

Instream Flow Council Strategic Plan

2018-2028

Adopted March 8, 2010

Revised March 26, 2018

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 Plan was implemented in 2010, and re-evaluated and revised in 2017. It defines the roles of the Instream Flow Council (IFC) and sets long-term strategic direction to best position IFC to achieve its [mission](#). It additionally sets [goals](#) to provide broad direction and identifies [strategic actions](#) where efforts can be focused to achieve these goals. Specific [activities](#) categorized as core, which are those that are needed to sustain the IFC, will be undertaken to implement the plan through 2028. In addition, priority activities which enhance IFC’s effectiveness in achieving its mission may also be implemented through 2028.

Plan Contents

Introduction	2
Who We Serve	2
Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles, and Goals	2
IFC’s Strategic Direction	3
Strategic Actions	6
Implementation	7
Evaluating Progress.....	8
Acknowledgements.....	8
Core and Priority Activities	10

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. Instream flow programs are defined as agency's water management and/or instream flow protection and restoration related activities, and include actions related to management of water volume in lakes, reservoirs, or ponds. 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; the focus also includes water level and other water management issues related to all surface water bodies such as estuaries and riparian habitat, and other inter-connected water resources such as groundwater.

This is the Instream Flow Council's third Strategic Plan. The first was completed in 2004 and guided the Council from 2005 to 2010, and the second was adopted in 2010 and guided the Council until 2017. This plan builds on accomplishments and knowledge acquired over nearly two decades of IFC's existence and provides direction for the next ten 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 (water managers, researchers, practitioners, educators, and other stakeholders) to benefit agency instream flow programs and activities. These stakeholders can provide important contributions to the effectiveness of member agency instream flow programs and activities and thereby the ecological integrity of the riverine, lacustrine, and related groundwater resources entrusted to fish and wildlife and agencies.

While IFC member agencies designate an individual to formally 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 conserving (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 conserve fish and wildlife resources and habitats they depend on so they can be used and enjoyed by future generations; and
- IFC perceives value in the development of a commonly accepted public and agency ethics 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 and water level 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 and lacustrine resource stewardship.
- Goal 4** Advance the integration of instream flow and water level science, policy, law, and public dialogue.
- Goal 5** Facilitate the development and effective application of tools and methods for instream flow and water level science, policy, law, and public involvement.

IFC's Strategic Direction

IFC's 2018-2028 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 and competition for freshwater sources increase, 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 and water level 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 naturally varying lake levels. Collectively this has or can result in a greater disconnect between natural resource conditions and people's every-day decisions. There is a need to take actions that enhance public understanding and support of instream flow and water level conservation. Even people interested in natural resources are often not engaged in instream flow and water level 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 and water level 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 and water level protection for increasingly more projects under tighter time constraints. However, some agencies lack the capacity and training to conduct basic instream flow and water level studies and to confidently engage in negotiations with stakeholders to effectively achieve instream flow and water level objectives.
- Socioeconomic conditions continue to be uncertain and may affect member agency support for organizations like IFC. As socioeconomic 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 level 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 maintained its fiscal and functional capacity over the last ten 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 and many of its member agencies have shared information by participating in or hosting local, regional, and international instream flow and water level workshops.
- IFC now has an expanded library of hard copy and online products to promote comprehensive and effective instream flow and water 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 and Water Level Community

- In general, instream flow and water level science is advancing, and the importance of maintaining ecologically important elements of natural flow and level patterns are becoming more broadly accepted. There is also more work occurring in quantifying ecosystem services that healthy watersheds provide. There are more organizations active in instream flow and water level work than in the past, many working to positively influence instream flow and water level 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 ten 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 and water level 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** Enhance online resources for the public that benefit IFC and IFC members.
- Strategic Action 1.4** Provide learning and professional development opportunities at IFC meetings.
- Strategic Action 1.5** Inform members of training and educational opportunities.
- Strategic Action 1.6** Host and contribute to meetings, workshops, and conferences on instream flows and water levels.
- Strategic Action 1.7** Provide financial assistance to members in order that they may pursue and contribute to educational, scientific, and other opportunities that advance IFC's mission.
- Strategic Action 1.8** Publish topical material on instream flow and water levels.

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** Provide scientific and technical support to Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (AFWA) committees
- Strategic Action 2.8** Market the value of the IFC to all eligible member agencies.
- Strategic Action 2.9** 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 and lacustrine 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 and water level 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/lake 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 and water level science, policy, law, and public involvement.

- Strategic Action 5.1** Provide peer reviews of member agency programs and their application of tools and methods.
- Strategic Action 5.2** Promote the use of IFC-recommended instream flow and water level 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 associated with Goals and Strategic Actions. Activities 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 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.

Evaluating Progress

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

During the 2018-2028 period we will assess our progress toward achieving our mission through surveys/communications with IFC members to determine whether or not instream flow and water level 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.
8. The scientific and technical support from AFWA and associated regional associations (WAFWA, MAFWA, SEAFWA, NEAFWA).

Acknowledgements

This Plan is a revision of the 2010-2015 IFC Strategic Plan that was developed by the efforts and insights of the previous Strategic Planning Committee composed by:

- Rod Wentworth, Chair, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Kathleen Williams, IFC Executive Director
- Peter Aarrestad, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
- Ian Chisholm, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Terra Hegy, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Robert Metcalfe, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Eric Nagid, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

In addition to those listed above, this revision was guided by the 2016-2018 IFC Executive Committee:

- Eric Nagid, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, President
- Dave Weedman, Arizona Game and Fish Department, President-elect
- Kevin Mayes, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Past-President
- Andy Brummond, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Treasurer
- Tom Bassista, Idaho Fish and Game, Secretary
- Jonathan Kohr, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 1 Director
- Jason Persinger, Missouri Department of Conservation, Region 2 Director
- Clint Robertson, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Region 3 Director
- Brian Murphy, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Region 4 Director
- Lauren Makowecki, Alberta Environment and Parks, Region 5 Director
- Tom Annear, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Director-at-Large
- Christopher Estes, Chalk Board Enterprises, LLC, Director-at-Large

This plan was improved through the feedback received from IFC members and from many insightful discussions on the role and activities of IFC.

Core and Priority Activities

2018-2028

Adopted March 8, 2010

Revised March 26, 2018

Activities in this 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. They are in addition to necessary ongoing business functions such as: financial management, membership communications, grant development and management, collection of dues, record keeping, responding to inquiries, marketing, and measuring progress. Priority activities are those beyond the core that may require additional capacity and expertise. They address the most pressing needs and opportunities and are considered important to accomplish over the life of this plan. Activities that are not addressed in this Plan may be conducted as necessary to respond to changing needs and opportunities for advancing IFC’s mission.

The following table lists each strategic action by goal, with the corresponding core and priority activities. Strategic actions will not be implemented simultaneously and therefore some do not have an accompanying activity. In other cases, activities are already underway.

Strategic Action	Core Activities	Priority Activities
Goal 1. Facilitate the development and improvement of member instream flow and water level knowledge and competencies.		
1.1 Facilitate collaboration, networking, and efficient exchange of knowledge and information among members.	Maintain list server. Maintain web page.	Enhance substantive listserv traffic.
1.2 Enhance online resources for members.	Assemble and maintain a resource library of each member agency’s instream flow policy and technical guidance. Assemble and maintain a resource library of material developed by, and available to members (including Habitat Suitability Criteria).	Develop a categorized list of seminal papers on instream flow and water level topics with abstracts and how to access copies. Provide access to copies of select member presentations at the biennial meeting.
1.3 Enhance online resources for the public that benefit IFC and IFC members.		
1.4 Provide learning and professional development opportunities at IFC meetings.	Conduct IFC biennial meetings and include focused training components.	
1.5 Inform members of training and educational opportunities	Distribute notice of training opportunities to members via the listserve. Keep current about knowledge and training needs of member agencies.	Develop training based on the book “Instream Flows for Riverine Resource Stewardship” and other IFC products. Provide regular, informal, webinars by members and invited guests.

			Help agencies identify and achieve minimum competencies for staff instream and water level flow practitioners
1.6	Host and contribute to meetings, workshops, and conferences on instream flows and water levels.		Develop a list of relevant events or reoccurring meetings
1.7	Provide financial assistance to members to pursue or contribute to educational, scientific, and other opportunities that advance IFC's mission.		Provide travel support to Governing Council members as needed to attend biennial meetings.
1.8	Publish topical material on instream flow and water levels.		Develop issue papers on specific instream flow and water level topics.
Goal 2. Ensure IFC's organizational effectiveness and relevance.			
2.1	Increase IFC membership from eligible member agencies.		Enhance interaction with non-member states & provinces to increase their understanding of the tangible benefits of IFC membership.
2.2	Increase member participation in IFC activities.	Host and promote attendance at biennial IFC meetings and participation in regional networking.	Provide practical and meaningful opportunities for members to participate in IFC projects and committees.
2.3	Determine and implement IFC activities in a timely manner.	Develop annual budgets.	Develop annual work plans.
2.4	Ensure the IFC's fiscal sustainability.	Sustain sufficient funding for core activities and organizational viability. Maintain a finance committee. Develop a fiscal plan to implement the strategic plan.	
2.5	Increase member interest in IFC leadership opportunities and provide timely leadership orientation training.	Develop an orientation program for incoming officers and officer-elects, at Biennial meetings (i.e. a full two years before RD-elects start their term on ExCom).	
2.6	Ensure effective communication throughout IFC.		Develop a web tool that allows members to suggest activities for possible inclusion in future IFC work plans. Increase communication between regional directors and members Increase communication with individual member agency leadership and AFWA committee representatives and initiatives.
2.7	Provide scientific and technical support to Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (AFWA) committees		Ensure IFC Governing Council representatives have the opportunity to serve on AFWA committees.
2.8	Market the value of the IFC to all eligible member agencies.		Develop materials emphasizing the importance of instream flows and water levels.

2.9	Evaluate IFC's effectiveness.	Evaluate progress based on the framework identified in the Strategic Plan.	
Goal 3. Effectively deliver our organization's products and approaches to members and stakeholders to stimulate support and action for riverine and lacustrine resource stewardship			
3.1	Communicate outcomes of IFC work in a timely manner using media relevant to target audiences.		Provide more on-line content aimed at a lay audience.
3.2	Develop, maintain, and make available resource material for outreach activities.		Provide materials to help members influence water allocation decisions and policy. Convert materials to electronic living documents.
3.3	Actively promote IFC and its products.	Promote IFC books. Encourage IFC acknowledgement in member presentations, publications, and public meetings.	
3.4	Develop and maintain effective partnerships.	Explore partnerships with academia that encourage needed research and contribute to the training of current and potential personnel. Enhance IFC's relationship with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA).	Engage non-governmental organizations and others (including water users) to communicate instream flow and water level problems and solutions to policy makers Explore opportunities provided through the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, AFWA, etc. Develop or foster multidisciplinary regional alliances to advocate for instream flow and water level friendly policies and clear and transferable science. Include wildlife, riparian socioeconomic considerations
Goal 4. Advance the integration of instream flow and water level science, policy, law, and public dialogue			
4.1	Encourage multidisciplinary involvement in IFC from member agencies.	Plan and provide integrated sessions at meetings, workshops, and conferences and encourage colleague participation.	Request governing council members to invite representatives of information and education, legal, and others from their agency to join the listserve.
4.2	Support and promote actions that elucidate the relationship between stream/lake health and human health.	Pursue funding to explore, characterize and incorporate into instream flow and water levels dialogue relevant natural resources economics, human ecology, or sociology (e.g., valuation of free-flowing rivers versus dammed rivers).	Develop and disseminate case studies of successful instream flow and water level prescriptions and agreements that were established within various legal and policy frameworks. Reframe instream flow and water level concepts to help the public understand the connection between water for aquatic resources and "quality of life" for humans. Help member agencies understand and use public initiatives and other programs (e.g., National Fish Habitat Action Plan, state Wildlife Action Plans, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, Farm Bill) to

			fund and implement instream flow improvements in their jurisdiction.
4.3	Establish and build relationships to advance opportunities and priorities of mutual interest.		Organize a committee to research international and national organizations with a strategic vision and mission complementary to IFC's. Collaborate with selected organizations to expand expertise and the applicability of targeted work.
4.4	Deliver and promote information on projects with multi-disciplinary teams that are using ecosystem-level science.		Develop a web page focusing solely on this aspect of river work; showcasing important, current IFC work in each region.
Goal 5. Facilitate the development and effective application of tools and methods for instream flow and water level science, policy, law, and public involvement			
5.1	Provide peer reviews of member agency programs and their application of tools and methods.	Continue to refine the approach to and quality of IFC peer reviews, including the incorporation of comments on the integration of science, policy, law, and public dialogue.	
5.2	Promote the use of IFC-recommended instream flow and water level tools and methods.		Influence the maintenance, restoration, and expansion of the stream and lake gaging network throughout the states and provinces.
5.3	Host training opportunities focused on the theory and practical application of tools and methods.	Hold public workshops/conferences on tools and methods across all ecosystem components as training and a fundraiser. Incorporate issue-based training into biennial and regional meetings for members and invited guests.	Host training workshop(s) on the extent of the public right to instream flow and water level resources and connectivity in watersheds.
5.4	Influence the direction and priorities of research and development.		