



STRATEGIC PLAN (2023 – 2026)

Engaging diverse perspectives for a healthy watershed that balances social, environmental, and economic needs.

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Background:

The South East Alberta Watershed Alliance (SEAWA) was established in 2008 as the official Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC) for the South Saskatchewan River Sub-Basin and the Pakowki Lake watershed, as designated under the Government of Alberta's Water for Life Strategy. SEAWA is a multi-sector, not-for-profit Society incorporated through the *Societies Act*, that promotes the good use and proper management of water in southeastern Alberta through watershed management planning. SEAWA acts as a collaborative forum for stakeholders from across sectors to work together in support of a healthy, dynamic, and sustainable watershed.

Core Work: Mandate and Roles

As a WPAC, SEAWA is expected to fulfill roles identified for WPACs. These roles are: (Appendix 1)

- State of watershed assessments and reporting
- Planning (e.g., Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP), Source Water Protection Plan (SWPP))
- Education and Literacy, and
- Convener Collaborator.

Not all WPACs will fulfill every role, all the time, or to its full extent. Each WPAC may focus on some roles more than others based on, experience, expertise, the interest of its members, assessment of watershed stewardship needs and alignment with partner initiatives. SEAWA watershed initiatives are guided by its Mission and Vision, Water for Life, and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) (Appendix 2). However, for SEAWA, the fulfilment of expected roles is highly dependent on operational and project grants, donations, and in-kind contributions.

As a designated WPAC, SEAWA supports the implementation of Alberta's Water for Life Strategy and works collaboratively to uphold the principles and achieve the goals and key directions of the strategy in its watershed. WPACs are a partner along with Alberta Water Council, Watershed Stewardship Groups, and the Government of Alberta (GOA) to help achieve Water for Life Goals of:

- Safe, secure drinking water
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems and
- Reliable quality supplies for a sustainable economy.

Additionally, Water for Life motivates SEAWA to balance three key directions in its work as a WPAC: partnerships, knowledge and research, and water conservation.

As independent societies, WPACs can also work on projects beyond the agreed upon mandate and roles.

Context:

SEAWA is governed by an elected Board of Directors with a total of 17 seats, shared among 9 membership categories (Table 1). In addition, the board may decide to give a voting privilege to the Past Chair. SEAWA has four active committees: Executive/Human Resources Committee, Communications Committee, Technical Committee, and Policy Committee.

SEAWA currently has two full-time staff positions: Executive Director and a Stewardship and Communications Coordinator, in addition to a summer student(s). The coordinator position may be filled in by a SEAWA intern or an assistant depending on qualifications and operational budget. Ideally, SEAWA would have three full-time positions, but this varies depending on available operational and project funding.

For the period 2023 -2027, important considerations include:

- **Mandate and Roles Document:** In September 2022 all WPACs in Alberta signed off on a “Mandate and Roles Document” which was developed collaboratively with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas on behalf of the GOA to reflect a clear and common understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. Based on receipt of this document, the Board underwent a facilitated update of its Strategic Plan.
- **People:** SEAWA is a partnership that includes many different people and organizations. It experiences changes in staff and volunteers in key positions. The anticipated resignation of the Executive Director in 2023 will require a significant transition. To support this transition there is significant need to fill the Stewardship and Communication Coordinator position.
- **Funding:** SEAWA relies on a mix of provincial, industry, and grant funding. SEAWA has a four-year (2023-2027) Mandate Fulfillment and Core Operating Costs funding agreement with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas. Inadequate funding holds SEAWA back from fulfilling more of the expected mandate and roles. SEAWA faces challenges such as a smaller population, a vast semi-arid landscape of predominantly agricultural land use, water quantity and quality risks, biodiversity hot spots, and more. Funding limitations determine how many and to what extent SEAWA’s strategic goals can be implemented and consequently, fulfillment of GOA’s expected roles for WPACs.

South East Alberta Watershed Alliance: framework policies

SEAWA’s Vision: A healthy watershed that provides balance between social, environmental, and economic benefits.

SEAWA’s Mission: SEAWA brings together diverse partners to educate the public, to support knowledge development, and to develop and facilitate the implementation of management plans for the sustainable use of the South Saskatchewan River Sub-Basin and the Pakowki Lake watershed.

Core Values:

- **Water Advocacy & Stewardship:** SEAWA seeks knowledge and shares that knowledge for restoring and protecting the watershed so that it is a healthy and safe community resource for all. Water is fundamental to all life and human needs. Biodiversity and healthy aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems are critical for a healthy watershed and anchor the work of the organization. As a collective voice of our waters, SEAWA aims to ensure the needs and importance of water are heard and understood.
- **Learning and Growing:** SEAWA encourages critical thinking, seeks sound information, and acknowledges sources of information. SEAWA seeks to generate knowledge through local projects. SEAWA grows skills and understanding, and actively share science, data, lived experience, and community knowledge of the watershed.
- **Innovative Leadership:** SEAWA helps others to take actions that improve the condition of the watershed. We get involved and inspire opportunities for people to act on problems and emerging threats that are negatively impacting the watershed. SEAWA works from the neighborhood to regional level, wherever the solutions exist, sharing our knowledge of care for the watershed with others as well as learn from them.
- **Community and Collaboration:** SEAWA needs the involvement of local citizens to motivate communities and individuals to take action. SEAWA contributes to and creates collective efforts that are rooted in respect. SEAWA meets people and partners where they are and creates programs and plans that rely on collective efforts and ideas. SEAWA creates relationships and partnerships through its work that strengthen ties to each other and the communities where they live, work and play.
- **Diversity:** People need a healthy environment to live and thrive. SEAWA hosts inclusive dialogues and brings diverse people and perspectives together. SEAWA serves as a conduit between businesses, residents, public officials, agencies, and processes. SEAWA listens and helps others to respect different perspectives. SEAWA

provides a platform for diverse stakeholders to bring their concerns forward and work together for the common benefit of a healthy and sustainable watershed.

STRATEGIC GOALS (2023 – 2026):

1. **Enhance Organizational Capacity:** build the Board to broaden the diversity of perspectives and support for our collective work.
2. **Build and Enhance Relationships:** expand our membership with increased municipal and other key stakeholders engaged in effective networking.
3. **Develop Water and Watershed Management Plans:** continue our community-based watershed planning and reporting to inform ecologically sustainable development and management of water for the environmental, social and economic well being of the South Saskatchewan River Sub-Basin and Pakowki Lake watershed.
4. **Develop Local Watershed Knowledge and Educate the Public and Watershed Stakeholders:** inform, initiate and support programs to implement watershed improvements in alignment with Water for Life goals, SSRP recommendations, SEAWA mission, and in the future, SWWP and/or IWMP. Through local knowledge sharing, SEAWA gains support and diversity of people engaged with watershed stewardship.

STRATEGIC PLAN (2023 – 2026):

Engaging diverse perspectives for a healthy watershed that balances social, environmental, and economic needs.

Goal Strategies	Enhance Organizational Capacity: build the Board to broaden the diversity of perspectives and support for our collective work.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Board recruitment, development, and socials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a Nominating Committee to engage others to fill vacancies (<i>engage with all Municipalities in our watershed / tap into new industries e.g., windmill, renewables / recruit from throughout the watershed</i>). • Directors of the Board belong to different sectors, and they need to get to know each other. Encourage Board tour of sites/projects and learn from each other to grow our common voice for water locally. • Grow Board commitment and improve function of the Board and its committees. • The diversity of watershed stakeholders can make work harder and more complex. Acknowledge and celebrate how SEAWA recognizes and represents the diversity of perspectives in the watershed. b. Grow our skills as a collective voice for the water: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the government to work together with SEAWA. • Advise the Ministry about integrated watershed management and with respect to related issues requested by the Ministry. • Meet with local governments and elected officials to share SEAWA's goals, work, and successes. • Ensure SEAWA's advocacy efforts are appropriate and align with SEAWA's core values and policies. • As issues arise, establish working groups amongst sectors to talk about complex issues and projects and ensure issues are addressed. c. Strengthen our staff and implementation team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the upcoming resignation of SEAWA's current Executive Director (ED), recruit and transition to a new ED. • Expand staff capacity; priority is to hire a Stewardship and Communication Coordinator. d. Expand funding through relationship building and specifically seek funding to increase staff capacity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain charitable status to engage more donors with an ability to provide tax receipts. • Secure grants from federal, provincial, and municipal governments, and other funding programs that support studies about the SEAWA watershed. • Recapture funding SEAWA had in the past by understanding why it was lost and what can be done to regain support. • Prepare project proposals to seek funding that clearly communicate what we hope to achieve and approach a diversity of funders. Funders want to know what their money will support. Showcase how SEAWA work directly supports their goals or priority areas.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effective governance that holds the interests of all stakeholders, creates, and maintains an honest, open environment, allowing the organization to create value, innovate and grow. ➤ SEAWA's advice is respected and sought out by governments and industries. ➤ New development projects in the watershed receive careful consideration and SEAWA's review of effects of projects on the watershed are welcome. ➤ Successful transition to new ED and more staff and volunteers helping SEAWA to accomplish its goals and participate in projects. ➤ Adequate resources acquired for SEAWA to work on watershed management planning and improved organizational capacity. ➤ More funding that allows SEAWA to expand its work on all our key roles.

Goal Strategies	<p>Build and Enhance Relationships: expand our membership with increased municipal and other key stakeholders engaged in effective networking.</p> <p>a. Grow our Membership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with all Municipalities in our watershed and encourage them to become SEAWA members, work with SEAWA, and provide funding to SEAWA. • Engage with relevant new industries (e.g., renewable energy) to become SEAWA members, and to provide funding to SEAWA. • Use a public forum to draw interest and raise awareness, highlighting the importance of the work we do and the resulting environmental and health benefits. Provide key information about the importance and benefits of resource management. <p>b. Relationship Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend town meetings in smaller communities to ensure a presence and connection with smaller municipalities. • Identify collaborative projects with stakeholders (e.g., municipalities, stewardship groups, youth groups, recreation groups, etc.) based on issues critical to them (e.g., retaining water, recreational impacts on water, etc.). <p>c. Improve Networking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect stewardship groups for greater collaboration of all stakeholders and grassroots efforts. • Ensure networking helps to amplify the work of other organizations. • Commit to networking and active participation with the broader water and watershed networks in Alberta and beyond.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More and more engaged members. ➤ More donations from Municipalities and other stakeholders. ➤ Effectively serve as a convenor and collaborator across watershed stakeholders to advance overall watershed stewardship and management. ➤ Focused and collaborative projects that get municipalities and other key local stakeholders on board with SEAWA. ➤ Greater clarity of what funding to pursue to support projects important to all stakeholders. ➤ Engagement of sectors enabling SEAWA all to share its good-news stories. ➤ Greater awareness of how SEAWA can help others achieve their goals.
Goal	<p>Develop Water and Watershed Management Plans: continue our community-based watershed assessments, watershed planning, and reporting to inform ecologically sustainable development and management of water for the environmental, social and economic well being of the South Saskatchewan River Sub-Basin and Pakowki Lake watershed.</p>

Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assess the state of the watershed: Proceed with our Source Water Protection Planning (2023 – 2027) and hire facilitator to involve municipalities and public. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, SEAWA has started a phase (information gathering and reporting) of source water protection planning. The rest of the phases will take 3-4 years to complete if funding is provided by GoA. Completing a Source Water Protection Plan covers both the State of the watershed assessments and reporting, and Planning Roles. • Hired consultants gather all existing information on watershed indicators. This includes public consultation/stakeholders to inform the watershed indicators. Involving stakeholders is critical to buy-in and involvement in the process. b. Report on the state of the watershed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure SEAWA has the capacity to periodically assess and report on the state of the South Saskatchewan River Sub-Basin and the Pakowki Lake watershed. c. Integrated Watershed Management Plan: develop IWMP and lead, promote and coordinate implementation across stakeholders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure alignment with corresponding Regional Plan(s) under the Land Use Framework (e.g., South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)) and other existing/relevant policies and plans.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Research in the SEAWA watershed is supported and enabled. ➤ Source Water Protection Plan is ready by 2027. ➤ State of the Watershed Report then builds on Source Water Protection Plan. ➤ Deeper understanding and assessment of the impacts of SEAWA’s work on water quality and quantity.
Goal	<p>Develop Local Watershed Knowledge and Educate the Public and Watershed Stakeholders: Inform, initiate and support programs to implement watershed improvements and grow support and diversity of people engaged with water stewardship.</p>
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use educational content that comes from the state of the watershed report, management plans, stewardship projects, applied research, and GoA-shared information to inform stakeholders and the public. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure and share knowledge gained from riparian restoration projects and expand to new places. • Determine if there is improvement in water quality. • Educate how planting native shrubs and trees contributes to ecosystem health. • Translate results to share with the public and stakeholders. • Show how SEAWA’s work fits into Water for Life and satisfies priorities in the SSRP. • Ensure our environmental concerns are also explained from economic and social perspectives. Explain how these are relevant to municipalities, industries, and the public. Explain to people how environmental concerns may affect their well-being. b. Annual educational forum(s) and report(s) communicate results to all stakeholders at every step of the SWPP process. c. Work with community to help address issues that affect the watershed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplify the work of other organizations to help attract more volunteers supporting watershed management projects. • Create a volunteer and stakeholders/associates list of organizations who might participate. • Help start local stewardship and other groups and promote/support stewardship projects that address issues in the watershed. • Recreation: do more to engage outdoor recreation groups and local governments regarding invasive species that threaten water bodies including education, monitoring, and enforcement.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engaged and educated community supporting water stewardship. ➤ More local efforts and grassroots projects throughout our watershed. ➤ More support and diversity of participants engaged with watershed stewardship and SEAWA. ➤ Greater engagement and coordination of efforts of all stakeholders.