



Project WaterShip: Leadership, Partnership, Stewardship

Final report on Needs Assessment Survey July 2010

1. Introduction

The Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES) is a non-profit non-governmental organization working towards a global community in which all needs can be met in sustainable ways.

The SES Freshwater Protection Program is in its fifth year of operation and received funding this year to conduct a Needs Assessment survey of watershed stewardship groups in Saskatchewan. The survey is the first phase of Project WaterShip; Leadership, Partnership, Stewardship (hereafter: Project WaterShip) – a capacity building project that aims to improve the institutional capacity of watershed stewardship groups to effectively and efficiently address issues surrounding freshwater resources.

The Needs Assessment was conducted in early 2010. A copy of the survey and an explanation of survey methodology are available in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively. The SES identified 27 non-profit non-governmental watershed stewardship groups operating, or having recently operated, across the province. Of these, 20 groups participated in the survey.

Participating Groups

Careful consideration was given as to whether or not to include groups operating under the Agri-Environmental-Group-Plans (AEGP) Program. While these groups can be considered stewardship groups, the protection of water resources is not always their specific focus. These groups function in a specific format under a federal and provincial government sponsored program operated by the Provincial Council of Agriculture Development and Diversification Boards for Saskatchewan Inc (PCAB). As many of the parameters against which groups are being compared remain constant between these groups, it was decided not to include them in the survey.

Two types of groups can be identified among those surveyed. There are 20 or so small community watershed groups operating around the province, 12 of which participated in the survey. These volunteer-run groups include environmental committees set up by cabin owners associations as well as groups set up separately out of concern for water quality or quantity. They are usually focused on water issues in one particular lake.

On a larger scale, there are eight watershed management groups in Saskatchewan who have formed as the result of a source water protection planning process led by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority (SWA). These groups operate across a wider geographical area based on watershed boundaries, and receive core funding from the SWA. Their goals are clearly set out in individual Source Water Protection Plans (SWPP's), and they are generally better equipped to address water issues than their smaller community counterparts.

For the purposes of analyzing survey results, these two types of groups have been assessed separately and will be hereafter referred to as "community groups" and "SWPP groups"

2. Discussion of Needs Assessment results

Concerns

In order to gather some background information about the need for water stewardship, groups were asked to identify their top three concerns regarding water resources in their area of interest.

The biggest concern for community groups was general water quality, with 35% citing this among their top three concerns. Other more specific concerns related to water quality included algal blooms, impacts of agricultural runoff on fish habitat, groundwater contamination and the spreading of effluent over farmland. The unsustainable development of shorelines right up to the water's edge on the margins of lakes was also a top concern of community groups, as was fluctuating water levels in reservoirs.

General water quality and water quantity/supply tied for the highest concern among SWPP groups. These groups seemed more concerned with bigger picture issues such as wetland drainage, industrial expansion and long-term supply – likely a reflection of their wider geographical scope.

Organizational Capacity

Ten capacity areas identified as a basis for survey questions are listed below. Near the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to rank their capacity in each area between 1 and 10, with a rank of 1 indicating an urgent need to build capacity in that

area; 10 indicating that they felt confident that no improvement was needed. Figure 1 indicates the level of need for these capacity areas.

- Access to information and Expertise
- Human Resources
- Provincial government communication and support
- Municipal government communication and support
- Education and training
- Funding
- Clarification of goals and aspirations
- Networking opportunities
- Organizational structure
- Social Marketing and Community Engagement skills

The top three capacity areas in which community groups need to build capacity were Funding; Education and Training; and Municipal Government Support.

For the SWPP groups, Funding; Social Marketing and Community Engagement Training; and Human Resources were the top three areas in which capacity needs to be improved upon.

Other areas in which groups want to build capacity include science and research; federal government support; management training and media engagement training. Discussion on the capacity needs of watershed groups follows.

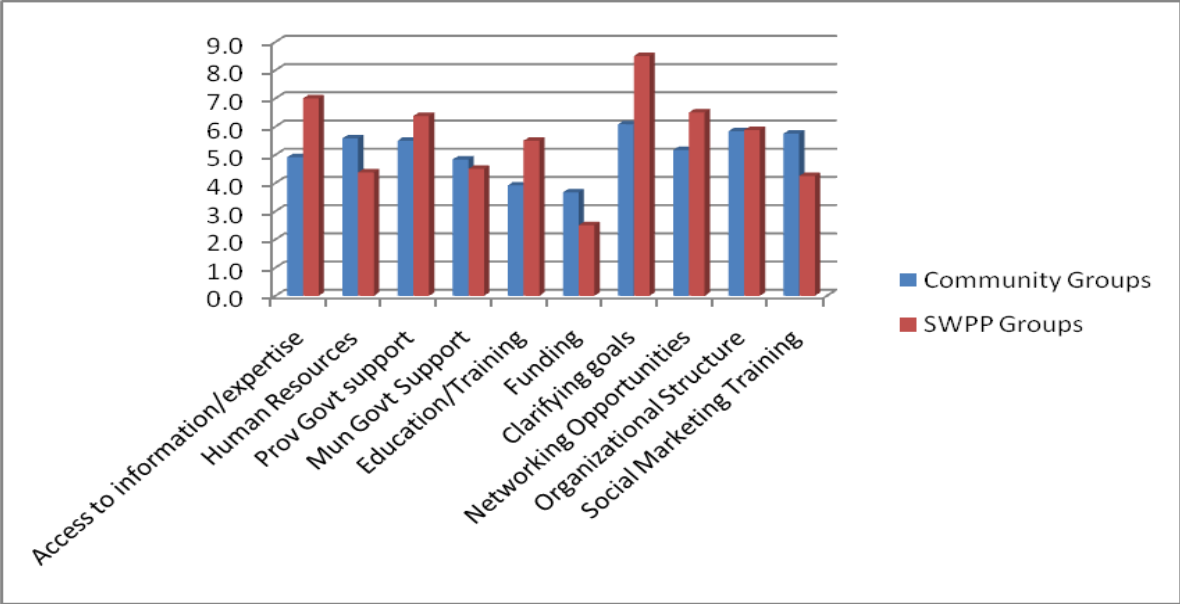


Figure 1: Needs of watershed stewardship groups as ranked out of 10 (Note: a lower score indicates a higher need)

Access to Information and Expertise

The perceived accessibility of information and expertise varied greatly between groups. This area was not a priority for SWPP groups, with two groups ranking this area a 10, indicating that they needed no assistance or guidance. Community groups indicated more of a need for improved access to information, with an average of 4.9 out of 10, as opposed to an average of 7 out of 10 for their larger counterparts. When asked right out if there was adequate access, 63% of SWPP groups answered “yes”; compared with 58% of community groups.

These results are not unexpected, as SWPP groups have been through a planning process with the SWA. Part of this process included consultation with a Technical Committee made up of experts from agriculture, government, industry, NGO’s and the private sector. The relationships built during this process are of great assistance in knowing who to call for information.

Problems with Access to Information and Expertise included knowing where to look for information; finding the time to look for information and a lack of communication and information sharing between government, academia and NGO’s. Several of the community groups indicated that the Saskatchewan Network of Watershed Stewards (SNOWS) have assisted them in the past by acting as a liaison for accessing the information they require. This umbrella organization has provided support and useful resources in the past including a “How To” toolkit for watershed groups. However, SNOWS has been inactive for two years due to a lack of funding and a perceived lack of support from the provincial government.

Human Resources

There was a large disparity between the two types of groups in this area. While all of the SWPP groups have at least two full-time equivalent paid positions, none of the community groups had any paid positions, save a per diem that some groups paid to their board members. Both types of group rely heavily on the help of volunteers, though this is more important for the community groups as they are entirely volunteer-run.

The number of volunteers available to community groups varied greatly, as shown in Figure 2. Half of the community groups surveyed indicated that they had no volunteers beyond their board members. However, two community groups had more than 100 volunteer groups that they could call on, whereas 50 volunteers was the highest number available to any of the SWPP groups. Those groups who actively engaged property owners in their areas and involved local schools in their activities enjoyed higher numbers of volunteers.

Half of all community groups had vacancies on their board at the time of the survey, along with one quarter of SWPP groups, indicating that watershed stewardship groups have a hard time recruiting and keeping committed volunteers. It is possible that many volunteers are more enthusiastic about participating in specific action projects than

committing to serving on a board of directors. SWPP groups generally have a more solid base of people to elect to their board, as they are supported by multi-stakeholder Watershed Advisory Committees (WACs) which assisted in the planning process.



Figure 2: Numbers of volunteers available to stewardship groups

Provincial Government Communication and Support

Due to the planning process that formed them and their wider geographical scope, SWPP groups enjoy a higher level of communication and support at a provincial government level than community groups. 63% of the SWPP groups cited provincial government support as “good” or “very good”, as compared to just 25% of community groups. Most of the community groups indicated that the support is adequate when they go looking for it, but that it is not readily forthcoming in any outreach or support programs. Perceived levels of provincial government support are displayed in Figure 3.

As well as core funding and in kind support from the SWA, SWPP groups are often well connected with AEGP groups operating in their area, which are coordinated by PCAB. Most groups have had limited or no contact with the Ministry of Environment.

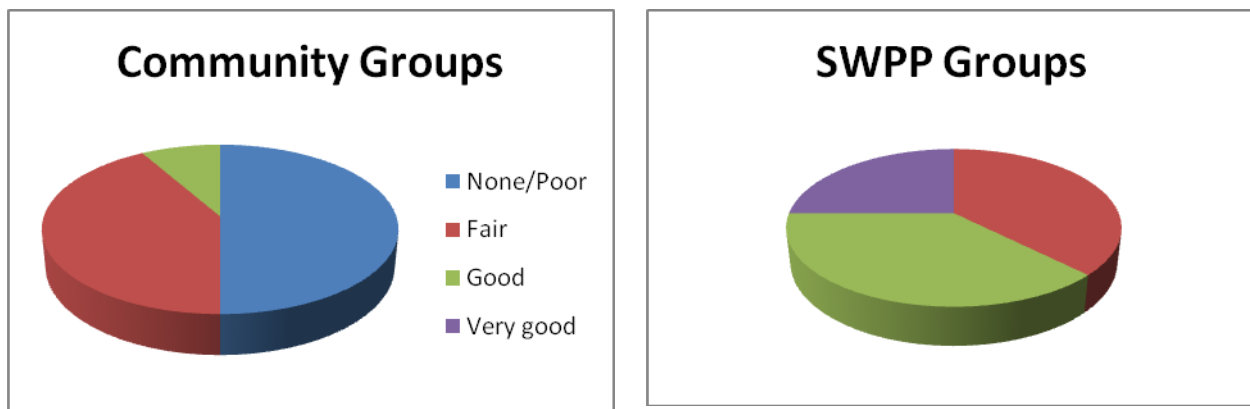


Figure 3: Perceived level of provincial government support

Municipal Government Communication and Support

Figure 4 shows the perceived level of support from municipal governments. Support for community stewardship groups ranges from an attitude of total disinterest to active involvement of the mayor and councilors on the board of the group. However, in general, community groups desire a substantial improvement in communication and support from their municipal governments, with half of these groups citing “None/Poor” communication and support. A few explanations were offered for this situation, including conflicting interests between municipalities and stewardship groups in terms of limiting growth around lakes and enforcing restrictions on shoreline development. Better relationships with municipalities was listed among the top three capacity areas upon which community groups wish to build.

In contrast, SWPP groups generally enjoy a high level of communication and support from municipal governments. Many have municipal representatives on their Board who were involved from the beginning in the planning process by sitting on WACs.

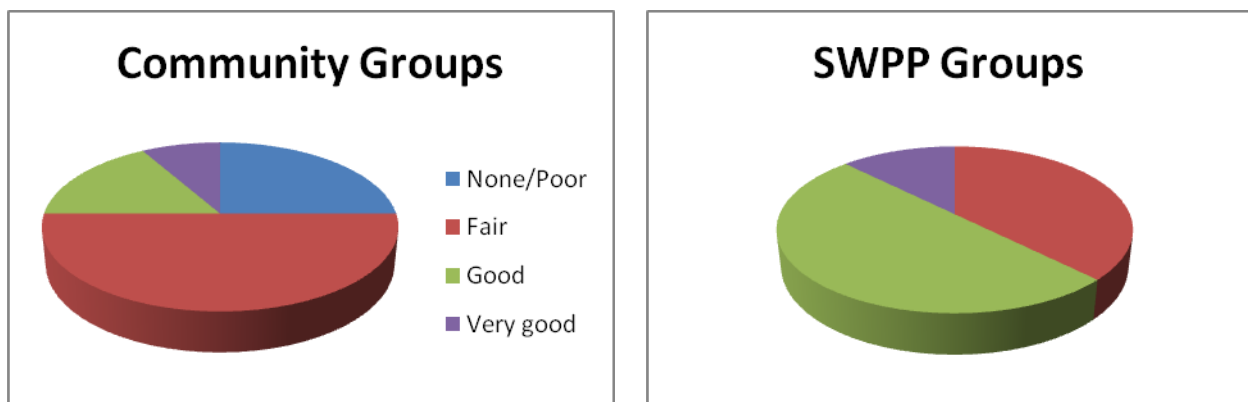


Figure 4: Perceived level of municipal government support

Education and Training

This is an area of capacity in which the community groups especially could use assistance. As previously mentioned, community stewardship groups rely on volunteers to operate – volunteers who are willing to contribute but do not necessarily have the organizational, technical or communications skills required to efficiently carry out the groups activities and outreach. Several groups mentioned difficulties in recruiting younger volunteers. Many of the leaders are in, or nearing retirement and have limited training or experience with online forms of communication and outreach, which are becoming increasingly important.

SWPP groups also expressed a desire for increased education and training opportunities for their staff, with an average capacity rating of 5.5. One group cited a lack of education and training of staff on how to work in a NGO environment to be their main barrier to operating effectively. As with most capacity areas, SWPP groups are faring

better in this area, likely due to their ability to go through a hiring process for staff rather than relying on volunteers.

Funding

While both types of group ranked Funding as their highest priority, the SWPP groups expressed funding as a more urgent issue than community groups, averaging a capacity score of 2.5, compared to 3.7. However, this does not accurately reflect the spread of funding, but rather indicates the larger funding requirements of SWPP groups as compared to community groups. SWPP groups have a much larger area to work within and have considerably higher administrative costs than the volunteer-based community groups. In terms of access to funding, the SWPP groups tend to be better off. Sources of funding are shown in Figure 5.

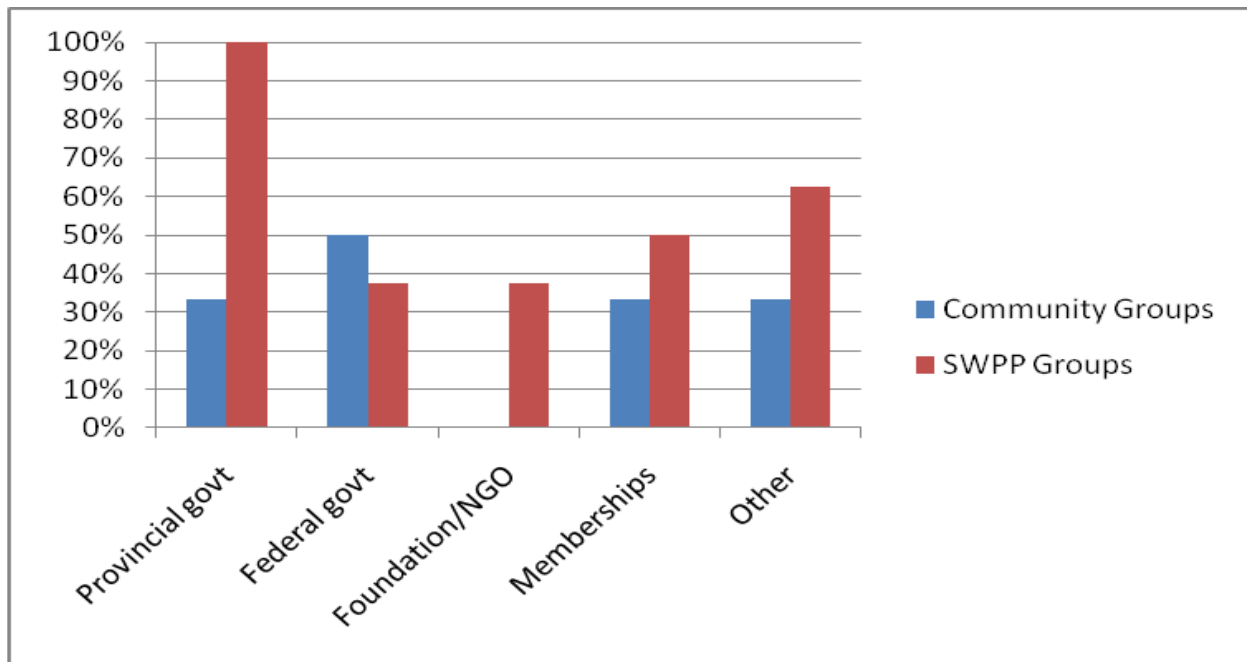


Figure 5: Sources of funding for watershed stewardship groups

All eight of the SWPP groups receive core funding from the SWA, though the amount varies. These groups have also accessed grants from other provincial government departments such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment. In contrast, only one third of the community groups surveyed have provincial government funding.

The federal government has been supportive in the past in providing funding to community groups through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), with almost half having received DFO grants in the past. However, discussions with watershed groups and with government representatives indicate that due to budget cuts, DFO is

no longer readily offering community grants. Only 3 of the 8 SWPP groups have accessed federal government funding to date.

A few groups have supplemented government grants with membership fees from municipalities or from property owners surrounding their lake. 38% of SWPP groups have received funding from other NGO environmental groups such as wildlife groups.

One source of funding which is still largely untapped by watershed stewardship groups is corporate donations and grants (included in “Other” in Figure 5). Only three of the 27 groups surveyed had received money from businesses or corporations. A representative from a community group stated “There are huge corporations out there just trying to give away significant amounts of money for environmental projects. One just has to be prepared to work to locate them and fulfill their requirements”. Other groups have stated that they think there is funding out there, but they do not know how or where to access it and they have limited experience with writing funding proposals.

Clarification of Goals and Aspirations

Both types of group indicated that Clarification of Goals was the area in which they least needed to build capacity, indicating that watershed stewardship groups have a clear idea of their objectives and what they are trying to achieve. Only one group of the 27 surveyed did not have a set mandate.

In particular the SWPP groups are clear on what they are doing, as their SWPPs set out recommendations and key actions under a series of objectives. The scope of work for these groups is wide and suggestions for potential partnering organizations are provided for each key action. It is interesting to note that, almost entirely, suggested partner organizations are government departments. Other watershed groups are rarely mentioned as potential partners.

Networking Opportunities

There are considerably more networking opportunities for SWPP groups than their smaller community counterparts. They are also usually in a better financial position to send members of their groups to conferences and events with other watershed groups and government representatives. Three of the SWPP groups had also made connections with other groups operating beyond the Saskatchewan border in Alberta, Manitoba, Minnesota and North Dakota.

The formation of the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW) in 2008 as an umbrella organization for SWPP groups has helped bring these groups together to work cohesively. SAW act as a support network with representation from all of the SWPP groups and hosts an annual conference which is well attended. The SWPP groups and SAW hold semi-regular conference calls to discuss current issues and ideas regarding watershed protection in Saskatchewan.

Community groups have benefitted greatly in the past from the work of SNOWS who are currently inactive. With the continued success of the SWA's integrated source water management planning process, a new model has emerged in Saskatchewan of watershed-based governance. Community groups are now expected to look to their larger counterparts for support and information. However, not all the community groups have a large watershed group within their watershed. Compounding this, many of the SWPP groups are still getting off the ground and as indicated by the top three needs identified by SWPP groups – Funding; Social Marketing/Community Engagement Training and Human Resources – these groups are not always in a good position to be offering information and support to the smaller stewardship groups operating within their watershed. Only one third of community groups have made a connection with the SWPP group for their watershed. One complaint from a SWPP group with regards to community groups is that some tend to be very focused on their particular lake and are not interested taking a more holistic 'big picture' approach.

Organizational Structure

All watershed stewardship groups in Saskatchewan are governed by a Board of Directors (or in one case a Committee). One community group made mention of specific committees operating beneath their board. As mentioned in the Human Resources section, many groups do not have a full board of directors at this time.

Improved organizational structure was not a high priority for either type of group indicating that logistically, the groups are organized well and that members generally have a good idea of their role within the organization.

Social Marketing and Community Engagement

The issue of citizen disinterest, apathy or general lack of knowledge is an issue for almost all of the groups surveyed. The average level of engagement of citizens was 4.3 out of 10 for all groups (10 being very engaged), with little difference between community groups and SWPP groups (4.4 and 4.1 respectively). Many groups cited large disparities in levels of engagement between rural and urban folks with those whose livelihoods depended more directly upon the availability of a reliable clean source of water being more aware of the threats. Predictably, there was a higher level of citizen engagement in regions where controversial issues have been raised.

Interestingly, community groups ranked this area pretty low in terms of needs, whilst SWPP groups ranked this as their second highest priority. In saying this, nearly all of the community groups mentioned frustrations with engaging citizens and educating citizens at some point during the survey.

Groups used a number of different media to get their message across to residents of their watershed. The spread is shown in Figure 6. A major weakness for community groups is that less than half of those surveyed have a website. In today's climate of online access and instant information, websites are an important marketing tool.

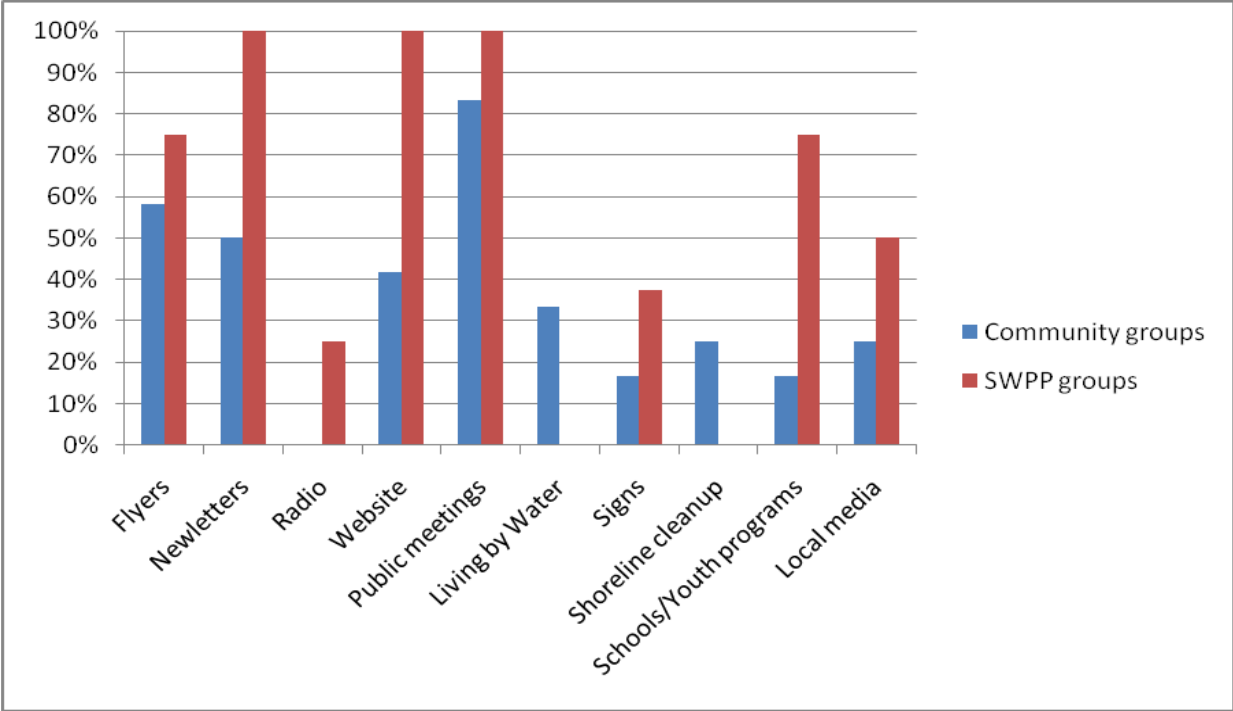


Figure 6: Social marketing/engagement media used by watershed groups

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

There are distinct differences in operations and capacity between the two types of watershed protection groups that were surveyed. The level of funding and in kind support from government departments and other groups varies a lot across the spectrum, as does the scope of work and land area that these groups cover. Amongst all these differences, some common themes have emerged.

Both types of group would benefit from improved communications. The SWPP groups who have all gone through the provincial government-sponsored planning process tend to keep in contact with each other and with SAW through conferences and regular phone calls. The current integrated resource management model of watershed governance in Saskatchewan would see smaller community groups liaising with their larger SWPP group counterparts, working with them and going to them for information and support.

However, survey results indicate that only one third of community groups have a relationship with the larger group in their area. Many of the goals and aspirations of volunteer community groups correspond with key actions listed in the source water protection plans of SWPP groups, albeit usually on a smaller scale. There may be opportunities for SWPP groups to outsource some of their work to community groups

and be more inclusive in their activities. Community groups, in return, could take a step back and assess how their activities fit into watershed protection on a larger scale.

Recommendation 1: Large SWPP groups should work towards building relationships with community groups operating within their watershed and investigate how both groups might mutually benefit from working together.

Community groups could also learn a lot from each other, as many are facing the same sorts of issues, particularly surrounding water quality in lakes. One quarter of community groups surveyed had a relationship with other similar groups. There is huge potential here for groups to work together and discuss their barriers and successes. Now that SNOWS is no longer active, these groups do not have a focal point for networking within Saskatchewan. Nature Saskatchewan has also ended their “Living By Water” program, despite lake resort communities continuing to grow. Provincial chapters of Stewardship Canada operate out of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. There is an opportunity for Saskatchewan to have a website portal to this national stewardship organization, which could be used to disseminate information and advice to groups.

Recommendation 2: Community groups should build relationships with similar groups, to investigate common issues and discuss ways of working together.

Recommendation 3: The provincial government, watershed groups and other NGO's should work together to create a Saskatchewan chapter of Stewardship Canada.

A lack of reliable long-term funding is the number one issue for watershed stewardship groups, as with most NGO's. The economic recession of 2008 has impacted governments, NGO's, industry and foundations alike. However, a number of different funding sources were identified during the survey, some more utilized than others. Very few grants have been accessed from private corporations, with most groups looking to government. Anecdotal evidence suggests that money is available from large industries and corporations for environmental stewardship projects, when the effort is made to enquire.

Recommendation 4: An updatable online database of funding sources for watershed stewardship groups should be created and details provided to all watershed groups.

A common problem that both types of groups face is residents lack of knowledge and awareness of the threats to freshwater resources in their watershed. Many citizens do not make connections between their daily actions and water quality issues, and there is often a lot of finger pointing to other sectors of society. Ongoing education of citizens is a high priority for watershed groups. Those groups who worked with schools and other local youth-based groups were better known in their communities and enjoyed higher levels of volunteer participation.

Social psychology research (www.cbsm.com) indicates that social messaging, in contrast to conventional marketing, can be tailored in such a way as to have a higher rate of success in fostering long-term sustainable behaviour change. Community Based

Social Marketing (CBSM), a concept put forth by Canadian environmental psychologist Dr Doug McKenzie-Mohr, utilizes specific techniques to remove the barriers that citizens have to leading more sustainable lives.

Recommendation 5: Watershed groups should try to involve schools in their watershed protection activities where possible, in order to establish their group within the wider community.

Recommendation 6: The SES and other groups should work together to host a workshop on CBSM specifically tailored towards watershed stewardship groups.

There are opportunities for improvement in the effectiveness of watershed stewardship groups in Saskatchewan to protect water resources. Any successful capacity building will require groups working together and should ideally involve various levels of government as well as other stewardship groups and NGO's.



This report was made possible through the generous support of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation are an independent Canadian grant making foundation, dedicated to the development of sound and innovative public policies.

Appendix 1. Survey Methodology

Contact details were found for 27 watershed groups across Saskatchewan. These groups were located through the SWA website, the SNOWS website and through personal correspondence with people involved in watershed stewardship.

First contact was made with a round of phone calls. The purpose of the initial phone call was to establish contact with the best person to speak for the group and to explain the purpose of the survey. In some cases repeat phone calls had to be made to reach the correct contact person for the group.

The survey was then emailed (and in one case mailed out) to the contact person for each group. Group contacts were requested to look over the survey questions, consult with their board if necessary and then contact the SES to set up a time for a telephone interview to do the survey. This method of surveying was chosen over having groups fill out the survey themselves, in order to avoid incomplete surveys and misinterpretation of questions.

As many of the representatives are volunteers, it took some time and follow up calls to set a suitable interview time. After three unsuccessful calls to try to set up an interview, groups were taken off the list.

In total, 20 groups participated in the survey.

The survey itself consisted of both closed and open ended questions in order to obtain as much information as possible. Similar responses to open ended questions were grouped together for the purpose of analysis.

Appendix 2: Needs Assessment Survey

Section 1: History and Context

Organizational information – as much detail as possible.	
Capacity Area	History and Context
Date	
Name of Organization	
Contact Name/Details	
Alternative Contact/Details	
Geographical area	
How long has your organization been operating? How did it form and for what reason?	
Capacity Area	History and Context
Notes on response	
What are the top three concerns regarding water in your watershed?	
Capacity Area	History and Context
Notes on response	

Section 2: Needs Assessment of Capacity Areas

Please rank the following needs between 1 and 10, 1 being an area in which you urgently require a lot of assistance, 10 being an area in which you require little or no assistance		
Capacity Area	Assessment	
Notes for Response	Needs	Ranking
	Improved access to information and expertise	
	Human Resources	

	Improved provincial government communication and support	
	Improved municipal government communication and support	
	Education and training	
	Funding	
	Clarification/amalgamation of goals and aspirations	
	Networking opportunities	
	Improved organizational structure	
	Social marketing and community engagement training	

Are there other Capacity Areas in which your organization could use help? Please list:

Section 3: Details on Capacity Building requirements

	How is your organization run? Board of Directors? How many? Any paid positions? Volunteers?
Capacity Area	Organizational Structure/Human Resources
Notes on Response	
	Does your organization receive funding? If so, where from?
Capacity Area	Funding
Notes on Response	
	Does your organization have a mandate or mission statement? If so, what is it? What are your organizations goals?
Capacity Area	Goals and Aspirations
Notes on Response	

	What does your organization do to educate and inform people about your watersheds and concerns surrounding water resources?
Capacity Area	Social Marketing and Community Engagement
Notes on Response	
	How engaged and aware of water issues are the communities in your watershed, on a scale of 1 to 10? (10 being the large majority of people are very engaged and aware of the issues, 1 meaning that the large majority are not at all aware or engaged)
Capacity Area	Social Marketing and Community Engagement
Notes on Response	
	What sort of development is currently happening in your watershed and how do you think this may impact water resources?
Capacity Area	Social Marketing and Community Engagement
Notes on Response	
	To what degree are your stewardship activities supported by local municipal governments?
Capacity Area	Municipal government communication and support
Notes on Response	
	To what degree are your stewardship activities supported by the provincial government?
Capacity Area	Provincial government communication and support
Notes on	

Response	
	Do you feel your organization has adequate access to information, resources and expertise?
Capacity Area	Access to information and expertise
Notes on Response	
	What challenges and barriers exist to achieving your goals?
Capacity Area	Various
Notes on Response	
	Is your organization involved with any other watershed protection programs or agencies? Please provide details.
Capacity Area	Various
Notes on Response	

Appendix 3: Participating Groups

Community groups

Big Shell Lake Watershed Stewardship Association
Black Strap Watershed Stewards
Brightsand Lake Watershed Stewardship Association
Cypress Water Protection Association
Jackfish and Murray Lake Watershed Association
Perch Lake Watershed Group
Pike Lake Association
Pipestone Watershed Stewardship Committee
Property Owners of Wakaw Lake
Turtle Lake Watershed Inc.
Weyakwin Cottage Owners Association
A group that wished to remain anonymous

SWPP Watershed Groups

Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association
Lower Souris Watershed Committee Inc.
Moose Jaw River Watershed Stewards Inc
North Saskatchewan River Basin Council
South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Inc.
Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards
Upper Souris Watershed Association
Wascana and Upper Qu'Appelle Watersheds Association Taking Responsibility Inc.

Appendix 4: List of acronyms

Acronym	Group Name	Details
AEGP	Agri-Environmental Group Plan	Producer-driven committees working to identify and address environmental issues on their farms
CBSM	Community Based Social Marketing	A model of fostering behaviour change in individuals towards environmental sustainability
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans	Federal government department responsible for protecting fish habitat
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	Groups working on policy and education in a support or lobby role to governments, often on a non-profit basis
PCAB	Provincial Council of Agriculture Development and Diversification Boards for Saskatchewan Inc.	Non-profit organization delivering agricultural sustainability programs
SAW	Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds	Umbrella organization supporting large watershed groups
SES	Saskatchewan Environmental Society	Independent non-profit group working towards environmental sustainability
SNOWS	Saskatchewan Network of Watershed Stewards	Inactive umbrella organization for community based stewardship groups
SWA	Saskatchewan Watershed Authority	Provincial government department responsible for allocating and protecting Saskatchewan's water resources
SWPP	Source Water Protection Plan	Strategic plans produced by larger watershed groups to protect and improve the quality of water resources
WAC	Watershed Advisory Committee	Multi-stakeholder advisory committees who participate in watershed planning and assist in the development of source water protection plans