment in summer 2017.



Above and above left: Example of an off-stream watering system

The breakdown of number/type of applications received and accepted during the 2016 application round is as follows:

- **25 projects proposals received** (13 riparian enhancement, 12 wetland enhancement) from 17 landowners.
- **14 projects accepted** (9 riparian, 5 wetland). Projects not accepted were either 1) ineligible as per the conditions of the grant or 2) withdrawn by the landowner.
- **10 projects commenced** (6 riparian, 4 wetland)
- **9 projects completed** (6 riparian, 3 wetland)

The nine projects completed in 2016 resulted in 7.1 km riparian areas and 22 ha wetlands protected/enhanced. As most project participants implemented exclusion fencing and alternative watering systems to either prevent or sustainably manage livestock access to natural waterbodies, these projects will mitigate the negative effects of over 1170 head of cattle to wetlands and riparian areas in the Vermilion River Watershed.

VRWREP Wetland Restoration with Ducks Unlimited Canada 2015-17

Due to the lack of private landowner uptake for wetland restoration projects, the NSW entered into an agreement with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to fulfil the NWCF grant deliverable of 24 hectares of wetlands restored in the Vermilion River Watershed, on behalf of the NSW. The deliverables and agreement with DUC is to be completed at the end of the NWCF grant period, March 2018.

VRWREP Evaluation 2015-17

The VRWREP has had a positive effect on both the people as well as terrestrial, riparian and aquatic ecosystems in the VRW region. For those who took part in enhancement projects in 2016, the access to funding to implement projects they have been wanting to incorporate into their operation has been appreciated. As well, the high promotional component of the VRWREP has raised the profile of the VRWA in the community. Stakeholders who have not participated in the VRWREP, or do not have “shovel-ready” projects may still be involved in other wetland restoration opportunities in the future through the VRWA.

2016-17 VRWREP Challenges

- Landowner recruitment requires the use of multiple communication strategies, tools and materials. Exploring the most appropriate promotional media and timing continues to be a work-in-progress.
- Weather: Timing of some projects was delayed due to weather-related issues, especially late in the season. As mentioned in #7, four projects were deferred to 2017 due to either weather or weather-related operational issues (i.e. ground too soft to bring in equipment, difficulties in the 2016 harvest forced landowner time to focus on crops rather than projects).
- Increasing program profile: The newness of the program presented challenges, as many watershed residents either have not heard of the VRWREP, or assumed it was associated with existing, more well-known programs (i.e., Growing Forward 2).

The above challenges can be addressed through time, community involvement, and continued promotion. Both the NSWA and the VRWA are using multiple approaches throughout the year to increase not only awareness of but also trust in the program. However, it often takes a couple of years to increase participation. Encouragingly, many 2017 applicants are either family members or neighbors of 2016 applicants, which speaks to the power of word-of-mouth and the influence of ‘early-adopters’.



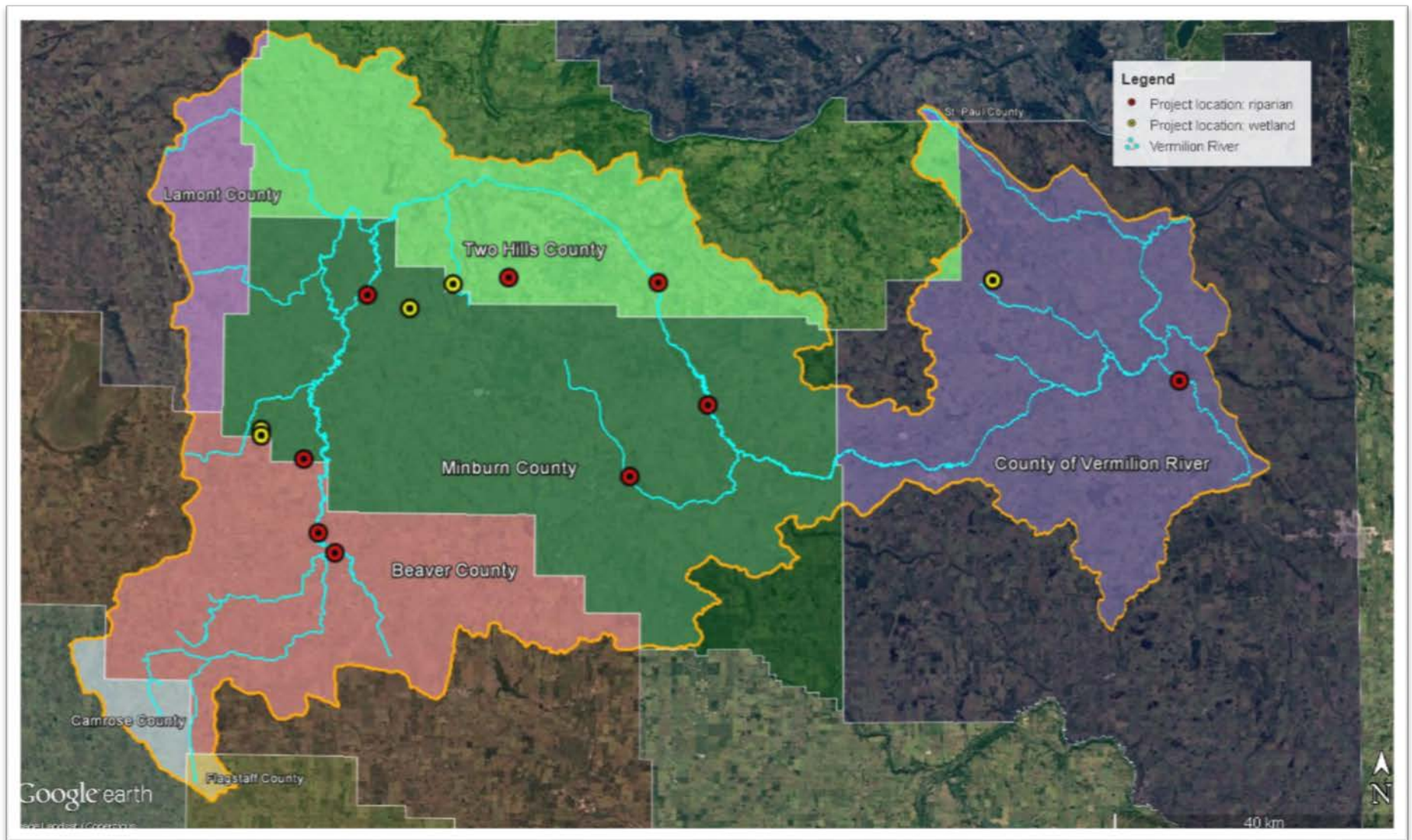


Figure 2: General locations of accepted 2016-17 VRWREP projects. Counties are represented by different colours within the watershed boundary.

SOCIETY BUSINESS

The VRWA had four regular meetings as well as a Strategic Planning Workshop in March 2017 to review the 2012 VRWMP. A summary report of the Strategic Planning Workshop is available online at www.vrwa.ca, and outlines the major discussion points and future directions for the VRWMP.

During the 2016-17 fiscal year, the Society held its first Annual General Meeting in Vegreville (June 2016), drafted a Terms of Reference for the Board of Directors, formed a partnership with the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee, and drafted its first Operating Plan as a registered Society.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Education and engagement is a major focus of the VRWA; both facets are incorporated in each of the five goals within which the Alliance operates. To both cultivate watershed knowledge and encourage participation of stakeholders in improving watershed health, the VRWA has taken steps to increase its organizational profile in the region. These steps included hosting events, attending partner events, using social media as a form of communication and dialogue, and providing information/education materials to watershed residents.

The VRWA participated in the following events in 2016-17:

- Two Hills Trade Show (April 2016)
- Hay Clandonald (January 2017)
- Open House (February 2017): The Open House specifically was designed to 1) promote the VRWREP and invite landowners to apply for funding and 2) officially premiere the NSWA's [new short film](#) which celebrates landowner stewardship in the VRW.
- Agri-Visions (February 2017)
- Central Alberta Grazing Association AGM: The NSWA Extension & Stewardship Coordinator was invited to give a 20-minute presentation at the 7 March 2017 Central Alberta Grazing Association AGM to increase awareness about the VRWREP and opportunities for funding/wetland restoration projects.

Along with in-person events, the NSWA promoted the VRWA and its project opportunities through a range of media including print, TV, radio, online, and postal mail. A watershed-wide postcard was sent to over 8000 residents, informing of the Alliance and the VRWREP funding opportunity.

As part of the VRWA's immediate promotional strategy as well as long-term outreach strategy, a new [short film](#) was created to introduce the concept of a watershed and watershed alliance to its audience, as well as highlight the stewardship actions and specific projects of WRRP-funded VRWREP participants. The film was premiered at the Open House and a more directed promotional campaign will continue throughout the summer of 2017. The film will be used to increase knowledge and awareness about the importance of healthy wetlands, and is housed on the VRWA's new website (www.vrwa.ca).



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Vermilion River Watershed Alliance Financial Statement for the year ending March 31, 2017:

Statement of (unrestricted) Revenues and Expenditures

Revenue	\$175.00
Expenditures	(\$60.57)

Statement of Financial Position

Assets	\$114.43
Liabilities	\$0.00



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