

# Instream Flow Council Strategic Plan

2010-2015

Adopted March 8, 2010

*The mission of the IFC is to improve the effectiveness of state, provincial, and territorial instream flow programs and activities in protecting, maintaining, and restoring aquatic ecosystems.*

This document defines the role of the Instream Flow Council (IFC) and sets long-term strategic direction to best position IFC to achieve its mission. It sets goals to provide broad direction and identifies strategic actions where efforts will be focused to achieve these goals. Specific activities will be undertaken to fulfill the strategic actions and implement the plan through 2010-2015.

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## Introduction

The Instream Flow Council (IFC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization made up of state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies working to improve the effectiveness of instream flow programs and activities for conserving fish and wildlife and related aquatic resources. Despite the frequent use of terms such as “instream”, “flow”, and “riverine” throughout this plan and other IFC products, IFC’s focus is not limited to flowing water public trust resources; we also assist members and others with water management issues related to estuaries, lakes, reservoirs, and other inter-connected water resources.

This is the Instream Flow Council’s second Strategic Plan. The first was completed in 2004 and guided the Council from 2005 to 2010. This plan builds on accomplishments and knowledge acquired over the first decade of IFC’s existence and provides direction for the next six years.

## Who We Serve

IFC seeks to help state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies better fulfill their public trust responsibility to protect aquatic resources, so that they can be used and enjoyed by current and future generations. As a membership organization with limited resources, we focus our assistance on the needs and issues most pressing to member agencies. We also strive to assist and collaborate with the broader instream flow community (researchers, practitioners, educators, and other stakeholders) to benefit agency instream flow programs and activities. These groups can provide important contributions to the effectiveness of member agency instream flow programs and activities and thereby the integrity of the riverine resources entrusted to these agencies.

While IFC member agencies designate an individual to represent the agency on the IFC Governing Council, most have additional staff involved in their instream flow programs and activities. A reference in this plan to “members” includes the agency representative and other relevant staff.

## Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles, and Goals

The work of the Council is guided by the following mission, vision, principles, and organizational goals.

The **mission** of the IFC is to improve the effectiveness of state, provincial, and territorial instream flow programs and activities in protecting, maintaining, and restoring aquatic ecosystems.

The **vision** of the IFC is that each water body in Canada and the United States has flow and water level regimes that sustain ecological integrity.

Our work is based on the following **guiding principles**:

- Conservation (protection, maintenance, and restoration) of natural aquatic ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, estuaries, groundwater, and wetlands, is integral to sustaining healthy and abundant fish and wildlife;
- River and lake systems from headwaters to estuaries provide many beneficial values and services, including connectivity, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, navigation, nutrient transport and recycling, pollution attenuation, energy generation, water supplies, biological

productivity, aesthetic vistas, and recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting, boating, swimming, and wildlife viewing;

- State, provincial, and territorial governments have a public trust responsibility to protect, maintain, and restore fish and wildlife resources so they can be used and enjoyed by future generations; and
- IFC perceives value in the development of a commonly accepted public and agency ethic that recognizes the need to manage our water resources in a way that respects ecosystem integrity – not just for intrinsic reasons, but because of the societal values these ecosystems provide.

Our work is guided by the following **goals**:

- Goal 1** Facilitate the development and improvement of member instream flow knowledge and competencies.
- Goal 2** Ensure IFC's organizational effectiveness and relevance.
- Goal 3** Effectively deliver our organization's products and approaches to members and stakeholders to stimulate support and action for riverine resource stewardship.
- Goal 4** Advance the integration of instream flow science, policy, law, and public dialogue.
- Goal 5** Facilitate the development and effective application of tools and methods for instream flow science, policy, law, and public involvement.

## **IFC's Strategic Direction**

IFC's 2010-2015 strategic plan focuses the organization's actions to best achieve its goals and advance its mission and vision over the plan period, in a means consistent with our values and principles. Factors influencing the strategic plan are described below. It also provides a framework to strategically assess changing opportunities and issues over the plan period and provide flexibility to ensure IFC activities are the most effective for achieving its mission.

### ***Factors Influencing IFC's Strategic Direction***

The following are the primary factors IFC is responding to in this Plan.

#### **Water Resources and Society**

- Demand for limited fresh water continues to increase, caused by a combination of population growth, increased consumption and energy demands, and sometimes exacerbated by a changing climate. As demand increases, the health of riverine and lacustrine resources are being increasingly threatened, particularly in areas where water resources are already stressed and competing interests lead to conflicts over water allocation. These conditions add urgency to the need to retain healthy riverine and lacustrine systems that can survive change. Recent public focus on climate change is an opportunity to foster better instream flow conservation.

- For a variety of societal reasons people have become less connected to natural resources in their daily lives. This leads to a public less knowledgeable or interested in free-flowing rivers, and a greater disconnect between natural resource conditions and people's every-day decisions. There is a need to take action to enhance public understanding and support of instream flow protection and restoration. Even persons interested in natural resources are often not engaged in instream flow issues.
- In some cases and locales, societal and climate trends have resulted in a heightened awareness of aquatic resource degradation, providing improved opportunities to integrate flow issues into the general public dialogue.

### **State/Provincial/Territorial Fish and Wildlife Agencies**

- Many agencies report the increased need to provide sound scientific justification for instream flow protection for increasingly more projects under tighter time constraints. However, some agencies lack the capacity and training to conduct basic instream flow studies and to confidently engage in negotiations with stakeholders to effectively achieve instream flow objectives.
- Economic conditions continue to be uncertain and may affect member agency support for organizations like IFC. As economic recovery occurs, state/provincial agency budgets often lag recovery trends, leading to restricted agency resources and capacities for water-related work. Travel funds for training are often the first to be restricted and the last to be restored.
- State, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies often place emphasis on sport fish management, with less emphasis on the ecosystem processes on which these and other species depend. Yet, when asked about the critical threats to the health and persistence of future fish populations, many cite insufficient water or inadequate water management. This disparity between programs and issues remains a challenge in many agencies.
- Although mostly biologists, IFC members recognize the need to complement instream flow and water management science with applied aspects in law, policy, and public dialogue. According to results of two recent IFC projects, both IFC member agency representatives and the broader instream flow community feel that the lack of legal and policy opportunities to manage water for fish and wildlife is the largest obstacle to instream flow problem-solving in the US and Canada. Non-governmental entities can be helpful allies in advocating for laws and policies that address instream flows.

### **IFC**

- IFC's primary strength is the knowledge and experience of personnel within its member agencies. There continues to be great opportunity for agencies to learn from each other and improve their programs based on other jurisdictions' experiences and lessons.
- One of IFC's most valued and productive services is its in-person training sessions, where members meet to share information on tools, methods, successes, and challenges. This type of learning is best conducted in person.
- Advances in communication technologies offer new opportunities to share and learn, but also require new investments and participant acceptance of the technology. Their availability also increases the challenge of justifying travel for in-person training/networking.
- IFC has increased its fiscal and functional capacity over the last five years, but the organization's revenue generating capacity still limits its ability to reliably sustain itself at more than a

volunteer level. Components of this plan are intended to address long-term organizational capacity.

- IFC has expanded its collaborative activities and increasingly recognizes the role others can play in helping improve instream flow programs.
- IFC and many of its member agencies have improved their informational and educational activities and products, but recognize more effort would be beneficial.
- IFC now has an expanded library of products to promote comprehensive and effective instream flow and water volume conservation. Many people use these products, and programs and decisions have subsequently benefited.
- There is a small core of active IFC members, including several entering or nearing retirement from agency service. The number of active members needs to expand to ensure a pool of volunteers who can maintain the organization's viability into the future.

### **Broader Instream Flow Community**

- In general, instream flow science is advancing, and the importance of maintaining ecologically important elements of natural flow patterns is becoming more broadly accepted. There is also more work occurring in quantifying ecosystem services that healthy rivers provide. There are more organizations active in instream flow work than in the past, many working to positively influence instream flow legislation.
- There is demand for IFC's collective knowledge and experience – for additional integrated products, for technical assistance, for participation in other groups and processes, and for leadership in the broader instream flow community. IFC members are dealing with heavy and diverse workloads, limiting their ability to respond to such demands.
- There continues to be research, product development, leadership, and training gaps left by the phasing out of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cooperative Instream Flow Service Group (since merged into the US Geological Survey).

### ***Strategic Actions***

Strategic actions describe where efforts will be focused to achieve IFC's goals. The strategic actions IFC will undertake over the next six years to advance the corresponding goal are listed below, but may not be implemented simultaneously. They provide strategic direction while allowing for flexibility to respond to opportunities when they arise.

#### ***Goal 1. Facilitate the development and improvement of member instream flow knowledge and competencies.***

- Strategic Action 1.1**      Facilitate collaboration, networking, and efficient exchange of knowledge and information among members.
- Strategic Action 1.2**      Enhance online resources for members.
- Strategic Action 1.3**      Provide learning and professional development opportunities at IFC meetings.
- Strategic Action 1.4**      Inform members of training and educational opportunities.

**Strategic Action 1.5** Host and contribute to meetings, workshops, and conferences on instream flows.

**Strategic Action 1.6** Provide financial assistance to members in order that they may pursue and contribute to educational opportunities that advance IFC's mission.

**Strategic Action 1.7** Publish topical material on instream flow.

***Goal 2. Ensure IFC's organizational effectiveness and relevance.***

**Strategic Action 2.1** Increase IFC membership from eligible agencies.

**Strategic Action 2.2** Increase member participation in IFC activities.

**Strategic Action 2.3** Determine and implement IFC activities in a timely manner.

**Strategic Action 2.4** Ensure the IFC's fiscal sustainability.

**Strategic Action 2.5** Increase member interest in IFC leadership opportunities and provide timely leadership orientation training.

**Strategic Action 2.6** Ensure effective communication throughout IFC.

**Strategic Action 2.7** Market the value of the IFC to all eligible member agencies.

**Strategic Action 2.8** Evaluate IFC's effectiveness.

***Goal 3. Effectively deliver our organization's products and approaches to members and stakeholders to stimulate support and action for riverine resource stewardship***

**Strategic Action 3.1** Communicate outcomes of IFC work to target audiences in a timely manner using relevant media.

**Strategic Action 3.2** Develop, maintain, and make available resource material for outreach activities.

**Strategic Action 3.3** Actively promote IFC and its products

**Strategic Action 3.4** Develop and maintain effective partnerships.

***Goal 4. Advance the integration of instream flow science, policy, law, and public dialogue.***

**Strategic Action 4.1** Encourage multidisciplinary involvement in IFC from within member agencies.

**Strategic Action 4.2** Support and promote actions that elucidate the relationship between stream health and human health.

**Strategic Action 4.3** Establish and build relationships to advance opportunities and priorities of mutual interest.

**Strategic Action 4.4** Deliver and promote information on projects with multi-disciplinary teams that are using ecosystem-level science.

***Goal 5. Facilitate the development and effective application of tools and methods for instream flow science, policy, law, and public involvement.***

- Strategic Action 5.1** Provide peer reviews of instream flow programs and instream flow tool and method applications.
- Strategic Action 5.2** Promote the use of IFC-recommended instream flow tools and methods.
- Strategic Action 5.3** Host training opportunities focused on the theory and practical application of tools and methods.
- Strategic Action 5.4** Influence the direction and priorities of research and development.

***Implementation***

The strategic plan will be implemented by conducting specific activities included in annual work plans. Activities, drawn from an Implementation Plan, include those considered ‘core’ to sustaining the IFC and achieving a minimum level of effectiveness and ‘priority’ activities designed to enhance IFC’s effectiveness in achieving its mission. Core activities are long-term program activities that must either be accomplished through member expertise and capacity or assured through other means that are financially sustainable. Priority activities are those beyond the core that are recommended during the plan period that may require additional capacity and expertise. Priority activities address the most pressing needs and opportunities and are considered important to accomplish over the life of this plan. Work plans should have the flexibility to respond to changing needs and opportunities by including activities most effective for advancing IFC’s mission. Toward that end, activities that have not been identified in the Implementation Plan may be included in work plans, and the Implementation Plan may be updated as necessary. In addition, officer-elects are expected to attend leadership orientation and identify work plan additions prior to their term, so that such activities can be effectively implemented during their term in office.

***Evaluating Progress***

In this plan, IFC has identified strategic actions to best advance its mission and vision in light of current issues and trends. We want to know if our work is making a difference, and which actions are most effective.

During the 2010-2015 period we will specifically assess our progress toward achieving our mission through surveys/communications with IFC members to determine whether or not instream flow conditions have improved in their jurisdictions, whether IFC helped with that (and if so how), and what IFC can do further to help conditions improve.

In addition, to generally assess and enhance IFC progress we will also evaluate:

1. Annual reporting on IFC accomplishments.
2. Feedback from recipients of IFC peer reviews.
3. Feedback from participants in IFC-sponsored meetings, workshops, and conferences.

4. Building from the International Instream Flow Program Initiative: periodic follow-up assessment of the effectiveness of state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agency instream flow programs.
5. The number of all eligible states, provinces and territories of the U.S. and Canada that are members of IFC.
6. Statistics on IFC web site traffic.
7. Number and diversity of member agency staff participating in IFC communication, projects, and leadership.

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