

The River Current

Winter 2004



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

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Floods, Drought &
Gradual Change
October 6-8, 2004***

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How to Save a River in Four Easy Steps - Paul Hanley

“At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Earth is facing a serious water crisis. All the signs suggest that it is getting worse and will continue to do so, unless corrective action is taken. In truth, it is attitude and behaviour problems that lie at the heart of the crisis.”

- *Water for People, Water for Life*, the UN World Water Development Report

Despite its vast water resources, Canada faces a looming water crisis. Brought on by a variety of factors, including increasing demand, a warmer, drier climate, and inadequate management of wastes and watersheds, both water quality and supply are in jeopardy in places like the Saskatchewan River Basin.

To meet this challenge, people will need to change their attitudes and behaviour, as the World Water Development Report suggests. While much of this change has to occur at the government, institutional and corporate levels, individuals and families can have an impact by becoming informed and expressing their concerns.

They can also make a significant contribution by changing their own behaviour. Here are several steps residents of the Saskatchewan River Basin can take to help “save our river” by changing our water use habits.

1. Change your energy behaviour

Declining river flows are connected to climate change, which is caused in part by greenhouse gasses (GHGs) emitted when fossil fuels are burned. The federal government is challenging individual Canadians to “shed a tonne” of GHGs, by reducing emissions—from driving cars, heating homes, using electricity, etc.—by about one fifth. Lower emissions help reduce the impacts of climate change and ultimately help maintain normal river flows.

The steps involved are relatively simple and most actually save money:

- Drive your car less often. Car pool, take public transport or use active transportation (walking or biking).
- When purchasing a new car, aim at a 25 percent improvement in energy performance.
- Turn down your house and water heater thermostats, and improve the weather seal and insulation in your house. Turn off lights when not in use and use compact florescent light bulbs.
- When buying new appliances, choose EnergyStar-rated models.



The Canadian Office of Energy Efficiency has recognized the 2004 Honda Insight as the most fuel efficient 2-seater vehicle for 2004

The Pembina Institute has developed a web-based tool to help Canadians reduce GHG emissions. (Find it at <http://www.OneLessTonne.ca>) Users choose among 20 actions to reduce their personal emissions by one tonne or more. Also, visit the One Tonne Challenge site at <http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/onetonne/>.

2. Change your water-use behaviour in the yard and garden.

Consumer water use typically doubles during the summer, substantially increasing municipal demand on water at a time when extractions for agricultural purposes are high. Here is what you can do:

- Established lawns generally require about 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water per week. Use a rain gauge to keep track of how much it has rained in the preceding week and water only if necessary.
- Water in the early morning to reduce evaporation and on calm days to prevent wind drift and evaporation.
- Water slowly to avoid run-off and ensure the soil absorbs the water.
- Collect rainwater from your roof in a rain barrel and use the water for potted plants and window boxes.
- Choose an efficient irrigation system. A soaker hose or drip irrigation system are highly efficient. If you use a sprinkler, choose one that sprays close to the ground.
- Set the blade on your lawn mower no lower than 6-8 cm so that the roots are shaded and better able to hold water.
- In the flower and vegetable garden, use lots of organic matter to improve the water-holding capacity of the soil, and lots of mulch around the plants to retain moisture.
- Consider a Xeriscaped yard. Xeriscaping involves the use of drought tolerant plants in place of traditional grass and ornamental plants that require a lot of water.



Above: Volunteers plant a Xeriscaped Garden

3. Change your water use behaviour indoors.

Canadians use more water per person than almost any other nation, 10 times the amount that Britons use, for instance. Domestic consumption of water can be substantially reduced by:

- Cutting water use in the shower by up to two thirds by replacing your showerhead with a low flow version.
- Cutting water use for the toilet by up to 50 percent by installing water dams into your toilet tank.
- Using energy efficient clothes and dishwashers, which use less water and especially less hot water (which also lowers GHG emissions.) Also, use cold water and cold water detergents for laundry.
- Make sure you eliminate all leaky faucets and try to cut down on unnecessary water use.



*Look for Appliances
that carry the Energy
Star Symbol!*

4. Change your behaviour related to water quality.

Whatever you use for detergents, cleaners, pesticides, etc. can make its way into storm sewers or the wastewater treatment system and eventually some of it finds its way back into the river. Reduce pollution by:

- Avoiding the use of cleaners, soaps, detergents, chlorine bleach and other household products whenever possible. Replace them with safer alternatives, which are now widely available.
- Practice organic gardening methods to eliminate the need for cosmetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers.
- Have your car maintained to eliminate fluid leaks.

For more on changing your environmental behaviour, visit the Environment Canada web site What You Can Do! at <http://www.ec.gc.ca/eco/>.

For more information contact:

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Attention Youth: Time to Click on Climate!

Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin has been developing a new product geared towards youth aged 8-12. It is called "**Click on Climate**" and is an outdoor, experiential program, similar to our signature program, Water Watchdog. Click on Climate hopes to teach youth about climate change, and encourage positive behavior changes regarding non-renewable resource consumption. If you are an individual or group leader interested in trying our new product and providing feedback to make Click on Climate the best it can be, please contact Josi Hauschild at 306 665 6887 or email jhauschild@saskriverbasin.ca



Planning for Climate Variability: Floods, Drought & Change

The Canadian Water Resources Association and Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin co-sponsored a conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on October 6-8th, 2004, entitled "Planning for Climate Variability: Floods, Drought & Change".

The conference was a great success, with 115 Attendees from across Canada. Media interest was high, particularly for the Keynote Speakers, Don Wilhite, Founder and Director of the National Drought Mitigation Center and International Drought Information Center; and Aly Shady, Water and Irrigation Specialist with the Canadian International Development Agency, Governor and Founding Member of the World Water Council and President of the International Water Resources Association.

In addition, the conference was preceded by a meeting of Stakeholders from the South Saskatchewan River Basin Study. This project plans to assess the current sensitivity of regional socio-economic systems to changes in water supply, and the future vulnerability of these systems under projected changes to the environment, economy and society of the South Saskatchewan River Basin.

More information regarding the conference, or to view the speakers presentations, please see: <http://www.saskriverbasin.ca/conference/>



Environmental Newspaper Launch: Prairie Peaks News

In October 2004, Prairie Peaks News was launched by founder and editor Leah Lawrence. Prairie Peaks News is a non-profit, independent newspaper that covers stories about the people, culture and issues that are important to Western Canada. Through balanced, high-quality journalism, the newspaper endeavours to provide a forum for people to discuss and debate where they want to go in the New West, without destroying the Old West.

The readership of Prairie Peaks News is very diverse - from ranchers to people who shop at Mountain Equipment Coop - but they are all interested in the balanced, high-quality journalism and editorial that Prairie Peaks News delivers

Lawrence says, "The thing that strikes me most about the people who contact me is that they don't adhere to traditional definitions of 'environmentalists' or 'conservationists'. Callers cross the political spectrum, come from all sizes of western Canadian communities and are actively working locally through a myriad of grassroots organizations, like Partners for the Saskatchewan River Basin, the Butte Action Committee, Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy."

For more information on Prairie Peaks News, or to subscribe, see <http://www.prairiepeaks.com> or call Leah at (403) 538-5648

Conference Listings

Beyond the Water's Edge - The Challenge of Full Integrated Management

December 6-7, 2005

Brandon, MB

Manitoba Conservation Districts Association in Partnership with Manitoba Water Stewardship presents this conference. For information, email mca@mts.net

Collaborative Habitat Strategies for Alberta

January 27-28, 2005

Calgary, AB

Presented by the Alberta Conservation Association <http://www.ab-conservation.com>

Fortieth Central Canadian Symposium on Water Quality Research Canada Centre for Inland Waters

February 14-15, 2005

Burlington, ON

Presented by the Canadian Association on Water Quality <http://www.cawq.ca/>

Water - Our Limiting Resource.

February 24-25, 2005

Kelowna, BC

Canadian Water Resources Association - British Columbia Branch hosts this event. <http://www.cwra.org>

Research and Education in an International Watershed: Implications for Decision-Making.

April 6-7, 2005

Winnipeg, MB

Hosted by the Red River Basin institute - <http://www.tri-college.org/watershed/>

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