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An Overview and Mandate of the Water Council Saskatchewan (WCS)

Introduction

Saskatchewan, like every other province, relies on water to service our communities, businesses, and for environmental purposes. Businesses throughout the province have a significant reliance on water for use in day-to-day operations, most notably in farming, manufacturing, potash mining, and resort communities. As a semi-arid prairie province, Saskatchewan is reliant on the inflow of water from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and internal watersheds for irrigation, sanitation, consumption, and recreation.

While Saskatchewan's climate has historically been susceptible to both droughts and floods, experts insist that the threat of climate change will exacerbate both the frequency and severity of these events. The effects of prolonged droughts and floods could be devastating for our economy and our way of life. Extreme events such as droughts and floods can cost the province millions of dollars in lost farm incomes, damaged infrastructure, and increased insurance premiums on property and cropland. Those threats make the province increasingly susceptible to many challenges, not the least of which being the safety of our citizens, infrastructure, and the economy overall. The security of our jobs, communities, and economy requires protection through effective and collaborative management.

The Government of Saskatchewan has primary responsibility in managing the province's water resources and while many positive steps have been taken, the challenges of budgets, changes in capacity, and other competing priorities have left water management too far down the list of priorities. Municipalities, indigenous communities, businesses, and the Federal Government also have responsibilities in this area but signs of close and strategic collaboration are too few. In an era of public-private sector collaboration and shared leadership of important public issues, the WCS is timely. The future of this valuable resource is directly impacted by all

stakeholders whose interests must be heard and whose collective efforts must carry the province forward.

Background

Over the past 20 years, water use management in Saskatchewan has changed considerably with the continued diminished role of the Federal Government. Prior to its gradual divesture, the Federal Government, along with the three prairie provinces worked cooperatively to complete the Saskatchewan-Nelson Basin Study (SNBS) from 1968 – 1972. This study investigated the development and investment opportunities in the basin that encompasses most of the southern to mid-prairie watersheds and provided recommendations to decision-makers on projects and approaches to water resource development in the basin.

While the Prairie Provinces Water Board has been in place since 1948, there are some opportunities from the SNBS that have yet to be acted upon. The SNBS was completed in a time when engineering and environmental approaches were quite different from current practices and is in need of updating to provide guidance on the issues of concern today, not to mention that climate change impacts were not being considered at the time.

Prior to the 1980s, the Federal Government financed the province's entire hydrometric network. In contrast, funding for hydrometric stations is presently split 50/50 between the Federal Government and the province. Since the 1990s, the Federal Government decided to only finance water management activities because they have a constitutional obligation to do so. The Federal Government still collects primary data for trans-boundary purposes since they required to do so by law.

The last major investment in water carried out by the Federal Government under the *Canada Water Act* was the South Saskatchewan River Basin study started in 1986 and completed in 1991. Similarly, the Federal Government used to provide 50/50 funding to map flood-prone areas throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as well as provided similar levels of funding to conduct watershed studies under the purview of the *Canada Water Act*. The Federal Government has invested in groundwater studies in most provinces, except Saskatchewan.

The recent dissolution of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) and changes to the community pastures program have resulted in the loss of considerable technical expertise in water, particularly in the area of hydrology. The Federal Government is currently in negotiations with the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (SWSA) to transfer nine federal dams over to the province. The dams are mostly located in South-western Saskatchewan and are often used for irrigation. The nine federal dams were the first priority out of a total of 29 dams that the Federal Government is interested in transferring.

Saskatchewan has responsibility for water under two arms-length crown corporations – SaskWater and the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (SWSA), as well as specific responsibilities under various Ministries. SaskWater is a self-

supporting commercial Crown corporation providing water, wastewater and related services to municipalities, industry, and rural water associations in Saskatchewan. The SWSA, is a Treasury Board Crown corporation with the mandate to "protect, manage, and enhance the province's water and watershed resources for the environmental, economic, and social benefit of citizens." The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority was converted to become SWSA in October 2012, with the transfer of some personnel from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment.

SWSA released its *25 Year Saskatchewan Water Security Plan* in October 2012. The document was approved by cabinet and contained seven goals with 89 specific actions. SWSA publishes their progress by all ministries and agencies as part of their required annual reporting. As was alluded to earlier, the effects of underfunding, staffing issues, and the organization's need to all too often be in a reactive rather than a proactive mode has led to a number of the action items being behind schedule and has compromised the holistic approach of the plan.

In terms of overall progress on the specific 89 action items, according to SWSA's internal data:

- 43% are either on schedule or on track
- 24% have been completed
- 22% are either temporarily stalled or behind schedule
- 6% have been abandoned
- 3% face serious obstacles or have not been started,
- 2% are pending as of 2015-2016

Following consultations, The *Water Security Agency Amendment Act*, also known as Bill 44 was introduced in November 2016. The purpose of the amendment was to support the Agricultural Water Management Strategy objectives with respect to responsible drainage. In addition, Bill 44 changes the complaint process to improve efficiency and services and increases fines for infractions under *The Water Security Agency Act*. The goal of creating a Water Council as outlined in the 25 Year Plan was eventually abandoned in favour of annual or bi-annual direct meetings with major stakeholders to discuss issues as they arise. Therefore, a Water Council that brings together all of the parties with a vested interest to provide input and serve for the betterment of all of Saskatchewan would be a great benefit.

Principles of the Saskatchewan Water Council

To establish a basis from which to move forward, the following principles have been developed:

- 1) All actions and discussions must be science and fact-based.
- 2) Water is a public resource and critical to the wellness and sustainability of all people of Saskatchewan so the interests of all Saskatchewan people should be considered.
- 3) Access to water should be prioritized as follows: sustaining the resource, community use, and economic purposes.

- 4) The collection, publication, and analysis of data is a critical component of all intelligent decision making.
- 5) Financial investment by governments toward water resources should reflect the full value of the resource in the economy.
- 6) Current and future investment by non-government entities in water must be considered.

Initial Areas of Focus

- 1) Identify and invite key stakeholders to be part of the process.
- 2) Prioritize issues and opportunities that could and should be priorities of the WCS through broad-based consultation.
- 3) Inventory all current and historical data available on water in Saskatchewan (e.g.: usage, mapping, quality, quantity and sources).
- 4) Initiate a process to gather “Best Practices” on water use, conservation, protection, and mitigation practices from Canadian and international experts.
- 5) Determine Federal & Provincial legislative mandates to guide future actions.
- 6) Develop a process to communicate the work of the WCS and on the value of water use management to key audiences, including through the use of events and promotions.

Long-Term Goals

- 1) Continually improve the governance around water resources in Saskatchewan to be more comprehensive, strategic, and collaborative.
- 2) Create a process for water management that is inclusive, science based, and sustainable.

Water Council Saskatchewan Goals

- Encourage and support the implementation of the SWSA 25 Year Water Security Plan
- Policy development process that utilizes the outcomes-based environmental model
- Saskatchewan becomes a world class jurisdiction for management of water resources
- Development of an innovative and expanding non-government sector around water in Saskatchewan, such as economic development through value-added agriculture (food processing)
- Provide a forum for input on water management to assigned government departments and regulatory agencies

Range of Issues to be Considered and Acted upon Once Prioritized:

Conveyance

Fisheries

Invasive species	Navigable waters
Governance	Recreation
Quantity knowledge	Potable access
Water management process	Nutrient loading
Flood management – control and mitigation	Cost of water servicing to residents
Water quality	Climate change issues
Irrigation (quality, quantity, location)	Legislative review
Academic research process and outcomes	Water efficiency
Sewage and lagoons	Water reclamation
Storm water	Drainage Control
Aboriginal representation	Riparian zones and habitat

Governance of the Saskatchewan Water Council

Membership will be open to any government agency, industry group, individual, or business with an interest in water. The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce will coordinate and act as convener for the first phase to ensure member efforts are spent on outcomes, not just logistics. An Executive will be elected by the members within the first year that will lead the WCS forward. Selection will be by sector (i.e. academic, business, government, municipal, conservation, agriculture, etc.) and will be developed by consensus.

Next Steps

- 1) Create initial stakeholders list and convene a meeting to review this document. This should include the following organizations:

Advocacy Organizations

Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce (SCC)
 Saskatchewan Mining Association (SMA)
 Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan (APEGS)
 Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada – Saskatchewan (ACEC - SK)
 Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA)
 Agricultural Producers' Association of Saskatchewan (APAS)
 Provincial Association of Resort Communities of Saskatchewan (PARCS)
 Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)
 Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)

Environment and Conservation Groups

Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES)
 Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF)
 Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)
 Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW)

Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association (SIPA)

Government of Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Water Security Agency (SWSA)
Ministry of the Environment (MoE)
Ministry of Agriculture (MoAg)
Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs (MoIA)
SaskWater (SKW)
SaskPower (SKP)

Government of Canada

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)
Western Economic Diversification Canada (WEDC)
Minister's Regional Office – Ralph Goodale (MRO)

Interprovincial Agencies

Prairie Provinces Water Board (PPWB)

Aboriginal Representation

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN)
Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (SICC)
First Nations University of Canada (FNUC)

Academia and Post-Secondary Institutions

University of Saskatchewan Centre for Hydrology
University of Saskatchewan Global Institute for Water Security
University of Saskatchewan Crop Development Centre (CDC)
University of Regina – Water, Environment, and Clean Energy Research
Saskatchewan Polytechnic – Applied Research and Innovation

Businesses

Clifton and Associates Ltd.

- 2) Launch WCS in recognition of 2017 being the 50th Anniversary of Lake Diefenbaker and the Gardiner Dam.
- 3) Create a partnership with ISM Canada to review all the data available and undertake in-depth analytics to provide maximum benefit for short and long-term outcomes.
- 4) Plan a Saskatchewan Water Summit to: present the WCS mandate; present the concept of the ISM analytics; present innovative practices on Saskatchewan challenges; and to seek broad input on the key issues around the valuable resource of water.
- 5) Seek out options to financially support the work of the WCS.

- 6) Encourage the Provincial Government, the Federal Government, and assigned regulatory agencies to consolidate all hydrological data gathered into a single database or platform.

Funding of the Saskatchewan Water Council

Initial administrative support will be provided by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. The work of ISM Canada, along with a plan that communicates the value of water along with a future Water Summit would invite the participation of other groups. Discussions with the Federal Government about funding would need to be undertaken due to the transboundary nature of water flow.