

# preserving our lifeline

to nurture, share, and protect the  
waters of the Bow River Basin.



# welcome to our newsletter

a quarterly look at stories and updates  
from around the watershed

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## 2023 Board Retreat

WORDS BY **Mike Murray**, Executive Director

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As is tradition, BRBC Board members travelled from far and wide this past September to gather within the Ghost watershed's extraordinary natural beauty. This annual retreat allows for deep dive reviews and discussions of past and future work, foundational in the BRBC's strategic planning. By identifying key focus areas, action items, and current needs, Board members ensure that the upcoming year's business plan and budget will continue to serve the needs of the membership and basin.

This past year has been busy and productive for the organization. We are grateful for the support of partners and the many members who bring their expertise and knowledge to the BRBC. Highlights of the past year include: continued success developing our [State of the Watershed Report](#) (anticipated to be completed in September 2024); ongoing support of the critical work carried out by our Standing Committees; well-attended quarterly forums and workshops; stewardship and partner project support; and collaboration on many initiatives that positively impact watershed management in the Bow Basin.



BRBC Board Retreat. From left to right: Joe Fowler, Rob Wolfe, Mike Murray, Richard Phillips, Chris Manderson, Brooke Kapeller, Scott Taylor, Mark Bennett, Sarah Hamza, Alan Breakey, Steve Meadows, Pablo Pina. Photo: Bow River Basin Council.

The State of the Watershed Report will be a major focus for us in the upcoming year. We are working with our partners to create online reports for the sub-watersheds in the Basin (published online as an [interim report](#)), as well as basin-wide information. We have been working with fantastic partners, members and volunteers up to this point and we look forward to additional collaboration on this project. If any BRBC members are interested in assisting, I encourage you to contact Brooke or myself.



# Making Meaning Through Pageantry

WORDS BY Geneviève Paré, Artistic Lead of Mudfoot Theatre

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Up until about one year ago, I had very little awareness that the Bow River Basin Council existed.

Well, perhaps the logo ignited some recognition. In fact, I do feel I had seen it on some interpretive signs somewhere, at some point, probably.

Then, about a year ago, my colleague and dear friend Evan Medd and I hit "GO" on an idea to investigate the potential of a community-integrated pageant on the Bow River.

Evan and I are theatre artists who grew up and work in Calgary, Mohkinstsis. We busy ourselves with the practice of telling stories (IRL), with the hopes of leaving an imprint on the human spirit. This is how we pay our rent, cover our car payments, and buy Christmas presents. For every theatre artist there is a unique motivation for telling stories, and a specific choreography to how they go about it. Evan and I are perhaps kindred in that we are highly collaborative artists, with a lean towards non-conventional theatre practices, and an authentic love and concern for the planet.



Project leads, Evan Medd and Geneviève Paré at work in the studio.  
Photo: Caitlind Brown.

I shouldn't mislead anyone to believe that I am strictly an artist. Over the years I have supplemented my income as a wilderness guide and outdoor leadership instructor, focusing largely on water activities like sea-kayaking and river expeditions. This is relevant in that I have spent many a meditation "going with the flow," and this experience greatly informs my sense of meaning.

I approached Evan about this pageant idea as he was getting ready to head off to Prince Edward Island, where he helps to bring the River Clyde Pageant (RCP) to life each summer. The RCP is an outdoor artistic spectacle that celebrates community while drawing attention to the impact of climate change on PEI's waterways and ecosystems. As it turned out, Evan had already been looking to initiate something similar here in Calgary.

**IT WILL BE A DAY  
OF GATHERING, OF  
PLAYFUL WONDER,  
OF CEREMONIOUS  
GRATITUDE!**

As creatives, Evan and I make art in response to the world around us. We see the gushing, gurgling, swishing blue veins that run through our city, that bring us water to drink, that nurture our gardens, that cool our hot skin, that bring beauty to our parks and pathways and apartment windows, that provide habitat and thoroughfares for wildlife, and we are in awe – and so many would agree, and yet... there seems to be a disconnect. How is it, as a collective, so little is understood about the Bow River and its tributaries, their histories and environmental circumstances? How is it we do not gather with the intention to celebrate perhaps the fundamental reason that we live here, in Mohkinstsis, where two rivers meet? The conversation quickly went from whether we should do this, to how.

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We imagined a procession of boats adorned with creative offerings: sculptures, puppets, flags, music, dance... anything goes! All in honour and tribute to the Bow. Perhaps as it grows there could be activations on the shore for those who have come to watch the parade: storytelling, music, river science experiments. We started with the shutters wide open to what this day could look like. It will be a day of gathering, of playful wonder, of ceremonious gratitude!

As we began to draw out the map of how we might arrive to this idea, Evan and I started to realize how fertile the journey of getting there could be. As artists, we are aware that the greatest impact of the work is not always, and in truth, not often on the audience, but on the artists themselves. So much of the learning, connection and growth is only implicit in the final outcomes of the work, so how can we get members of the Bow Basin community themselves involved in the development of this pageant? How do we involve Indigenous participation at the ground level? How do we involve those who are under-represented? How do we allow the process to be just as, if not more, meaningful than the product?

The ideas began to accumulate, and we knew we needed help. A quick Google search led us to the Bow River Basin Council website. A carefully worded email to Executive Director, Mike Murray, resulted in our first partnership and the support required to access funding from the Canada Council for the Arts Research and Development Grant.

With money in the bank, we were able to execute a four-month research project. This involved consultations with the BRBC, the City of Calgary, Indigenous Youth Leadership students, and the River Clyde Pageant in PEI. The process was designed with the support of Vicki Stroich, who formerly worked for Alberta Ecotrust and is now the Artistic and Environmental Programs Manager at Caravan Farm Theatre.

During this time we surfaced four core pillars to help guide the development of the pageant: Spirit and Creativity, Community, Education, and Sustainability.

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Anticipating challenges. Photo: Caitlind Brown.

The focal point of our research took place in August, when we conducted a one-week prototype of the project with six other individuals who formed our Research Committee: Anders Hunter, Lane Shordee, Caitlind Brown, Dwight Farahat, Talia Potter, and the BRBC's very own Joe Fowler. Oh! And I cannot forget, the Bow River was, of course, an integral part of this committee.

On the first day, we got to know each other by sharing personal and traditional stories about rivers. Anders talked about the river as the place to collect willow for bows and sweat lodges. Dwight shared how Napi left his imprint on the land, and how Calgary sits where his Bow and Elbow met. We then learned about the health of the river through a hands-on lesson led by Joe.



The Research Committee getting hands-on river education with Joe Fowler. Photo: Caitlind Brown.

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The Research Committee hitting the water. Photo: Caitlind Brown.

For the next two days we built bull trout helmets, using recycled clothing and local willow. These we took with us for a float from Bowness Park to St. Patrick's Island. Although on a hot day this float would be a conveyor belt of rafts, kayaks, giant pizzas and rainbow unicorns, our float was in cool temperatures and therefore quiet. Regardless, we certainly turned heads and conjured laughter and waves, and a few curious souls came to ask us what we were up to.

On the last day, we discussed our experiences, and what more this could become. We imagined brilliant opportunities, and possible barriers. We spoke at length about sustainability; not only from an environmental perspective (it would be terribly ironic if the environmental impact of this project outweighed the benefits), but also from an energetic standpoint. As artists and community organizers, we are all too familiar with burnout. Many thoughts and ideas were shared on this theme, and to quote Dwight Farahat, "Fun = Sustainability." How can we make sure everyone is having a good time, even at the operating level?

So far, this project has indeed been a good time, but the fun is just getting started! Evan and I have recently drafted a pilot project for 2024 and have started seeking support. Conversations have begun with the Bow River Basin Council, CPAWS, the Canadian Academy of Mask and Puppetry, Bowness Community Association, Bow Waters Canoe Club, Tribe Arts Society, and others. We are tenderly expanding to include up to 35 people in next year's pilot pageant, with the aim of engaging a minimum of 50 percent BIPOC and newcomer populations. We imagine five boats on the water with four days of preceding activities, including storytelling, river science, art making and land-based activities. As I type this, we are actively seeking out grants and donations, planning fundraisers, and looking to in-kind opportunities to make the pilot happen.

Evan and I have come to understand that stewardship can only really happen when people feel connected to something, or someone. Meaningful connection takes time, trust, challenge, learning, joy, jokes, imagination, vulnerability, bruised knees, expression, exhaustion and awe. Did I mention it takes time? We believe connection to land, self, and community is the first step towards positive change; to quote Calgary's own Kadra Yusuf, we will "Do it right, not fast."



The Research Committee. Top (left to right): Talia Potter, Evan Medd, Dwight Farahat, Lane Shordee. Bottom (left to right): Joe Fowler, Anders Hunter, Caitlind Brown, Geneviève Paré. Photo: Caitlind Brown.



Having a blast on the Bow. Photo: Caitlind Brown.

# CABiN Monitoring in the Elbow Valley

WORDS BY Joe Fowler, Watershed Stewardship Strategic Support Coordinator, BRBC

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The bright yellow leaves on the trees signal a change in seasons. Summer is winding down. For CABiN technicians across the country, this means it's time to pull out the waders and rubber boots! "CABiN" stands for the Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network and provides nationally standardized training and tools for monitoring stream and river health. Water samples are collected, flow is measured, and benthic macroinvertebrates are gathered to give us specific information about the health of a stream. Benthic macroinvertebrates are water-loving insects that lack a backbone. This includes worms, crustaceans and mollusks, but in our local rivers and streams it typically means insect larvae. Insects like mayflies, stoneflies and dragonflies spend much of their life exploring the cold depths of rivers and wetlands, and only fly around in the final stage of their life cycle. These larvae have adapted to thrive in very specific conditions (like cold, clear water with a healthy amount of dissolved oxygen) so their presence, or absence, can tell us much about the health of their aquatic habitat.

In addition to assessing invertebrates, data from "reference sites" is also used to compare findings. Reference sites represent habitats that are closest to a "natural" state before any human impact. These days it's hard to explore the landscape without encountering other recreators or seeing evidence of the various industries present in the watershed. But the Elbow Valley contains the headwaters of the Elbow River and is also in a protected area so the sites visited may very well become reference sites for future monitoring.

CABiN monitoring would not be possible without the support of numerous partners. This season our team consisted of the Elbow River Watershed Partnership, the Bow River Basin Council, and local entomologists John Swann and Diane Edwards (ABI Environmental Services). We also received support from local volunteers and a few BRBC Board members came out to observe.



Diane Edwards (left) and Brooke Kapeller (right) work together to measure the slope of Prairie Creek. Photo: Joe Fowler.

The cool, fall air greeted us each morning as we met for coffee in Bragg Creek and reviewed the plan for the day. When you get the opportunity to explore the beautiful Territory of Treaty 7, it doesn't feel much like work. Beyond the scientific tests, we also spent time admiring the mountains, examining fossils and speculating on what else we would discover. I felt incredibly fortunate to be joined by John and Diane. They were a wealth of knowledge and their enthusiasm highlighted the significance of our discoveries. At the headwaters of Prairie Creek, John pointed out a roach-like stonefly that requires

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very cold water with an abundance of dissolved oxygen and fast stream flows. These very specific conditions mean they are not often found, so seeing their round, stocky bodies was a rare treat!

CABiN further enhances our connections to local creeks and rivers and helps us see the big picture when we assess watershed health. The data collected includes nutrient levels, pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, suspended solids and alkalinity. We also measure the velocity, width and depth of the stream, randomly measure 100 rocks, and examine the size of substrate (fine sand versus gravel). Enhancing our connection to the Elbow River Watershed gives us insight into the quality of the water and provides a baseline for future assessments. Having this baseline is incredibly valuable, especially as we assess the impacts of climate change.

The experience also directly applies to the Freshwater Field Study, which is conducted each spring and fall with Grade 8 students in the Elbow River Watershed. This program inspires youth to see themselves as environmental stewards and scientists. It is quite impactful to be able to tell them that the data they are collecting and the tools they are using are almost identical to CABiN technicians across Canada! The hands-on experience allows them to practice science IRL (in real life). Students that may have difficulties in the classroom suddenly thrive when exploring outside and performing the numerous tests. Additionally, for many of these students, the Elbow River is the source of their drinking water, and the program highlights how fortunate we are, as Albertans and Calgarians, to be so close to the headwaters (where the river begins). Since we have access to some of the cleanest water available, how do we mitigate our impacts? How can we demonstrate reciprocity and give back to these bodies of water that give our communities so much?

For those interested, findings from the last three years should be available in the spring of 2024 (stay tuned!) – and if you're like me and you thrive in the outdoors doing hands-on work, keep us in mind next fall. When the leaves start to change,

grab your rubber boots and let us know if you would like to observe a day of CABiN monitoring in the Elbow Valley.



Roach-like stoneflies, peltoperlids, found in the headwaters of Prairie Creek. Photo: Joe Fowler.



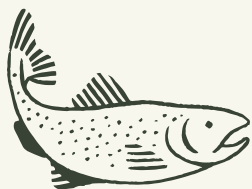
CABiN field technician, Kip Monaghan, in the headwaters of Prairie Creek. Photo: Joe Fowler.



# BRBC Quarterly Educational and Networking Forum

Glencoe Golf and Country Club  
31002 Elbow River Drive, Calgary  
December 13th, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm  
(8:30 am, sign in)

To register, [please visit this link](#)



## FORUM SPEAKERS

**Geneviève Paré and Evan Medd**

Mudfoot Theatre

*Spirit of the Bow: Making Meaning Through Pageantry*

**Brock Coates**

Glencoe Golf and Country Club

*Glencoe's Water Stewardship Story*

**Anne Naumann**, Calgary River Valleys

*Calgary River Valleys' Redd Count*

**Liliana Bozic**, Urban Systems

*Natural Asset Integration*

**Marina Krainer & Flora Giesbrecht**

Ghost Watershed Alliance Society &

Elbow River Watershed Partnership

*Taking Action on Native Trout Recovery in the Ghost and Elbow Watersheds*

**Dr. Gurbir Dhillon**, Farming Smarter

*Addressing Soil Erosion with Sustainable*

*Agricultural Innovation – Fall Seeded*

*Cropping and Reduced Tillage*

**Dan Fox**, The City of Calgary

*Overview of The City of Calgary's Water*

*Treatment & Supply Service plan and*

*budget (2023-2026)*

**Darren Bourget**

Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

*Drought and Risk Management*

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## Donate

Sustainable funding fuels the work we do and allows us to support projects across the Bow Basin. The BRBC prides itself on maintaining autonomy and integrity via diverse funding sources, including donations by our membership and partners.

To learn more about our current initiatives, visit [www.brbc.ab.ca](http://www.brbc.ab.ca)

A donation can be made online at [brbc.ab.ca/donate](http://brbc.ab.ca/donate)

The next BRBC newsletter will be released in March. If you would like to submit an article, please contact Andrea Czarnecki at [aczarnecki@brbc.ab.ca](mailto:aczarnecki@brbc.ab.ca)

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE ARTICLES IN THIS NEWSLETTER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR/S AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE BRBC.