

Preparing a Vision for the Oldman Watershed

Your chance to help shape the Oldman's future

The Oldman Watershed Council is working with communities to improve the Oldman River Watershed through **sustainable water management and land use practices**. The first step of this process involves building a **shared vision for the watershed's future**. We are inviting all watershed residents and stakeholders to participate in defining this vision, and to contribute the ideas, commitment and enthusiasm that will help us achieve it.

Have your say and join us today.

VISIONING

What is a watershed?

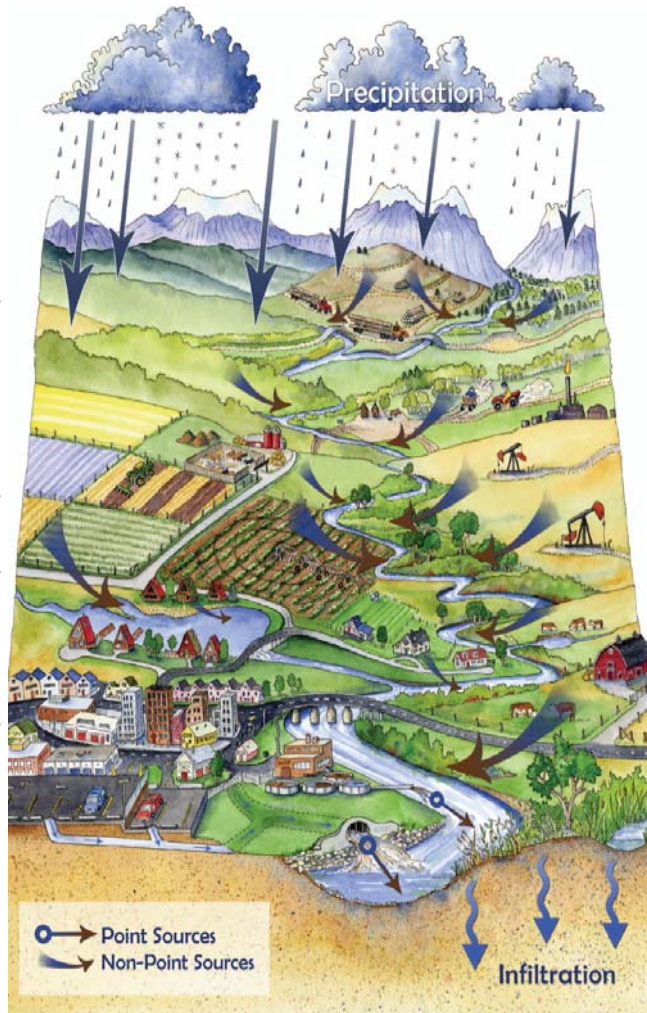
Water is a uniting force. It cycles around the globe, falling from the sky, moving across the land, sinking into the soil, travelling down our rivers, or up our wells.

A **watershed** (or a *basin*) is an area of land that catches precipitation and drains into a larger body of water such as a marsh, stream, river, or lake. A watershed is often made up of a number of sub-watersheds that contribute to its overall drainage. No matter where you are, you're in a watershed.

The Oldman Watershed

Watersheds can **range in size** from a few hectares to thousands of square kilometres. The watershed for the Oldman River covers 28,000 sq km (about 17,000 sq mi), extending north to High River, east to Grassy Lake, west to the Crowsnest Pass, and south past the 49th parallel into Montana's Glacier International Peace Park.

The Oldman Watershed has three very important jobs: 1) it **captures** water in form of snow and rain, 2) it



filters and **stores** the water in the soil, and 3) it **releases water**, as surface run-off or groundwater, into the Oldman River and its tributaries. Industry, farming and development on the uplands of a watershed can affect the quality and quantity of its ground and surface water.

Integrated Watershed Management

Integrated Watershed Management is a comprehensive approach to managing water and land resources. This involves looking at what affects the health of rivers, wetlands and riparian areas, particularly in relation to water quality and quantity.

It **combines local and scientific knowledge to manage watersheds in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways**. This means bringing scientists together with the people who live and work in a watershed, to identify watershed issues and goals, and to develop and implement plans for improving watershed management.

Integrated Watershed Management Planning

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC)

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) is a not-for-profit organization working in partnership with communities and residents to improve the Oldman River Watershed through sustainable water management and land use practices.

The OWC is made up of watershed residents and stakeholders like you, from various backgrounds and perspectives. Council members provide leadership and guidance in watershed planning and management, water quality monitoring and stewardship.

The Issue

Everything we do in the Oldman Watershed has the potential to affect the quality and quantity of our ground and surface water.

Water is naturally limited in the Oldman Watershed because of low precipitation and high evaporation. Life isn't bad in the Oldman Watershed, but meeting the rising water demands of a growing population is a major challenge to future growth in our region. Dams, canals, highways, farmland, parks, industries, commercial forests, towns and the City of Lethbridge are all part of the Oldman Watershed. There are approximately 10,000 oil and gas wells in the Oldman Watershed, 600 livestock feedlots, and 85 wastewater treatment facilities.

Contaminants from these activities enter our streams, rivers and aquifers constantly, travelling with natural runoff over the land, seeping through the soil into ground water, or issuing from point sources such as a storm water outfalls or irrigation return ditches. In addition, soil compaction, logging, dams, dugouts, hard-top driveways and roads all change the way water travels through our watershed, affecting both water quality and quantity.

Preparing a Vision for the Integrated Watershed Management Plan

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) is currently working on a *Watershed Vision* in preparation for developing an *Integrated Watershed Management Plan* (IWMP) for the Oldman Watershed. This will involve defining a **shared vision** for the watershed's future, one which is grounded by the values of those

who live in the Oldman Watershed. This means asking watershed residents and stakeholders some very important questions. How do we want our watershed to look in the next 10 to 50 years? How should we get there? What local skills and knowledge can help us better manage our watershed?

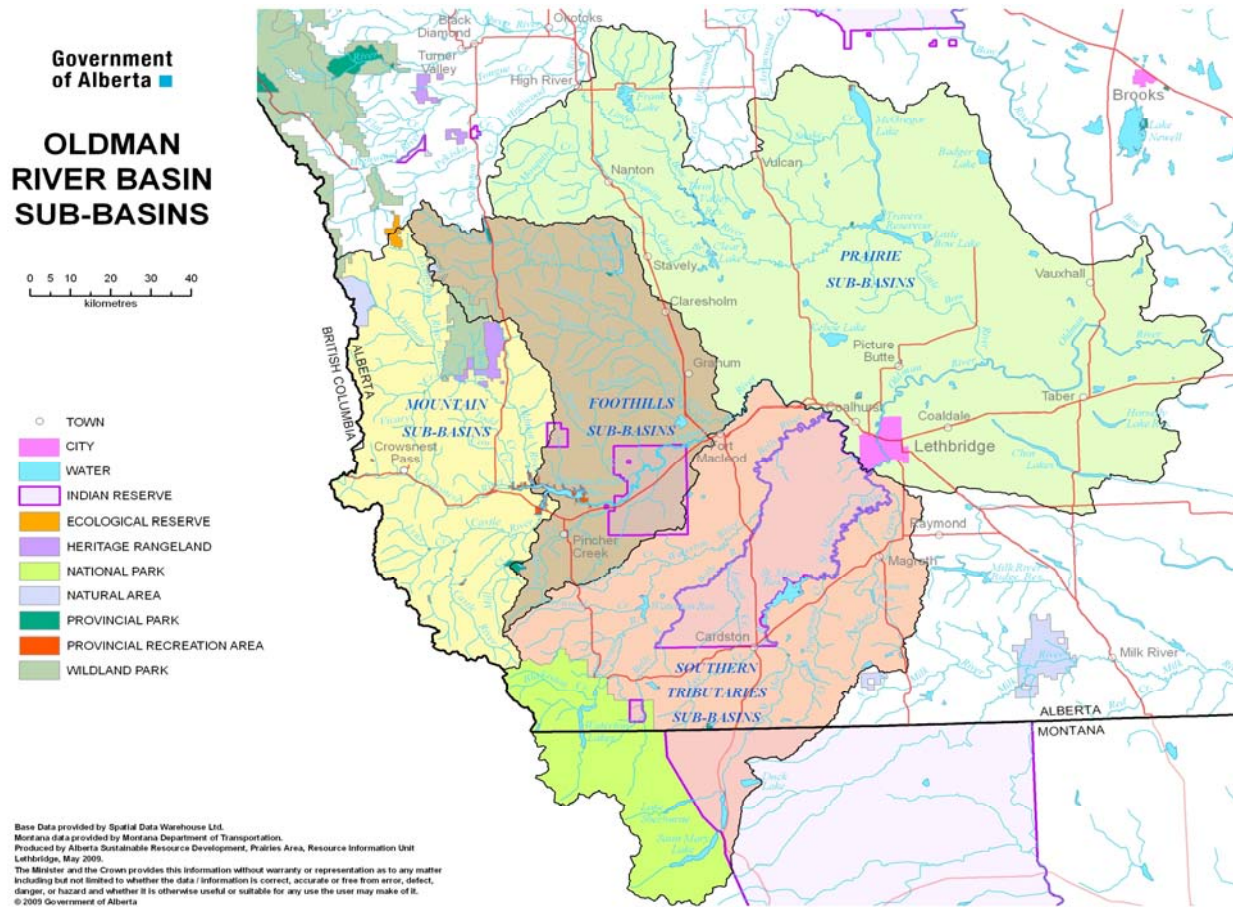
Over spring and summer 2009 the OWC will be seeking answers to these questions by conducting on-line surveys and face-to-face interviews with people who live and work in the Oldman Watershed. These people will include residents, farmers, ranchers, business owners, government agents, and members of watershed groups and other non-profit organizations.

The interview and survey results will be used to develop a draft vision for the watershed. This draft will be taken to focus group meetings around the watershed for review and discussion. In the fall of 2009 a final *Watershed Vision* will be released together with the *State of the Watershed Report*. The *State of the Watershed Report* will document trends in water quality and quantity in the Oldman Watershed, as well as the health of aquatic ecosystems and riparian areas, pollution sources, and land uses affecting ground and surface water.

In summary, the *Watershed Vision* will tell us how we want our future watershed to look, the *State of the Watershed Report* will tell us how near or far we are from our *Watershed Vision*, and the *Integrated Watershed Management Plan* will outline what we need to do to reach our vision.



Forests, wetlands and riparian areas act as giant sponges that store and filter water. When we damage these ecosystems, we lower water quality, increase flood risk, and reduce the amount of water stored naturally in the watershed.



Sub-basins of the Oldman Watershed

Mountains

The Mountains Sub-basins include the Crowsnest River, Castle River, and Upper Oldman River. The headwaters of these streams arise in the high peaks of the continental divide. Dams are absent, so these streams have near-natural flows. Forestry and recreation, together with some mining and oil and gas, are the main land-uses in these basins.



Foothills

The Foothills Sub-basins include Willow Creek, Pincher Creek and Beaver Creek. These creeks are fed by alpine snowmelt and natural springs. Agriculture is the primary land-use in these sub-basins.



Prairie

The Prairie Sub-basins are characterized by slow meandering waterways, including the Little Bow River, Mosquito Creek and a number of small, closed creek systems. These basins have been extensively cultivated and the waterways are highly managed with a series of reservoirs and diversion structures.



Southern Tributaries

The Southern Tributaries include the Waterton, Belly, and St. Mary rivers. These rivers originate in the mountains of Glacier-Waterton International Peace Park, then flow through grassland and agricultural land. Large dams and diversions store and direct river flows to many irrigation districts.



The Visioning Process

VISIONING

May-Jun '09 - Engagement and Information Gathering

Over forty stakeholders in the watershed will take part in one-on-one interviews with Council staff sharing their vision of the watershed for the next 10-15-20 years.

Jul-Aug '09 - Confirming Your Input

After the interviews are completed, the information will be grouped into issue areas and re-circulated to original interviewees as a Delphi Questionnaire. This is an opportunity to review the information and rank your priority areas.

A second Delphi Questionnaire will be used to further group and confirm your input.

Aug-Sep '09 - Checking Back

Community stakeholders will be invited to attend open houses and focus group sessions throughout the watershed to review draft qualitative outcomes or VISION for the watershed management plan.

Sep-Oct '09 - Prioritizing Watershed Planning

Taking a look at what we've HEARD (visioning) and what we KNOW (State of the Watershed) to identify areas of need and direction for future planning (IWMP).

How can I participate if I'm not being interviewed?

Check out the website at www.oldmanbasin.org to fill out the online questionnaire. All online information will be incorporated into the final draft and reviewed during the Checking Back stage.

What is a DELPHI Questionnaire?

The Delphi technique is a group consensus method that helps identify common goals and areas of agreement and disagreement, reveal group values, and establish priority on the basis of pooled judgment.

Participants are asked to anonymously rank and comment on statements or recommendations in iterative questionnaires, without coming into face-to-face contact with each other. Such process eliminates all interpersonal dynamics that tend to exist in face-to-face group decision making and allows respondents to change their mind or put forward challenging views.

Open House and **Focus Group** session location and dates will be posted on the website in July.

Integrated Watershed Management Planning

Join Us Today!

We welcome any and all participation from the watershed community. If you are interested in participating in an interview, completing a survey, or participating in a focus group to help develop a Vision for the Oldman Watershed please contact Stephanie Palechek or visit the website below.

There are many other avenues for getting involved, such as becoming a member of our Board of Directors,

participating on one of our various working teams including the IWMP Steering Committee, or signing up to be a OWC member to stay informed about the OWC and activities relevant to your watershed.

Stephanie Palechek, Executive Director

403-382-4239

stephanie@oldmanbasin.org

www.oldmanbasin.org

