

The River Current

Fall 2002



Our Mission:
Promoting watershed sustainability through awareness, linkages and stewardship.

Be Water Wise

David Schindler identifies a number of ways to avert a water shortage on the Prairies:

- ◆ Cut greenhouse gas emissions.
- ◆ Provide full public support for water conservation methods on entire watersheds.
- ◆ Provide more public information and education about ecosystems and management of water systems.
- ◆ Use farming practices that save and aid wetlands to collect and store water.
- ◆ Reduce water runoff from fields by selecting crops that hold water back.
- ◆ Protect riparian areas around lakes and rivers with trees and grass.
- ◆ Reduce clearing of trees from land and reduce drainage of water bodies.
- ◆ Provide more funds and manpower for science and government support for research institutions.
- ◆ Regulate human activities that affect lakes and rivers ecosystems.
- ◆ Compost manure from livestock operations and apply it dry to fields.

McConnell

Expert Warns of Prairie Water Shortage

By John McConnell, Freelance Writer

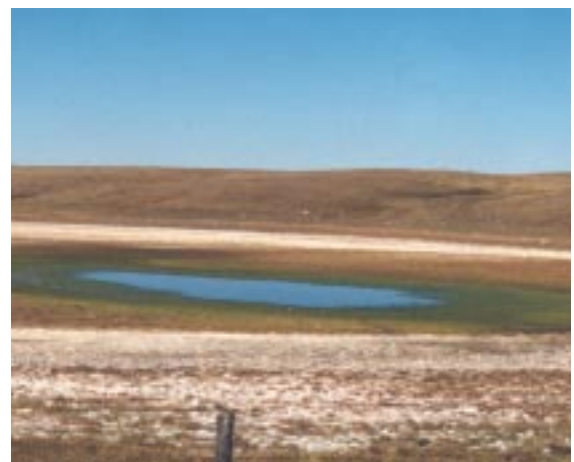
A leading water ecologist is warning of a severe freshwater shortage on the Prairies. David Schindler of the University of Alberta told delegates at the PFSRB annual conference in Saskatoon that new ideas and better policies for total watershed management are urgently needed to reduce these water problems. Last year, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council awarded Schindler the \$1 million Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for his water research.

Schindler, who also farms with his brothers, said shortages loom despite an apparent abundance of fresh water in northern Canada. He blamed the threat on a changing climate and water use practices.

Water shortages would reduce water quality and biodiversity on the Prairies, where problems will be particularly severe. He said much of Western Canada warmed by at least two degrees during the 20th century. As well, increased evaporation has reduced river flows by 30 to 40 percent. Irrigators, municipalities and industry are also using more water, he added.

Schindler said river flows have dropped by as much as 80 percent since the early 20th century, which he blamed on increased water use. He also said lake levels are dropping, wetlands are drying up, and ground water supplies are declining. Glaciers, which have supplied prairie rivers with much of their water, are melting and retreating at an accelerated rate.

Schindler said the climate is expected to warm by another two to seven degrees in the 21st century, which will mean more water shortages. Policies for water and land use must be improved to save the Prairies' multimillion-dollar agriculture, forestry, tourism and fishing businesses. Solutions will require greater application of what is already known about fresh water ecosystems and watershed management.



Missouri Couteau, Saskatchewan (Fall 2000)
Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

Major changes are required in public thinking, policies and practices. If not, water on the Prairies will become so scarce that expansion of industrial agriculture and business enterprises will not be possible. Part of the problem is that the dangers aren't understood. "Politicians don't realize climate is a wild beast, and they're a bunch of little boys poking at it with sharp sticks."

- Reprinted with permission from The Western Producer

2002 "Just Add Water" Conference Highlights

Lawyers, scientists, politicians, educators, environmentalists, and a journalist; represent the diverse range of speakers who joined us this year in providing their thoughts and perspectives on water, water legislation, and pressing water issues. Our theme for the 2002 Conference, presented in partnership with the Saskatchewan Legal Education Society, centered on water jurisdiction and policy and the challenges of current and future water-related issues on the Prairies.

Keynote speaker Dr. David Schindler's view on the threats of a water shortage on the Prairies, Stuart Rush's summary of Aboriginal Water Rights, and Dr. Elaine Wheaton's presentation on climate change were identified by delegates as being particularly informative, interesting and adding to their level of knowledge.



Photo: PFSRB Managing Director Susan Lamb (left) and banquet speaker Susan Ormiston (right).

A real highlight was the thought provoking after-dinner presentation by Susan Ormiston, a journalist with CBC television. Her fascinating talk included slides from her summer vacation, footage from the Big Picture feature on water that CBC produced in the spring 2002, and her own personal perspective on the whole issue of communications and media; why is it so difficult to get stories about water (unless it involves a tragedy) onto the evening news, and into the consciousness of the general public.

Many of the presentations from the conference can be found under the 2002 Conference section on our website at: www.saskriverbasin.ca/Resources/2002resources.html.

We appreciate the support of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Western Economic Diversification and the Centre for Studies in Agriculture, Law and the Environment in sponsoring this year's conference.

If you would like to suggest a theme or topics for future conferences, please send an email to: partners@saskriverbasin.ca

Window on Water Project Announcement

When we think about water on the Prairies, it is most often in terms of "lack of." In the southern prairies there are areas of permanent water deficit, meaning that less rain falls than is evaporated back into the atmosphere. This situation is exacerbated by the longer ice-free seasons created by climate change. On top of those challenges, water use in Canada has increased by over 50% from 1972 to 1991, dramatically illustrating our thirsty lifestyles.

While it won't provide all of the solutions, good water conservation practices can help to alleviate some of the growing demands on our river system. The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation has provided a grant of up to \$90,000 over 3 years to the Meewasin Valley Authority in Saskatoon, for a series of projects which will serve to encourage a shift in attitude about the value of water and the need to conserve this precious resource. The "Window on Water" project will include a number of demonstration projects, education initiatives and programs to encourage water conservation and stewardship. These include Xeriscape (Low water landscaping) demonstration projects and delivery of homeowner workshops, a Grey Water (recycled household wastewater) demonstration project and the Water Watchdog Program.

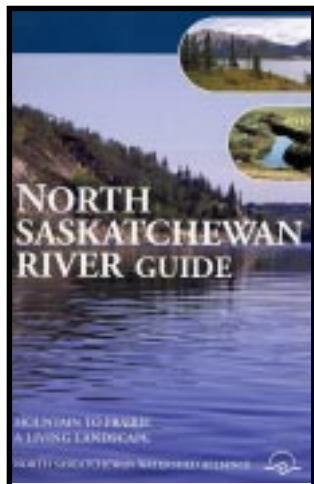
Jason Tuchelt, Water Conservation Project Officer, will implement communications strategies to ensure that the public has a better understanding about the use and management of water. Participation in public policy processes with municipal, provincial and federal agencies will encourage implementation of policies that support water stewardship.

The programs and successes of the "Window on Water" project will be shared with other agencies, communities and interest groups throughout the Saskatchewan River Basin. For more information contact Jason Tuchelt at the Meewasin Valley Authority (306) 665-6887.



Photo: PFSRB

North Saskatchewan River Guide (2002)



The North Saskatchewan River Guide published by the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) appeals to a wide audience, indeed is a best seller! The guide was written for historians, fishermen, hikers, canoeists and trivia buffs; in other words for everyone. It is full of fascinating facts and eco-tips for travelling along the river, historical information, and 27 reach maps. This guide allows people to reconnect with the river.

This book has been on the Edmonton Journal's best seller list for non-fiction for 12 weeks at the time of writing, and has proven to connect people to their past and raise awareness of just how important this water source is. It is a first-of-its-kind guide of this nature for a major Alberta river. Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin is pleased to have been one of the sponsoring agencies.

The North Saskatchewan River Guide is available for sale at the following locations:

Edmonton: Audrey's Books; Greenwood's Books; Volume II Books; The King's University Bookstore; Mountain Equipment Co-op; Totem Outfitters; Map Town; Ellerslie Gift & Garden; The Alberta Provincial Museum; **Nisku:** The Leduc County Office; **Elk Point:** The Elk Point Historical Society (Ron Onusko); Fort George/Buckingham House Interpretive Centre; The Elk Point Review; **Fort Saskatchewan:** The Fort Saskatchewan Historical Society; **Prince Albert, Saskatchewan:** Venturoso Books; **Saskatoon, Saskatchewan:** Meewasin Valley Centre

The river guides make excellent gifts and fundraiser items. For more information or to purchase in bulk, contact the NSWA office in Edmonton at 780-496-3474 or by emailing water@nswa.ab.ca.

The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) is a multi-stakeholder, grass roots organization, with members throughout the North Saskatchewan River watershed. The NSWA operates on the premise that water resources are best managed through an integrated approach whose unit of management is the watershed.

Free Water Watchdog Kits Available to Prairie Youth in Spring 2003!

We have confirmed sponsorship that allows us to offer kits at no charge, on a first come first serve basis, to individuals and groups within the Prairie provinces beginning in the spring 2003. Applicants must commit to using the program with children in their community, completing a short evaluation form and assisting the children in submitting their findings and a list of their stewardship activities by mail or online. We require this information for project evaluation and reports to sponsoring agencies.

Water Watchdog is an action-awareness program aimed at increase understanding about water quality and management issues in the Saskatchewan River Basin and throughout the Prairie Provinces.

Each kit contains materials and information to assess some basic water quality parameters including the physical, biological, cultural and chemical data. Kits are user-friendly and adaptable to fit various time restraints and age groups (7-14 years).

Based on demand, PFSRB reserves the right to limit the number of kits provided to any one group, and within each community. All applicants will be advised when the kits are available.

For more details about the Water Watchdog program, visit us online at www.saskriverbasin.ca or call toll free: 1-800-567-8007.

Thank you to our Water Watchdog Sponsors:



River Ripples

Government of Canada Seeks Feedback on Climate Change Draft Plan

On October 24th, the Government of Canada released a comprehensive overview of the Climate Change Draft Plan: Achieving Our Commitments Together. The Government would like to receive your comments on this plan.

Please read the information provided on-line and then complete a short questionnaire by visiting: www.climatechange.gc.ca. By doing so, you can contribute to a made-in-Canada approach to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and meeting our Kyoto commitments.

To order the overview of the plan and comment form, call 1-800-O-Canada (1-800-622-6232), TTY 1-800-465-7735

"Healthy Wetlands, Healthy You -- A Clean Water Project"

is Ducks Unlimited Canada's new education program for grades 4 to 12. The program includes 6 (PDF) Research Guides in both French and English, ready to guide teachers and students through studies of local Wetlands.

Ducks also has a discussion forum to receive comments about the state of wetlands in your community, and what classes are doing to help conserve and protect these precious resources around the world.

To participate in this project visit: www.epals.ca/projects/ducks_umlimited

If you would prefer to receive "The River Current" newsletter electronically, please send your email address to: partners@saskriverbasin.ca



Join the H2info List Server!

The Water Information Network is a project of the Toronto Environmental Alliance, RiverSides Stewardship Alliance and the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy. It acts as an online clearinghouse on water information with a focus on nonpoint source pollution issues in Canada.

One of the central H2info services is the H2info list serv and H2info News. It is a free, open list serv for the exchange of information and for discussion on issues.

Currently membership stands at several hundred environmentalists, civil servants, politicians and practitioners from the public and private sectors. Every other week, a digest of water-related news from across Canada, the U.S. and around the world is distributed on the H2info list serv. Over 45 local, national and international list servs are monitored for H2info News, as well as major newspapers from across Canada.

To join the list serv, visit the H2info web site at www.h2info.org and enter your e-mail address in the box at the right hand side of the page.

Perceptions of Fairness in Allocating Water in the Saskatchewan River Basin

Researchers from a water management consulting firm in Saskatoon and the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario are conducting an independent research study on water management within the Saskatchewan River Basin. The study will assess the perceptions of fairness (from government agencies and major water users) in water management in the Saskatchewan River Basin.

Findings from the research will support a better understanding of the similarities and differences among various water management groups. A summary of the findings will be provided in an upcoming issue of *The River Current*.

For more information please contact: Bob Halliday, R. Halliday & Associates, Ph: 306-665-0805 or e-mail: rhalliday@sk.sympatico.ca

The River Current is published quarterly by Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin. Articles and news items will be considered for publication. For further information about Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin Project, or to submit items, please contact:

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