



Alberta Stewardship Network Stewardship Needs Assessment: Part 1 Watershed Stewardship Group Needs Survey Outcomes Executive Summary

Introduction

Land Stewardship Centre of Canada (LSCC) is a not-for-profit, charitable organization bringing people together to work on common priorities for achieving sustainability on the landscape. The Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN) is a program of LSCC, actively supporting and celebrating grassroots stewardship efforts in Alberta since 2004.

In 2005, LSCC conducted a survey of watershed stewardship groups (WSGs) in Alberta to determine their priority needs. In response, ASN developed a number of products and services to support grassroots watershed stewardship efforts.

The 2011 Watershed Stewardship Group Needs Survey is the first phase of a new ASN stewardship needs assessment project. The purpose of this project is to determine the current needs of WSGs, better understand how past/current ASN programs/projects have been used by the stewardship community, and identify gaps and/or opportunities for ASN to provide value-added support to WSGs in the future. Information gathered through this process will enhance existing ASN initiatives and help guide the development of new ASN products and services.

Survey Results

Respondents were asked to rank the following services, products and resources in terms of their need priority to WSGs.

- Web presence of my stewardship group
- Infrastructure and supplies
- Greater community/public awareness
- Funding for projects
- Funding for core operations
- Access to information/expertise
- Access to training/education
- Connections with federal representatives, program, services
- Connections with provincial representatives, programs, services
- Connections with municipal representatives, programs and services
- Connections with other non-profit stewardship groups
- Connections with *Water for Life* partner representatives, programs, services
- Understanding role and fit within Alberta's *Water for Life Strategy*
- Human resources/staff/ volunteers
- Networking opportunities

On average, respondents rated each of these options medium to high priority. The top three WSG needs identified by respondents are:

Greater community/public awareness

Respondents expressed a desire to increase awareness within government and in the local

community about the value of grassroots stewardship work. The need for targeted awareness efforts, relationship building, and education of government representatives regarding WSGs was emphasized. Respondents also indicated a desire for the public to appreciate the value of their efforts, with the aim of generating more volunteer support, increasing public participation in projects and initiatives, and creating more opportunities to partner and leverage resources.

Funding for projects

In addition to continued project-based funding, the need for long-term project funding was also expressed. It was also suggested that other, alternative sources be explored as a possible source of project funding. Very positive feedback was provided regarding the ASN Grant Program's flexibility and reliability.

Access to information and expertise

Access to up-to-date information and topic-specific expertise is important to WSGs and their work. Respondents highlighted the need to access this information and expertise from a variety of resources such as websites, interactive workshops, courses and publications, as well as networking with experts, mentors and other stewards.

Moving Forward

The survey results clearly point to a continued need and role for ASN in supporting WSGs going forward. In an effort to address as many WSG priority needs as possible, LSCC and the ASN program will apply the following recommendations to the redevelopment of the ASN program plan.

Recommendation: Develop an engagement and outreach strategy

An engagement and outreach strategy will be developed to help raise greater awareness of community watershed stewardship issues. This strategy will focus on outreach to communities and various levels of government with the purpose of connecting and engaging these groups, and raising awareness of the importance of stewardship, and in particular, the work of WSGs in Alberta.

Recommendation: Enhance project funding opportunities

WSGs face numerous challenges when planning, implementing and delivering their community projects. These challenges include lack of organizational capacity, overcoming the lack of perceived value for their project, time limits on grant funds and more. In order to help address some of these issues, ASN will focus efforts on enhancing and improving project funding opportunities for WSGs.

Recommendation: Enhance the ASN web presence

It is important that WSGs are supported by and have access to user-friendly, current, online resources. ASN will improve its web presence by enhancing current tools and resources, and investigating the development of new and interactive online tools.