

## January 2015 e-News

### Check it out!

Our newly designed website [www.pfcalgary.ca](http://www.pfcalgary.ca) encourages more interaction and, like all websites of this style, we'll be adding more info as it becomes known to us. A big thanks to Dan and Michell McDougall of Twisted Ink Design and Advertising for their creation.

### Milk River Ridge Reservoir Water Quality Update:

The Milk River Ridge Reservoir Water Quality Stewardship Initiative (MRRRWQSI) is a multi-year collaborative initiative of the County of Warner and Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD). In 2014 several conservation organizations agreed to partner with ESRD and the County; their involvement will be focused on securing and enhancing wildlife habitat within individual stewardship project areas.

The MRRRWQSI initiative consists of 9 separate projects around the Waterton-St. Mary Headworks inlet canal and the shorelands of Milk River Ridge Reservoir. The lands in question are predominantly Provincial Crown land (which are sometimes referred to as "public land"). In the past these lands were often called "right-of-way" lands, but today they are referred to as the "provincial land corridor".

The Stewardship Initiative has as its overall aim the improvement of water quality within ESRD's headwork canal and Milk River Ridge Reservoir through the restoration of impacted shore lands and riparian areas. Water quality declines in previous years are attributed in part to a significant degradation of the provincial land corridor which surrounds the Reservoir and the headwork canal that enters into the reservoir inlet. By returning ecological function to compromised corridor lands they will be able to function as environmental buffers to intercept and slow runoff from the Milk River Ridge, and better anchor riparian areas and shore lands with desired vegetation communities.

County of Warner representatives approached ESRD staff in the spring of 2013 to discuss the need to more effectively manage the provincial land corridor along ESRD's water management headwork canals and Ridge Reservoir. Numerous impacts, unauthorized activities and encroachments have occurred on the provincial land corridor over a period of several decades, in some cases preventing these shore lands from functioning as ecological buffers. Shore land degradation and poor land use practices are contributing to a diminishment of water quality in Ridge Reservoir. Restoration actions and better stewardship actions (both on provincial Crown land and adjacent private land) will help in minimizing water quality declines that have resulted from poor land use practices.

Agreement was reached that a collaborative partnership should be formed between the County and the Department and that a stewardship initiative should be undertaken to: **a)** identify the provincial land corridor boundary for the benefit of adjacent landowners and the public, **b)** systematically address wide-ranging provincial land corridor impacts, and **c)** undertake habitat enhancements wherever opportunities exist to do so with the involvement of conservation partners.

The Alberta Conservation Association has agreed to coordinate the involvement of participating conservation partners:

- Pheasants Forever – Calgary
- Pheasants Forever – Lethbridge
- Lethbridge Fish and Game club
- Alberta Fish and Game Association

These partners would undertake on-the-ground activities to achieve wildlife habitat objectives within individual project areas on behalf of participating conservation partners, and receive and disburse partner funding. Conservation partners expressed an interest in funding and supporting the following activities on the provincial land corridor to benefit wildlife:

- establish permanent cover on exposed soil using a native seed mixture
- manage weeds in newly seeded areas
- develop an artificial wetland in project “B”
- develop MRRRWQSI project specific signage

2014 has been a productive year, ESRD has completed approximately 3 miles of fencing along the south shore of Milk River Ridge Reservoir and the canal system to the west of the reservoir. This has secured over 150 acres for wildlife habitat. All partners contributed to the purchase of grass seed to put approximately 90 acres of previously cultivated lands within the fenced areas back into permanent cover. ESRD is already taking action on activities for the 2015 season, which include further boundary surveys and fencing projects along the south and north shores of the reservoir. There will be ample opportunity for conservation groups to continue with this partnership in helping to re-establish vegetative buffers and create wildlife habitat in the upcoming years.

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