

# Project aims to protect watershed

REGINA (SNN) — The WaterWolf Project illustrates the old adage there is strength in numbers, particularly when it comes to regional development.

A model of co-operation, the WaterWolf Project consists of 16 rural municipalities, 46 villages, towns and hamlets and the Whitecap Dakota First Nation. The project aims to develop land use plans and policies to promote sustainable regional economic development and protect the vulnerable South Saskatchewan River watershed.

Geographically, all of the partners are located in an area south of Vanscoy along Highway 11, adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River and bordering the shores of Lake Diefenbaker.

"The WaterWolf growth management plan was established because there was no structure for addressing regional development issues and no consensus for planning infrastructure and development," said Russ McPherson, WaterWolf Project manager.

WaterWolf is an initiative of the Mid Sask Community Futures Development Corp. Regional Economic Development Authority. It got off the ground about three years ago. The project was a response to pressures on rural municipalities created by explosive residential development south of Saskatoon along the river valley.

"We started a regional planning process and doing actual land use planning, which is something that hasn't happened here in the past," McPherson said.

"We are basically saying what kind of development do you want to see? Where do you think it should be? And how do we start doing long-range planning for (roads, sewer and water infrastructure)?"

The process also looks at the impact on the community now and during the next 25 years and at the environment and the water quality in Lake Diefenbaker, which WaterWolf hopes to develop as a major tourist destination.

The initial project grew as more municipalities came on board and is now moving to become a regional planning commission, McPherson added. The commission would provide the expertise and recommendations on land use and development while final decisions would rest with municipalities, he said.

The advantage of the WaterWolf growth management plan is that there are economies of scale for the partners, who have a combined population of about 18,000 people. As a group the municipalities will be able to tap more per-capita government infrastructure funding, have greater purchasing power in terms of hiring expertise and developing regional services and be able to take advantage of investment and taxation opportunities.

"What we are trying to do is build capacity in rural areas to manage change going forward. That means we are going to need a (development) plan out here, but we are also going to need our own planners and our own building inspectors. Again each individual small municipality couldn't manage or afford that but as a group we'll be able to manage those pieces. It's about growth management and having a growth agenda," McPherson said.

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