

# Nose Creek Watershed Partnership a Vanguard in Alberta

by C. Lacombe

Alberta’s historical population figures show how much can change in the span of a human life. It took 35 years (1921 – 1956) for the provincial population to double to 1.1 million. Then it took 25 years to double to 2.2 million and finally, it took 22 more years to double to 4 million by July 2013.

An Albertan born in 1956 would remember Calgary as Cow Town and would notice the acceleration of change on the landscape as they compared childhood memories to today’s reality.

*Source Alberta Municipal Affairs	1985	1990	1995	2000
Airdrie	10,431	11,904	14,506	19,165
Rocky View County	16,703	17,484	19,888	20,441
Calgary	625,143	692,885	749,073	860,749
*Source Statistics Canada				
Alberta	1981	1991	1996	2001
	2,237,724	2,545,553	2,696,826	2,974,807

It should not come as a surprise then that community leaders started to notice changes in the environment around them in the mid-1990s. Not just land going under development, but effects on water and air conditions. Community leaders managing things in the 1990s were in charge of some of the fastest changing landscapes in Canada.

While the population grew, so did urban centers; with Calgary region leading the way. Nose Creek watershed runs through the thick of development action in its region. Its headwaters lie near Madden, AB for both Nose Creek main stem and West Nose Creek tributary. The main stem comes close to following Hwy #2 through Airdrie and straight down through Calgary to the Bow River. West Nose Creek meanders southeast from Madden until it joins the mainstem in north Calgary near the airport.

In quiet conversations, community leaders from Rocky View County, Chestermere, The City of Calgary and Western Irrigation District began to discuss ways they could check what looked like effects on Nose Creek water quality.

“There was recognition that we didn’t know what the state of the watershed was in the early days. So, we initiated water quality monitoring to get a baseline,” says Tim Dietzler, Rocky View County Agriculture Fieldman.

They created a staff technical committee and terms of reference to begin exploring ways to reduce contaminants in storm water. By 1998, Nose Creek Watershed Partnership (NCWP) became a formal entity and invited Airdrie, Crossfield and Calgary Airport Authority as partners.

NCWP was part of the watershed movement vanguard in Alberta. The South Saskatchewan River watershed of southern Alberta contains the highest density of urban and agricultural development in the province. It contains the entire Calgary region and 13 formalized irrigation districts.

At this early stage, the province had not created the watershed framework that exists today for monitoring, protecting and revitalizing Alberta’s water resources. The movement grew out of local concerns in the South Saskatchewan basin where water users (urban and rural) expressed concerns about water quality and quantity.



*As Alberta’s population grows, so does the need for larger infrastructure. Hidden among the transportation corridors, Nose Creek struggles to retain its natural health.*

In some respects, the Bow River basin became a test case for the province while it wrestled with how to manage the rapid changes taking place all over the province. As a major tributary to the Bow River, Nose Creek also provided valuable insight in that process.

In the same year that NCWP released its first progress report, Nose Creek Report Card 2003, the Alberta Legislature passed its Water For Life Strategy setting up a framework for water resource protection and goals in Alberta.

“We understood that Water For Life gave us the ability to develop a Watershed Management Plan,” Dietzler says. NCWP became Alberta pioneers in this process.

With an eight-year head start on game, NCWP developed one of the first sub-basin plans while working alongside the Bow River Basin Council that pioneered the first major basin Watershed Management Plan. The Nose Creek Watershed Management Plan focuses on riparian protection and water quality guidelines for water entering Nose Creek.

A watershed management plan does not come together without a lot of ground work and science. The water monitoring data, the collaborative committee and the municipal leadership support necessary for success took time to build.

Along the way, the NCWP partners had technical help from Trout Unlimited, Madawaska Consulting, Paliser Environmental, Waxwing Synthesis and Resolution Inc., Westhoff Engineering Resources, University of Calgary and Bow River Basin Council. The Calgary region became Alberta’s leading watershed management movers and shakers as more aspects of managing the resource became evident through the work of these resource protection pioneers.

Today, NCWP fits into the Water For Life Strategy as a watershed stewardship group. Its watershed management plan forms a part of development guidelines in Rocky View County, Airdrie, Crossfield and parts of Calgary where Nose Creek and West Nose Creek flow.

While its work will never end, thanks to alert community leaders, NCWP led the way in Alberta at a significant time and exemplified guardianship of our natural resources.



*West Nose Creek  
Prairie rivers look modest. Yet to the ecosystems they support, prairie river value is immeasurable and rare.*