

Vision

To promote a new ERA in watershed thinking where well-managed human activities result in healthy ecosystems and a robust economy.

Mission

The ERA is a community based water group that aims to connect people to the Elk River ensuring it is drinkable, fishable and swimmable for future generations.

Principles

We are an organization that 1) stimulates conversation, shares information and facilitates community input to encourage sustainable water decision-making in the Elk Valley; 2) Promotes thinking like a watershed by coordinating a community voice to contribute to watershed planning and management activities, regulatory processes and other regional water initiatives; 3) Brings together diverse points of view and offer a safe place to dialogue about the Elk River; 4) Unites not divides.

Goals

- a) Deliver watershed education programs so that residents know where their water comes from, how it is used and ways to keep it healthy for future generations.
- b) Collect watershed science and data in order to prioritize community stewardship action.
- c) Convene and facilitate community input about sustainable water decision-making.

Elk River Facts

The Elk River starts at Petain, Elk and Castelnau Glaciers in Elk Lakes Provincial Park and is joined by over a hundred tributaries and subtributaries during its 220 km journey to Lake Koocanusa.



The total watershed area of the Elk River is 4450 km<sup>2</sup> – the same size as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park (in Alberta/Montana).

The Elk River is renowned for its blue-listed/threatened Westslope cutthroat and bull trout. It is considered one of the best places for fly-fishing in North America.

First Nations (Ktunaxa) have harvested natural resources from the river for thousands of years.

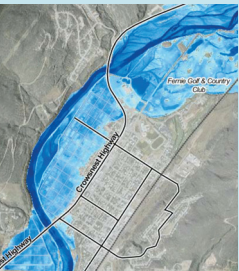
The Elk River was first labeled on a map by John Palliser during the Palliser Expedition in 1857. Fur-trader and explorer DavidThompson called it the “Stag River” in 1811.

Typically the discharge for the Elk River at Elko Dam is about 60 m<sup>3</sup>/second. During the 1995 flood, Water Survey Canada estimated a record of 818 m<sup>3</sup>/s! That's like draining an Olympic size swimming pool every 3 seconds!

Watershed Governance

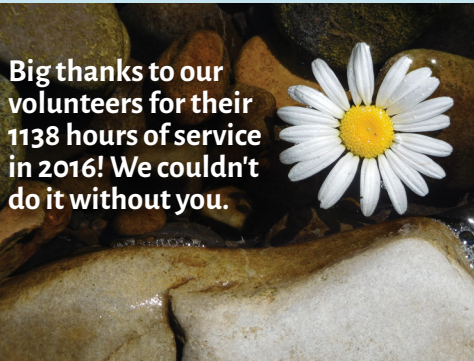
Completed the Elk River Flood Strategy (Strategy)

- This 3 year project had a budget of \$250,000 and involved partnerships between the University of Lethbridge, Teck, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Columbia Basin Trust, professional consultants, community and local governments.
- Presented the Strategy recommendations to all 4 municipal governments for adoption and integration, and provincial government members of the Cumulative Effects Management Framework.
- Completed the RDEK Area A Elk River Priority Flood and Erosion Mitigation Sites: Conceptual Design Report for 8 chosen sites.
- Convened and facilitated two Elk River Flood Committee meetings with all local governments, major industry (Teck, Canfor, Jemi Fibre), ENGO's Wildsight and ERA, and community homeowners along the river participating.



Watershed Planning

- ERA is one of the initial working group members that has been on the Elk Valley Cumulative Effects Management Framework since the process started, which is scheduled to be implemented in 2017.
- ERA is on the inaugural Steering Committee members of Teck's Elk Valley/Crowsnest Pass Community of Interest group.



Elk River Watershed Alliance (ERA) Annual Report 2016

March 2, 2017



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# Executive Director Summary of the Year 2016

2016 was a year of firsts for ERA. We pulled off our first successful fundraising event the Fernie Brew Ha Ha Comedy Night. ERA coordinated the completion of a three year Elk River Flood Strategy, our biggest and most ambitious project to date. It was the first year we ever received funding support from the Federal Government for wetland enhancement and streamside restoration, supporting wildlife habitat enhancement.

ERA was fortunate to have our first Eco-Canada Intern Beth Millions (MSc Environmental Science) who we mentored throughout the year, kick-starting her bright future. ERA also mentored 36 youth age 10 - 14 in the Elk Watershed Discovery Camp, which was our first fully subscribed camp. Twenty-six students from Fernie Secondary School became the first certified BC Wildlife Federation Wetlandkeepers through a high school program in BC.

For the first time in the last 5 years of operation, ERA is truly diversifying its' funding sources. This is a testament to ERA's trusted relationships with government, foundations, industry, business and private donors, as we demonstrate value-added watershed programs and services.

Sparwood was a focal community of ERA's in 2016. ERA hosted the first ever Wild About Wetland Wednesday Workshops with community citizens in August. Frank J. Mitchell Elementary Students wrote quotes and created artwork for 4 interpretive signs, picked noxious weeds and planted native herbs and shrubs. We partnered with Canfor, Teck and Sparwood Fish and Wildlife Association to complete a 50 metre bioengineered streamside stabilization and fish habitat enhancement program and an interpretive kiosk at Alexander Creek.

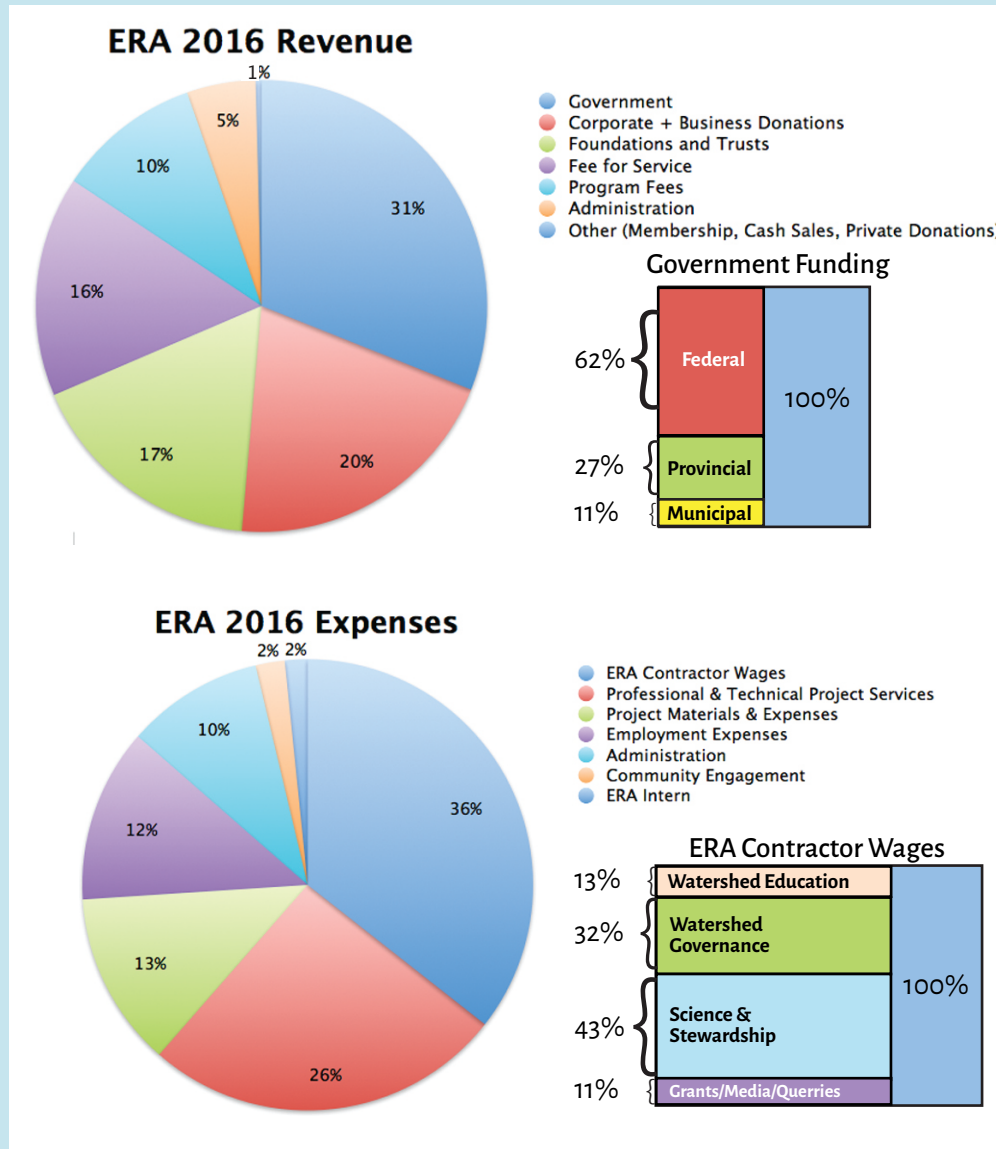
Having monitored Lizard Creek for 5 years, it was the first time we repeated sensitive habitat inventory mapping or SHIM to detect changes in the aquatic ecosystem. The fish rearing habitat on this creek is truly amazing!

As part of the Elk River Flood Strategy, ERA convened and facilitated the first meeting of the newly formed Elk River Flood Committee to implement the recommendations from the Strategy.

At the end of December, Ayla Bennett, ERA Contractor, gave birth to their first son Mannix Hawk, a new member of our community. It has been a wonderful year full of community teamwork accomplishments, collective and collaborate effort, and inspirational contributions by watershed citizens.  
*Lee-Anne Walker*, Executive Director (2011 to present)



## ERA by the Numbers



## Administration

### Fundraising:

Planned ERA's first fundraiser "Fernie Brew Ha Ha - Comedy Night" attended by 205 participants on August long weekend. Volunteers dedicated 150 hours doing promotion, setup, running and cleaning up the event. **Raised \$3,700.**



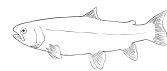
The Pub donated a portion of the sales from Fernie Brewing Company pints sold during July and August totaling **\$1495.**



Canyon Raft Co. donated proceeds from the Annual Fernie Raft Race to support the camp **\$2040** and planning to donate again for 2017.



Sparwood Fish and Wildlife Association donated **\$1500** to the Alexander Creek Streamside Restoration and Community Education program.



The Elk Valley Thrift Shop Society donated **\$1000** and the Sparwood Futures Society donated **\$3860** to the Sparwood wetland project.

### Fee for Service Contracts for 2016:

Joint presentations at schools in Fernie, Sparwood, Elkford and Crowsnest Pass with Teck during Mining Week entitled "Mining and Wildlife: Keeping Both Safe and Healthy Everyday".



RDEK Elk River Priority Flood and Erosion Mitigation Sites: Conceptual Design Report.

Facilitating and convening the Elk River Flood Committee.

## Watershed Literacy & Education

### Elk Watershed Discovery Camp:

- 4th year operating the Camp, 2nd year ERA offered two-one week sessions
- 36 participants aged 10 - 14 attended
- 100% of parents surveyed said they would send their child back to the camp or recommend it to a friend. 100% of youth said they wanted to return to the camp.
- Top five favorite activities (youth ranked in descending order): white water rafting, biking, geocaching, tubing down the Elk River, and fly-fishing.
- Submitted several articles to local media based on chapters from the Elk River Flood Strategy for public information.



## Science & Stewardship

### Wonder of Wetlands:

Fernie Annex Pond

- For the first time ever in BC, ERA certified 23 Fernie Secondary School French Immersion Leadership and Outdoor Education students as BC Wildlife Federation Wetlandkeepers.
- Students finished a total of 241 hours of classroom lecture time and volunteered 207 hours of field work which included planting 400 native herbs/shrubs at the Annex Pond in Fernie, enhancing this wetland to improve water quality discharge to the Elk River.



Sparwood Beaver Wetland

- Hosted 3 Wild About Wetland Wednesday Workshops with total of 32 participants. They dedicated 80 hours to collect baseline data on the Beaver Wetland in Sparwood.
- 40 grade 8 students from Sparwood Secondary School teamed up with 24 Grade 4 students from Frank J. Mitchell Elementary School to plant 200 sedge/rush plugs and 100 native shrubs to enhance this site. They also pulled noxious spotted knapweed. 64 students helped for 3 hours with total of 200 hours of volunteer labour.

### Streamside Restoration/Enhancement and Community Education:

Lizard Creek

- Continued to monitor and improve the bioengineering project at Lizard Creek with fascine bundles added in 2016.
- 7 people volunteered 45 hours to collect and prepare fascine bundles to help stabilize the slope.

Alexander Creek

- 16 people dedicated 100 hours collecting native vegetation and building fascine bundles for the criss-cross benches of native plants, planted native vegetation, seeded the site soil surface and built a protective fence around the vegetated bioengineering project.
- 7 people volunteered 45 hours to collect and prepare fascine bundles to help stabilize the slope.



### Silver Springs Stewardship:

- Recreation Sites and Trails BC issued ERA our first permit from the Section 57 of the Forest and Range Practices Act to rehabilitate Silver Springs by designating a public parking lot, improving trail access, installing information and interpretive signage and completing a feasibility study to install a composting backcountry toilet on site.
- 12 youth dedicated a total of 36 hours to clean up the site and COTR Mountain Adventure Skills Training students are dedicating 48 hours in April 2017 to construct a trail from the new parking lot and install the signs.



### Elk River Shoreline Cleanup:

- Conducted river cleanups in all three Elk Valley communities and RDEK Area A.
- 92 people spent 200 hours cleaning up trash along the Elk River & public staging areas.



### Community Based Water Monitoring:

- Completed 5 full years of monitoring on Alexander Creek
- Second year of monthly monitoring from April to October at Alexander Creek increasing the quality of the data collected (total dissolved solids, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, temperature, cross section, conductivity, pH)
- Repeated 5 kms of **Sensitive Habitat Inventory Mapping (SHIM)** on Lizard Creek after initial mapping in 2011.
- 72 hours of time was dedicated by Streamkeeper community volunteers during high flow (June) and low flow (September) at 8 sites on both Alexander and Lizard Creeks.
- Reporting on community based water monitoring for public.

