



Surface Water Working Group

Purpose:

In support of CEMA's over-arching purpose the SWWG will recommend regional management frameworks that address issues of surface water quantity, quality and watershed integrity within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Objectives:

Phase 2 Water Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River

- To recommend a Phase 2 Water Management Framework that will manage industrial water withdrawals from the lower Athabasca River while providing a high level of protection of the aquatic ecosystem over the long term. This will be achieved:
 - Through a structured decision making process,
 - By evaluating a variety of water management scenarios to develop a recommended Water Management Framework through:
 - Identifying a range of environmental, social and economic values associated with the lower Athabasca River,
 - Identifying aquatic ecosystem and Ecosystem Base Flow requirements,
 - Identifying existing and future industrial water withdrawal requirements, and;
 - Identifying potential options for managing available water volumes.

Watershed Integrity

- To establish and recommend environmental criteria and a management system that defines and maintains watershed integrity in sub-basins of the Athabasca River drainage basin starting with the Muskeg River. This will include:
 - Completing a "State of the Muskeg River Watershed" report, and;
 - Recommending a Muskeg River Watershed Management Framework that recognizes environmental, social and economic values.



Surface Water Quality

- To establish and recommend reach-specific surface water quality objectives for the lower Athabasca River that are protective of human health and the aquatic ecosystem.

Context:

In July 1999, Alberta Environment released the Regional Sustainable Development Strategy (RSDS) for the Athabasca Oil Sands Area in northeastern Alberta. The purpose of the RSDS was to provide a framework for balancing development with environmental protection. The Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA) was identified as a multistakeholder forum through which to address many of the RSDS issues.

The RSDS identified 72 major issues of concern in 14 theme areas. Surface water quality and quantity were two of the themes identified. The Surface Water Working Group (SWWG) of CEMA was formed to address a subset of the surface water quality and quantity and watershed integrity issues identified in the RSDS.

On March 1, 2007 Alberta Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada released the Water Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River that specified the need to review and revise this Framework by 2011 (AENV/DFO letter of April 26, 2007). CEMA, through the SWWG has accepted the tasks of completing this review and all the associated elements.

With regards to the Muskeg River Watershed Management Plan, recent decision reports have recommended that AENV complete this plan by the end of 2008; SWWG is working to provide a draft recommendation by August, 2008 with a goal of finalizing this recommendation in late 2009.

Operating Guidelines:

The SWWG will operate in a manner that is consistent with the [principles](#), rules, [policies](#) and [procedures](#) adopted by CEMA.

The SWWG will follow the CEMA [decision making policy](#) and [guideline](#).



CEMA Terms of Reference for SWWG September 10, 2007

The SWWG will consider the need to formally interface with other CEMA working groups and other regional multi-stakeholder organizations. The critical linkages and information sharing needs that the SWWG have identified include:

- the Sustainable Ecosystem Working Group (SEWG) regarding fish and fish habitat;
- the Reclamation Working Group (RWG) regarding surface water quality;
- the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program (RAMP) regarding monitoring of fish and water quality;
- the CEMA Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) Standing Committee;
- The NOx/SOx Management Working Group (NSMWG) regarding acid deposition into water bodies; and,
- The Regional Issues Working Group (RIWG) regarding industry and regional issues.

Report to the CEMA Board:

The SWWG will forward the following final recommendations to CEMA:

- Phase 2 Water Management Framework by Q3/Q4 2009;
- Muskeg River Watershed Integrity Management Framework by Q3/Q4 2009; and,
- Reach-specific Surface Water Quality Objectives by Q3 / Q4 2008.

The SWWG will provide progress report(s) at each CEMA General Meeting.

These ToR will need to be reviewed and updated as required every 2 years beginning in 2010 at the latest. This will allow for a review and confirmation of the SWWG's purpose and objectives by CEMA Members in a timeframe that is consistent with the completion of the SWWG's deliverables.

Membership:

Any member of CEMA is eligible to join this WG.

The WG will seek to maintain broad stakeholder representation.

Details of membership responsibilities and chair rotation can be found in CEMA's [membership](#) and [chairing](#) policies and procedures.