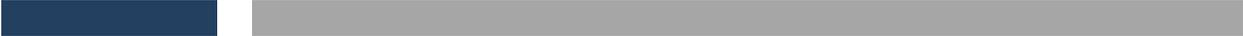


# Recommendations Document from the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council



## Advice to the Government of Alberta for consideration in the development of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Note: This document is advice to the Government of Alberta. This advice considered existing Government of Alberta policies and information provided by the Government of Alberta's staff. The Government of Alberta's views and intentions may not necessarily coincide with the recommendations of the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisor Council.



## Message from the Chair

Picture yourself sitting in a room with 24 strangers who have decades of experience and education in land-use planning. You are asked to shape the future of the local area you live, work and play in. You are asked to participate in the process by bringing your experience and knowledge to share with others, but not representing the interests of the organization you work for or were sponsored by. Imagine being asked every other week, for six months, to analyze provincial government land-use policy positions and hold varying, often opposing, ideas and concepts in your mind while exploring the art of possibly implementing those opposing ideas and concepts in a region you call home. Imagine being held publicly accountable for every recommendation, idea or insight you make regarding how the Government of Alberta, or other vested groups, could address the difficult balancing act of land-use planning.

This picture was the journey of the 25 Albertans who made up the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC). They routinely debated and walked in the shoes of each other and the Government of Alberta in determining how economic, social and environmental outcomes could be addressed concurrently in the North Saskatchewan Region. Being held to account to make choices on these outcomes was difficult, but with a self-determined 75 per cent consensus requirement, RAC rallied over and over to make tough recommendations for government's consideration in the development of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

The journey taken by the North Saskatchewan RAC was different from those taken by RACs for the Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regions. Based on government's learning from two approved regional plans, government asked the North Saskatchewan RAC for very specific advice, as outlined in the Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (the Terms of Reference). This narrowing of focus was a challenge for RAC as many of the advice areas were influenced by much broader considerations and policy implications. In order to maximize the contributions of RAC members, this report is written with two purposes in mind. Firstly, to provide advice as required in the Terms of Reference. Secondly, to provide insight to government, other vested groups and stakeholders on the learnings from RAC's deliberations, and how the varying ideas and perspectives can be employed to work on wicked problems and concurrently achieve economic, social and environmental outcomes for the region, and ultimately the Province of Alberta.

As readers, you may support or challenge what you see in this report, but more importantly on behalf of RAC, I hope you see the art of the possibility of how regional land-use planning actions of today and tomorrow can be advanced to achieve a 50-year vision. The men and women who made up the North Saskatchewan RAC gave their very best to this assignment and honoured their RAC colleagues and Albertans throughout the process. I would be remiss if I did not note that the work of RAC would not be possible without the leadership of

Crystal Damer in the Land Use Secretariat, the tenacity of the cross-government Land-use Framework Integration Team, and the logistical and facilitation support of Elevate Consulting. As Chair, it has been an honour and a privilege to have worked with such a calibre of Albertans as seen in the North Saskatchewan RAC. I am inspired by their passion and desire to make the North Saskatchewan Region the best place in the world to work, live and play.

Wendy Boje

North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council Chair

# Members of the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council

## **Wendy Boje - Chair**

A resident of Parkland County, Ms. Boje serves as Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Policy, Policy Coordination Office, Executive Branch and brings past experience from Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

## **Patrick Alexander**

Mr. Alexander is the Reeve of Clearwater County. A long-term farmer and oil and gas worker, Mr. Alexander has also served on the board of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance.

## **Cecil Andersen**

Mr. Andersen is a Drayton Valley area cattle rancher who has lived his entire life in the North Saskatchewan Region. He was an active participant in the establishment of the Pembina Grazing Reserve and continues today as President and supervisor. Mr. Anderson holds a big game outfitting license and operates in areas adjacent to the North Saskatchewan River.

## **Thomas L (Tim) Burton**

Dr. Burton was the Professor of Recreation and Sports Policy and Planning at the University of Alberta. He has been involved with the Community Planning Association, and the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association for many years.

## **Nicholas Gafuik**

Named among Alberta's top influential people in 2010, Mr. Gafuik is an employee of Canadian Natural Resources Limited in

Calgary, working on policy and public affairs.

## **Leslie Gammie**

Dr. Gammie lives in Edmonton and was employed with EPCOR Water Services working on water quality, health surveillance, and developing standards and guidelines with Health Canada and different provincial departments.

## **Robert Gibb**

With over 10 years of experience working with Talisman Energy Inc. in Calgary, Mr. Gibb is employed as Manager, External Relations Alberta.

## **Ed Gibbons**

Mr. Gibbons has been a City of Edmonton Councillor since 2001. He was raised in Gibbons and has also farmed, part time, in the area.

## **Arnold Hanson**

With 40 years of experience farming in the Viking area, Mr. Hanson is currently serving his first term as Reeve of Beaver County. He has served on various agricultural boards including the Alberta Beef Producers.

## **Lorne Hindbo**

Mr. Hindbo lives in Caroline and has been active in the Burnstick Grazing Association, was an outfitter, and is a cattle and horse rancher in the Caroline area.

**Tim Hofstra**

As an active member of his community of Millet, Mr. Hofstra has been a farmer for over 35 years and is involved in numerous boards.

**Doug King**

As a real estate developer from Ardrossan, Mr. King is part of the Urban Development Institute of Alberta, as well as the Alberta Trail Riding Association.

**Charles Newell**

Mr. Newell is a rural Albertan who has been actively farming certified organic grain and cattle for over 20 years. He is an experienced board member in the energy industry, serving on a rural electrification association as well as advising on the start-up of an independent power producer.

**Ed Parke**

A Councillor from the County of Vermilion River, Mr. Parke brings 40 years of experience as rancher in the Kitscoty area. He has been involved in numerous committees including the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance.

**Robert Phillips**

Mr. Phillips has experience in facilitating and building strong land resource strategies and initiatives that foster environment and economic development opportunities. He has held tenures with the Alberta Government, Corporate Land Resource Developers, and with aboriginal communities in land resource management as an aboriginal liaison.

**Neal Sarnecki**

Mr. Sarnecki is currently employed by the Capital Region Board as Regional Projects

Manager, Land Use. He is a professional planner with over 25 years of experience.

**Tracy Scott**

As the head of Industry and Government Relations – Ducks Unlimited, Red Deer, Mr. Scott is involved in many aspects of water management and serves on numerous watershed committees including committees for the North Saskatchewan and Battle rivers.

**Stephen Stanley**

Dr. Stanley is currently the Senior Vice President for EPCOR Utilities Inc. in charge of water and wastewater services to more than 75 communities in western Canada. He has been a professor of civil engineering and environmental science at the University of Alberta, and a Board member of the Alberta Chamber of Resources.

**David Taylor**

Mr. Taylor is the Manager of Regional Analysis and Relationships, for Environment Canada's Prairie and Northern Region. Prior to this, Mr. Taylor held positions in the National Capital Region with Transport Canada, the Department of Justice, and the Parks Canada Agency.

**Peter Vana**

A professional planner with over 33 years of experience, Mr. Vana is currently working as the General Manager of Development Services for Parkland County.

**Liv Vors**

Dr. Vors lives in Edmonton and is a wildlife biologist/environmentalist with expertise in caribou.

### **Leonard Wade**

Mr. Wade is a member of the Frog Lake First Nation and is currently the Environmental Officer in the Lands Department of his First Nation. He is a former RCMP officer who received a Commissioner's Citation for Bravery in 2002.

### **Robert (Bob) Winship**

Mr. Winship is a professional forester with over 33 years of experience working in the forest industry, and is currently located in Drayton Valley.

### **Allen Wright**

Mr. Wright has over 40 years of diversified experience serving both public and private organizations. He held the position of President of the Coal Association of Canada for a 10 year term, retiring in 2011.

### **Marla Zapach**

A resident of Nordegg, Ms. Zapach is currently engaged in the eco-tourism industry. She has experience working around the world for international agencies and Canada. Ms. Zapach is a member of the Nordegg Chamber of Commerce and Director on the Nordegg Community Association.



*Photo: North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council with Kyle Fawcett, Stewardship Minister. (Absent from photo: Tracy Scott).*

### **Members who could not attend due to scheduling conflicts:**

#### **Stan Delorme**

Mr. Delorme has spent his life working to promote Métis culture and community partnerships. As a land holder in Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, Mr. Delorme is deeply committed to preserving and enhancing the environment while strengthening economic opportunities for all.

#### **Cecil Janvier**

Mr. Janvier is a member of the Cold Lake First Nations. He is also the former Chief and is currently a councillor with the Cold Lake First Nations. Mr. Janvier holds the portfolio for Lands and Resource Development and is an active member of his community who is dedicated to the protection of their Treaty and aboriginal rights.



# Executive Summary of Recommendations

The North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC) was appointed by Cabinet to provide the Government of Alberta with advice on specific topic areas, as outlined in the [Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#). Government sought RAC's advice on six topic areas, each of which support a set of outcomes proposed for the region.

## Regional Outcome: Watersheds are managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship

### Advice Areas: Managing wetlands and lakes as part of watershed management

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

1

- Identification of priority areas for wetland conservation and restoration to support implementation of the [Alberta Wetland Policy](#). This should include suggested tools to support identification of these priority areas.
- Achieving an appropriate balance for lakes in the region between a healthy environment with the current and future pressures and uses, including recreation, municipal, industrial and agricultural activities. This should include suggestions on strategies or approaches to best achieve this balance.

### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 1.1 Implement the full suite of tools it has within the *Water Act* and [Alberta Wetland Policy](#), including addressing the incentives and offsets that are needed to address the economic benefits and challenges of maintaining and restoring wetlands. As part of the policy implementation, address the process of wetland replacement by facilitating offset program exchanges as close as possible, within the area or municipality if possible. A well-functioning market is required to provide cost-effective compensation options so that cross-regional exchanges would be the exception.
- 1.2 Educate and engage with landowners and lease holders regarding the actual identification of their wetlands, the values of those wetlands and options on how to mitigate loss to their wetlands, including the programs that are in play to support such mitigation.
- 1.3 Strengthen the current approach with partners by being more deliberate in the uptake of wetland management practices offered by partners.
- 1.4 Engage with aboriginal communities and provide capacity to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the wetlands inventory.
- 1.5 Ensure availability and cost-effective options for wetland offsets by allowing for additional mitigation agents (i.e., organizations that create offset options). In particular, allow for municipalities to have the opportunity to establish themselves as mitigation agents.
- 1.6 Explore the concept of various wetland creations (e.g., urban storm water catchments, industrial borough pits) and the possible role they could play in supporting biodiversity and wetland values in a variety of settings.
- 1.7 Give consideration to what tools could be offered to municipalities to integrate and protect wetlands in urban settings.
- 1.8 Work with municipalities to implement a streamlined process for when the wetland policy is implemented and reach an agreement on inventory, mitigation, restoration and replacement approaches.
- 1.9 Maximize the use of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) to support watershed planning and management, and the development of the data and information that will be required for planning and decision-making around a number of water body types. Due to their significance in supporting biodiversity, consider wetlands as a biodiversity indicator in the regional plan.
- 1.10 Consider the priority areas for wetland conservation and restoration identified by RAC (refer to Figure 1: Map of Priority Wetland Conservation and Restoration Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 22), with the following direction:
  - The identified areas are only intended to prioritize places for securement of intact wetlands and wetland restoration. Government, mitigation agents, and project proponents should prioritize securement and replacement activities in these areas based on robust data sets.
  - These priority areas do not imply protection or prohibition of activity.

- These priority areas should not result in any new prohibition or regulatory burden over and above existing requirements under the *Water Act* and *Alberta Wetland Policy*. Securement and restoration are voluntary activities subject to the consent and participation of landowners.
- 1.11 Develop a lake management strategy that includes roles and responsibilities of municipalities, government and stewardship groups, such as WPACs, and provides options for governance for particular lake plans, if needed.
  - 1.12 Improve the application of monitoring and science concerning lake health by creating a classification system of lakes in the region that would identify and regularly update carrying capacity (recreational, industrial, community pressure), and provide criteria that would identify health of lakes based on certain attributes, including understanding of non-point source contributions.
  - 1.13 Incorporate aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge and traditional land-use components concerning lake attributes into the lake monitoring program.
  - 1.14 Leverage the implementation of the *Alberta Wetland Policy* where such policy could support the recovery of stressed lakes (e.g., Pigeon and Wabamun).
  - 1.15 Employ the developed lake classification system to prioritize lake management planning and lake management health mitigation across the region to address those lakes in and beyond the “100 kilometre” urban recreation stressed area.
  - 1.16 Increase the level of collaboration between government, WPACs and municipalities to address lake maintenance, management planning (recreation and community) and enforcement of proper lake community infrastructure development and maintenance (i.e., drinking water and septic systems).
  - 1.17 Ensure the legislative and policy frameworks available to manage lakes are being fully employed.
  - 1.18 Incorporate a healthy lake management component into the recreation strategy (refer to RAC’s recommendations to government for the management of outdoor recreation; pg. 75) that will address increased recreation pressures as a result of the “100 kilometre” urban recreation driver). Improve upon programming efforts targeted at education and awareness of lake use.

## Regional Outcome: Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship

### Advice Areas: Supporting biodiversity in the region

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

2

- Opportunities to improve the way working landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity.
- Strategies to minimize human footprint and fragmentation of landscapes.
- Approaches to be used to better integrate industrial access management.
- Approaches to be used to improve the timely and progressive reclamation of disturbed lands.

### RAC’s Recommendations to Government:

2.1 Best approaches for managing working landscapes:

- Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)
- Enhanced reclamation
- Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access

2.2 Best approaches for minimizing human footprint and fragmentation of landscapes:

- Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access
- Enhanced reclamation
- Comprehensive education and awareness

2.3 Best approaches for integrating industrial access management:

- Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)
- Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access
- Regulatory requirements
- Comprehensive and integrated recreation management

2.4 Best approaches for the timely and progressive reclamation of disturbed lands:

- Enhanced reclamation
- Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access
- Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)

**Advice Areas: Supporting biodiversity in the region (continued)**

**Government sought specific advice from RAC on:**

- Identification of potential new conservation areas to support biodiversity, specifically the identification of new potential conservation areas that are managed to protect sensitive habitats and maintain ecological systems and processes.
- Provide recommendations on what the Government of Alberta can do to recognize private landowners for their stewardship and conservation initiatives (monetary and/or other alternatives).
- Insight on the limitations facing the promotion of the use of voluntary tools on private lands for conservation and stewardship, including how the Government of Alberta can increase private landowner awareness and use of voluntary tools.

**RAC's Recommendations to Government:**

- 2.5 Designate the 25 areas of public land supported by RAC for conservation designations. (Refer to Figure 2: Map of Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 43).
- 2.6 Mature the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) private land stewardship tools (i.e., transfer of development credits, conservation easements, and conservation offsets). Government, in collaboration with municipalities and landowner groups, should develop a long-term strategy and action plan that provides leadership for the tools to be implemented, keeping in mind the limited maturity that these tools have in Alberta at this time. Key strategy and action plan elements to include are:
  - Provision of what outcomes (e.g., biodiversity) the tools are trying to effect
  - Creation of a central co-ordination hub that polls parties who develop or manage the tools to inform and monitor the uptake of the tools and their effect on the desired outcomes
  - Provision of educational and awareness services for both local governments and landowners
  - Modelling of different methods for tool implementation (i.e., varying length of application of a tool on a land base, understanding the economics of tool application occurring across municipal boundaries)
  - Efficiency reviews of the administration and processing required to access and implement the tools
  - Exploration of sustainable funding approaches that allow the marketplace and private landowners to interconnect while addressing long-term “land lock down” concerns by landowners; this approach is currently modelled under the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program
  - Research and test other long-term tools that could be employed for municipalities to access outside of land trusts specifically
- 2.7 Build off of and learn from successful stewardship programs already in existence and adapt such programs to the new approach to agriculture (i.e., larger continuous land base farms).
- 2.8 Encourage the application of private land biodiversity in the context of protecting and improving wetlands.
- 2.9 Seek opportunities to collaborate and build off of existing private land stewardship awareness campaign efforts and maximize partnerships with groups and individuals who are demonstrating excellence in private land stewardship towards a biodiversity outcome.
- 2.10 Conduct private land stewardship pilots to test stewardship tools and practices and increase private landowners’ awareness. RAC prioritizes the Wainwright area as the first pilot that government should focus on. (Refer to Figure 3: Map of Private Lands Pilot Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 52).
- 2.11 Explore the policy implications and opportunities to achieve biodiversity on private lands while concurrently addressing recreational pressures through private land recreation models.

## Regional Outcome: Aboriginal peoples and their rights are considered and included in land-use planning development and implementation

### Advice Area: Inclusion of aboriginal peoples in land-use planning

3

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

- Identifying mechanisms to strengthen relationships and increase the current level of aboriginal peoples' involvement in regional planning.

#### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 3.1 Be perseverant and patient with growing its relationship with the aboriginal communities in Alberta. Keep in mind that establishing common ground is a process and Alberta has only begun; it is less about advising and more about participation and building trust.
- 3.2 Recognize that the time frames that government and industry seek to reach resolution on land-use decisions are different from the time frames of aboriginal peoples. To mitigate this difference government should consider investing in long-term relations with the First Nations and Métis organizations, particularly noting consistency of having the same staff involved and providing sufficient time to allow for First Nations and Métis organizations to engage in discussions and processes, not just singular community representatives. This recommendation would also start to address the capacity issues in the communities.
- 3.3 Make use of community-based planning approaches that would create integrated planning (i.e., cumulative effects planning versus project-by-project planning).
- 3.4 Acknowledge and respect the value of traditional ecological knowledge held by aboriginal peoples. Work collaboratively to find the best ways that traditional ecological knowledge can inform plan development, monitoring and state of landscape reporting.
- 3.5 Create standing stakeholder groups with nominated members from the First Nations and Métis at the community level who will advise government at the local planning level and the implementation of the plans, and create the opportunity for community-to-community dialogue rather than government-to-government only discussions.
- 3.6 Examine pilots and models working in neighbouring jurisdictions (e.g., the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Fund) on land-use planning approaches and financing options for First Nations and Métis organizations.
- 3.7 Build off of the evolving economic discussions occurring with some aboriginal communities in the White Area (eastern side) of the region to further the understanding and potential opportunities for all aboriginal communities in the region.
- 3.8 Implement First Nations and Métis cultural awareness as a core training need for government staff, and partner with municipalities and industries who also wish to participate in such training. Include training on how to communicate with and amongst aboriginal peoples.
- 3.9 Support land stewardship training and sustainable placements with aboriginal communities to allow for sustainable capacity-building within aboriginal communities.
- 3.10 Explore options that include off-settlement Métis and urban aboriginal populations in land-use planning within municipalities.

**Regional Outcomes: Community development needs are anticipated and accommodated**

**Lands are efficiently used to minimize the amount of area taken up by the built environment** *(additional proposed outcome)*

**Advice Areas: Community growth and community land-use planning**

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

4

- How can the Government of Alberta, municipalities, landowners and industry collaborate in the implementation of the efficient use of land principles?
- Enhancing efficient land use in areas where petroleum and petrochemical investments are expected to occur.
- Strengthening regional infrastructure, community planning, and development in order to support economic expansion and population growth
- Facilitating efficient transportation of products to local, national and international markets.
- Increasing the current level of collaboration, involvement and partnership by and between various groups (e.g., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) and the Government of Alberta, in the area of land-use planning.

**RAC's Recommendations to Government:**

- 4.1 Step into the municipal land-use planning ring and provide further support and possible requirements to enable municipalities in areas such as annexation, density and sensitive land-use matters. This also includes working with municipalities on how growth will occur within the priority growth areas around the Capital Region Area and Highway 2 Corridor to ensure the financial viabilities of all municipalities are maintained, or strategies are put in place to address those communities no longer financially viable.
- 4.2 Assess the opportunity of linking efficient use of land tools for municipalities with land-use market tools, like ecosystem services.
- 4.3 Expand the Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plan (CRISP) model. Facilitate and provide data and information to conduct an immediate and medium-term land-use/infrastructure plan (including transportation, infrastructure and industrial planning, and the Industrial Heartland's eco-industrial plan) for the Industrial Heartland, taking into consideration the downstream effects of the Lower Athabasca Region; and that the North Saskatchewan Region is the hub for the market access strategy of the province. This approach would be of particular value for the Industrial Heartland given the continuing investments in the petrochemical industry.
- 4.4 Provide additional capacity in the form of training and advice to municipalities in the use of efficient use of land tools, and work with municipalities to evaluate the tools' effectiveness and ability to create sustainable communities in an Alberta context.
- 4.5 Facilitate and act as a knowledge broker to immediately develop a transportation plan to address pinch points in the region where immediate and straight-forward responses are required.
- 4.6 Ensure any further subregional planning efforts incorporate infrastructure planning, including transportation.
- 4.7 Work with municipalities on sustainable infrastructure funding options.
- 4.8 Provide options in transportation infrastructure system designs, depending on the expected life of the infrastructure required.
- 4.9 Develop a policy in consultation with municipalities and industry that addresses sustainable transportation infrastructure funding, including assessments of where tolls and public/private partnerships are options.
- 4.10 Review the transportation infrastructure system attributes and assess where there might be governance or operational model changes required, given the significant growth in demand and limited growth in supply.
- 4.11 Work with municipalities to provide them with capacity to mature their planning capabilities, including exploring options with neighbouring aboriginal communities to support mutually beneficial land-use opportunities.
- 4.12 Consider addressing the aggregate extraction challenge by requiring municipalities to identify where gravel resources are in their municipal development plans

so they can co-ordinate the extraction of their resources in accordance with land-use planning.

- 4.13 Evolve the current government partnership and collaboration models with various groups (i.e., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) to maximize the skills, knowledge and relationships in these groups while bringing leadership, facilitation, clarity of direction and knowledge to the table.

**Regional Outcome: The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for recreation, active living, and the preservation and promotion of the region’s unique cultural and natural heritage**

**Advice Area: Management of outdoor recreation**

**5**

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

- Expansion or establishment of new recreation areas – Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas, Public Land Recreation Areas, etc.

**RAC’s Recommendations to Government:**

- 5.1 Reach out to municipalities and industry to leverage ideas and initiatives to create recreation opportunities. Specifically look at options which allow for variations around reclamation of industrial sites that may create alternative recreational opportunities.
- 5.2 Consider alternative revenue generation opportunities based on different recreation strategies that clearly outline the service received in exchange for the fees.
- 5.3 Develop, in partnership with municipalities, a recreation/tourism plan that incorporates what the region’s urban population seeks in the 100 kilometer radius of the urban corridor and how that demand might be met.
- 5.4 Partner with municipalities to prioritize and enable the development of tourism development nodes in the Green Area of the region (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77) and support the necessary governance that would include government, aboriginal communities, municipalities and industry.
- 5.5 Build and model Crown land governance structures off of the Bighorn governance model for the entire Green Area in the region.
- 5.6 Establish a permanent and sustainable recreation enforcement program in the Green Area of the region. Provide the program with the appropriate tools by implementing the tools available under the *Public Lands Act*, and include the aspects of education, engineering and enforcement.
- 5.7 Manage the public and parks land for the intended use seamlessly as one government, and streamline, where possible, the administrative and procedural rules between the two land bases.
- 5.8 Prioritize recreation management planning in the Upper (East) Planning Area and the Long Lake Planning Area first, followed by the Lower and Center Planning Area, Upper (Central) Planning Area, Ram Planning Area, and Upper (West) Planning Area. (Refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77).
- 5.9 Invest in upgrading and enhancing the parks infrastructure at Pigeon Lake Provincial Park, followed by Long Lake Provincial Park, Calhoun Bay Provincial Recreation Area, Crimson Lake Provincial Park, Fishlake Provincial Recreation Area, Goldeye Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area. (Refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77).
- 5.10 Develop the Bighorn Dam Provincial Recreation Area and expand the lands by Jackfish Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area, Buck Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, Bellis Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Long Lake Provincial Park in order to increase the land base available to the provincial parks system. (Refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77).

## Regional Outcome: The region's economy is growing and diversified

### Advice Areas: Economic development

6

Government sought specific advice from RAC on:

- Maintaining a viable agricultural land base to support growth and diversification of the agricultural industry.
- Attracting tourism investors and developers (specific to Crown land) through longer-term tenure.

#### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 6.1 Develop an agriculture policy that lays out the role of agriculture, including clarity in what land inputs and food outputs are desired, and the respective land-use policies that should be considered as a result of the industry's role.
- 6.2 In combination with providing municipalities with further support for community planning decisions, consult and consider what expertise support and market tools municipalities need to make difficult choices in land development.
- 6.3 Streamline the application process for tourism and recreational leases to shorten the current timeline substantively and assess current tenure terms. Longer-term lease opportunities should be considered for tourism and recreation (up to 99 years) depending on the type of development proposed and assessed under specific criteria for lease length.
- 6.4 Develop a back country tourism strategy that links to the tourism nodes (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77), tourism and recreation lease application process and addresses where compatible activities (industrial/recreational) and viewscapes can occur, and communicate the strategy as such to the investor community.
- 6.5 Put policies and/or guidelines in place that provide clarity for the management of lands adjacent to lease lands (buffers) for tourism and recreation in relation to potential influences of growing recreational use such as random camping and development.
- 6.6 Work with municipalities to assess what tools and programs would build capacity in municipalities to take on more tourism development opportunities at the local government level, noting that public land access would be a critical infrastructure component.
- 6.7 Identify and develop a tourism strategy for the region's destination areas and "nodes" (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77).

## Proposed Vision, Outcomes and Strategic Directions

RAC provided observations on the proposed regional vision, outcomes and strategic directions for government's consideration. (Refer to the section on The Region's Draft Vision, Outcomes and Strategic Directions; pg. 12).

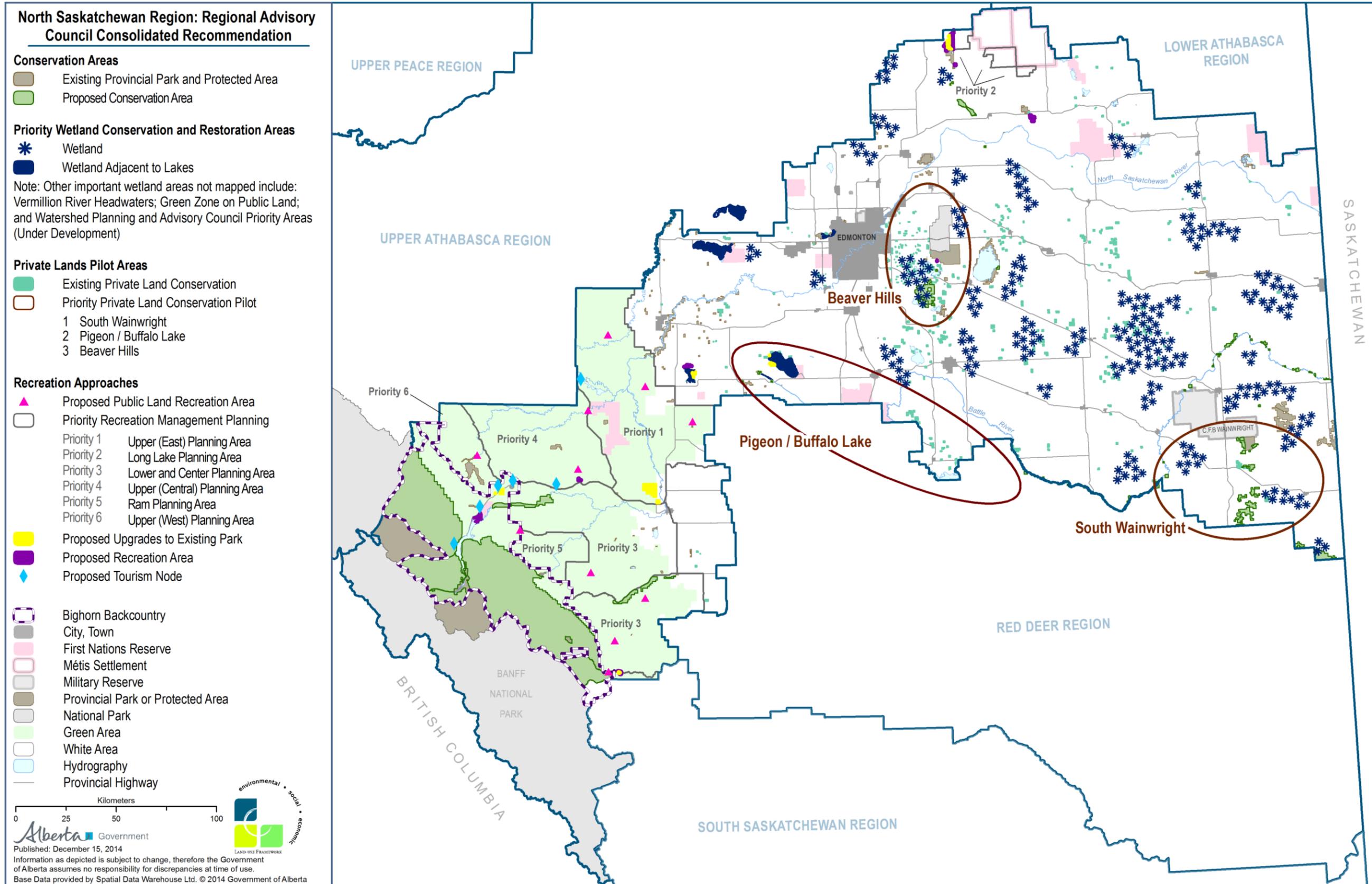
## Responsibility of the Government of Alberta

### Regional Outcome: Air quality is managed to support human and ecosystem needs through shared stewardship

RAC was not asked to provide advice on the management of air quality, but acknowledges the Government of Alberta's role in developing an air quality framework for the region.

RAC also acknowledges government's role in the development of other environmental management frameworks, including a surface water quality framework and a biodiversity management framework, to support the environmental outcomes for the region.







# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Why a Regional Advisory Council .....	1
Background to the Land-use Framework .....	1
Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan .....	2
Role of the Regional Advisory Council.....	3
Purpose of this Document.....	4
<b>ADVICE FROM REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Drivers of Change in the North Saskatchewan Region.....	5
RAC’s Integrated Recommendations.....	7
The Region’s Draft Vision, Outcomes and Strategic Directions.....	12
Healthy Ecosystems and the Environment.....	13
1. Managing Wetlands and Lakes as Part of Watershed Management .....	13
Advice Area: Wetland Management .....	19
Advice Area: Lake Management.....	25
2. Supporting Biodiversity in the Region .....	26
Advice Area: Supporting Biodiversity Through Management of Public Lands.....	35
Advice Area: Supporting Biodiversity Through Conservation Areas .....	41
Advice Area: Supporting Biodiversity Through Stewardship on Private Lands .....	50
People-Friendly Communities with Healthy Economies .....	53
3. Inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples in Land-use Planning .....	53
Advice Area: Inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples in Land-use Planning.....	57
4. Community Growth and Community Land-use Planning.....	58
Advice Area: Community Growth and Community Land-use Planning .....	67
5. Management of Outdoor Recreation .....	68
Advice Area: Management of Outdoor Recreation.....	75
6. Economic Development.....	78
Advice Area: Economic Development – Agriculture and Fragmentation.....	81
Advice Area: Economic Development – Tourism Lease Tenure on Crown Land for Recreation and Tourism .....	84
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>91</b>
Appendix A: Government of Alberta’s Land-use Classification System and Management Intents .....	91

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms .....	92
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## List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Priority Wetland Conservation and Restoration Area Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region.....	22
Figure 2: Map of Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region.....	43
Figure 3: Map of Private Lands Pilot Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region.....	52
Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region.....	77

## List of Tables

Table 1: Priority Wetland Areas Recommended by the North Saskatchewan RAC.....	21
Table 2: RAC Recommendations for Supporting Biodiversity through Management of Public Lands.....	35
Table 3: Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC .....	41
Table 4: Priority Areas for Recreation Management Planning .....	73
Table 5: Identified Priorities for Investing New Funds to Enhance and Upgrade the Existing Provincial Parks System .....	74
Table 6: Identified Areas for Expansion to the Provincial Parks System .....	74

# INTRODUCTION

## Why a Regional Advisory Council

### Background to the Land-use Framework

The Land-use Framework sets out a new approach to managing the province's land and natural resources. Released in December 2008, it provides a decision-making blueprint for sustaining a growing economy while balancing social and environmental goals.

The framework was developed through extensive consultation with Albertans and their collective feedback formed the guidance from which a provincial vision and a set of desired provincial outcomes were created.

#### **Vision:**

Albertans working together to respect and care for the land as the foundation of our economic, environmental and social well-being.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources
- Healthy ecosystems and environment
- People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities

The outcomes recognize that Alberta's economic, environmental and social goals are interdependent. As such, achieving these outcomes will require an integrated and balanced approach to land-use management.

Resolving the complexities in land-use planning and decision-making requires provincial leadership and an integrated planning process. Establishing a formal regional planning system is the most effective way to implement provincial policy, and a regional approach will allow the establishment of land-use management objectives and determine land-use trade-offs.

The Land-use Framework commits to the development of seven regional plans, each based on land-use regions identified by their watershed boundaries. This approach recognizes the great diversity of Alberta's landscapes and allows for important land-use trade-off decisions. Regional planning will integrate economic, environmental and social factors and provide the context for future, more detailed planning to ensure that planning for land-use and environmental management are aligned and integrated.

Each region must develop a regional plan and the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan is the third regional plan underway. When completed, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan will provide the foundation for land-use decision-making within the region.

The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) is legislation complementary to the policies outlined in the framework. It was brought into law in October 2009 and governs the establishment and implementation of regional plans.

Complete versions of the Land-use Framework and ALSA can be found online at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca).

## Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan

The Government of Alberta, led by the Land Use Secretariat, is responsible for regional planning. The secretariat currently uses a three stage process for the development of each regional plan:

- **Stage 1: Pre-planning** – Develop the Profile of the North Saskatchewan Region and the Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (the Terms of Reference). Government consults and engages with the public, stakeholders, and aboriginal peoples on a draft vision, the proposed outcomes, corresponding draft strategic directions, and opportunities and challenges in the region, as set out in the Terms of Reference.
- **Stage 2: RAC** – Obtain advice from the Cabinet appointed North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC) on specific topic areas, as identified by government in the Terms of Reference, and obtain feedback from the public, stakeholders and aboriginal peoples on RAC’s recommendations document to the Government of Alberta.
- **Stage 3: Completing the Plan** – Develop the draft North Saskatchewan Regional Plan considering RAC’s recommendations to government and all input received to date from public, stakeholder and aboriginal consultations, including feedback to RAC’s recommendations to government. With the release of the draft North Saskatchewan Regional Plan, government consults and engages with the public, stakeholders and aboriginal peoples to obtain feedback on the draft regional plan and tables a final plan to the legislature that considers all feedback received from consultation and engagement. Once the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan is approved by Cabinet, it becomes a regulation under ALSA.

Once approved by Cabinet, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan will provide direction to more detailed local land-use plans, and local and integrated planning must be consistent and align with the regional plan. Implementation of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan will be supported by local policies and regulations, such as municipal zoning, and by provincial laws, regulations and policy tools.

## Role of the Regional Advisory Council

A RAC is established for each region and is composed of a cross-section of individuals who live, work, recreate and/or have an interest in the region, and are able to strategically consider what is best for the entire region at a holistic level. Each RAC has a Chair who consolidates the voice and perspectives of RAC members and ensures that government provides enough information to inform RAC's advice. The Chair is responsible for conveying RAC's views and corresponding advice, on behalf of RAC members, to the Stewardship Minister.

The North Saskatchewan RAC was comprised of members with a cross-section of expertise and experience. Their role was to provide strategic advice, analysis and options for consideration in the form of recommendations. RAC members were solicited through a public process and appointed by Cabinet.

RAC members attended eight multi-day, facilitated meetings in locations across the region between July and November of 2014. They provided perspectives from one of 12 lenses, based on their backgrounds and experiences, to ensure their deliberations, and ultimately their advice, was formed from objective experiences and facts, versus personal opinion.

RAC's work was supported by the Land Use Secretariat and a cross-government Land-use Framework Integration Team which included officials from: Environment and Sustainable Resource Development; Agriculture and Rural Development; Energy; Culture and Tourism; Transportation; Municipal Affairs; Aboriginal Relations; Treasury Board and Finance; and Innovation and Advanced Education. RAC also received information from additional government and guest speakers to support their discussions and deliberations.

For each area of advice sought in the Terms of Reference, the Government of Alberta provided background materials to set the stage for discussions. Government officials provided the various government approaches available for application at the time of deliberations for RAC to discuss and evaluate, as they related to the Terms of Reference.

RAC members also heard presentations from First Nations and Métis organizations that have an interest in the North Saskatchewan Region.

### RAC Member Perspectives:

- Aboriginal
- Agriculture
- Air
- Biodiversity
- Energy and Minerals
- Forestry
- Government
- Land
- Municipal
- Recreational
- Tourism
- Water

## Purpose of this Document

This document summarizes the information presented to RAC by government and the RAC deliberations and advice that RAC members felt were most relevant to the request outlined in the Cabinet approved Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The Terms of Reference directed RAC to deliberate and provide recommendations on very specific aspects within the economic, environmental and social outcomes for the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan. During the course of deliberations, RAC sometimes shared observations and considerations that were related to the Terms of Reference, but also spoke to broader challenges and opportunities. These are also captured for government's use.

## INTEGRATED DELIBERATIONS AND ADVICE

The Land-use Framework and corresponding regional planning approaches recognize that a region's economic, environmental and social outcomes are interdependent, and as such achieving them requires an integrated approach. RAC's deliberations highlighted the areas of complementary and conflicting intersections between the economic, environmental and social outcomes, and RAC's corresponding advice weighed the compromise needed in some instances. The advice areas address the three provincial outcomes and in this document, are organized under two main sections: Healthy Ecosystems and the Environment, and People-friendly Communities with Healthy Economies.

As a result of the wide variation in the impacts of certain RAC advice in the region, several of the deliberations for the RAC advice are broken out by western regional perspective (i.e., Green Area – predominantly public land attributes); eastern regional perspective (i.e., White Area – predominantly private land attributes); and Capital Region “hub” perspective (i.e., Capital Region Area – predominantly municipal land attributes).

# ADVICE FROM THE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Drivers of Change in the North Saskatchewan Region

### RAC's First Thoughts

Throughout RAC's deliberations, government and RAC members themselves provided RAC with various socio-economic analysis insights. These insights formed the foundation for many of RAC's deliberations. The following provides the economic lens that RAC viewed the region through.

### Background on Drivers of Change in the Region Provided by Government

The North Saskatchewan Region has always had sustainable economic development to the east in industries such as agriculture and energy development, and to the west in industries such as forestry and energy development. What has changed the region most dramatically is the rapid economic expansion in the Capital Region.

From 2000 to 2013, the North Saskatchewan Region observed a 3.1 per cent annual growth rate in gross domestic product. Within the Capital Region alone, the rate was 3.8 per cent while provincially it was 2.9 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

This comparison of economic growth identifies not only the opportunity the region has been capitalizing on, but concurrently the pressure the region is now under.

To understand where the 3.8 per cent growth comes from, one can look north to the Lower Athabasca Region and its energy and forestry activities, and south to the United States, Alberta's single largest trading partner. While government and industry strive to expand a market access strategy to eastern and western Canada to increase access to Asian and European market opportunities, Alberta's industry also continues to export products south to the United States. The effect of the North Saskatchewan Region being the central dispatch for exports heading south means the Capital Region Area has become a "hub" of sorts where pipelines, roadways and railways filled with raw or manufactured product is either shipped south for export markets or north for inputs into further natural resource development. With this complex transportation system comes a growth in manufacturing, both of natural resource products (petrochemicals, etc.) and more recently, industrial manufacturing. Between 2003 and 2013, machinery and fabricated metals manufacturing grew by 7.4 per



<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada; provided by the Government of Alberta

cent and 5.6 per cent respectively in Alberta; much of that growth coming from the Capital Region and much of the market demand for the growth coming from the United States.<sup>2</sup>

With the Capital Region becoming a “hub” for Alberta’s manufacturing production and natural resource export market, a ripple effect is created elsewhere in the region and significant growth pressures are faced by the Capital Region. For example, on the eastern side of the region (i.e., Highway 36) there is increased pressure on transportation routes for high load transport and to the west (i.e., Highway 22) there is increased pressure as a result of recreation use.

On average, 58 families (581 individuals) move into the City of Edmonton per week<sup>3</sup> to fill the job markets in the Capital Region and the Lower Athabasca Region. Community infrastructure and social planning are becoming much more critical for the region as a whole. All of this growth is connected to the continued growth in the energy sector, particularly oil and gas, whose developments occur across the region.

The rapidly growing population in the North Saskatchewan Region, particularly in the Capital Region, is predominantly composed of young people with families who are arriving from across the country, or internationally, or are Albertans relocating from other areas of the province. The Capital Region will soon be home to the largest per capita urban aboriginal population in Canada. This combination of immigration patterns influences particular aspects of community and infrastructure planning within the Capital Region and beyond to the rest of the North Saskatchewan Region. While the Capital Region Board is accountable for co-ordinating planning within the 24 member municipalities for this unique growth, the spillover effects into the remainder of the North Saskatchewan Region impacts recreation and transportation in particular. Recreation pressures become much more localized (i.e., within one hour or 100 kilometres of the urban center) and transportation needs, such as oversized loads and public transit, are different from what the region has typically had to accommodate. Finally, the region’s immigration pattern contributes to defining an Albertan in a different way (i.e., younger, national or international heritage and perhaps even a temporary Albertan in nature). While the definition of an Albertan in this region is not clearly defined yet, it is noted that today’s Albertan in the North Saskatchewan Region is very different from that of 20 years ago.

#### **RAC’s First Thoughts**

RAC reflected on a 50-year vision and provided advice that contributed to short-term, mid-term and long-term objectives to ensure the region would be able to maximize the economic opportunity before it today in a responsible and thoughtful manner.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Statistics Canada; provided by the Government of Alberta

<sup>3</sup> Source: City of Edmonton Statistics

# RAC's Integrated Recommendations

RAC was asked for advice on the six different areas, as guided by the [Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan](#). As specified in the Terms of Reference, government sought RAC's advice on benefits, choices and trade-offs to balance economic development with the environmental and social considerations around these advice areas.

While each advice area was found within either an environmental, social or economic outcome, RAC members, through their deliberations, observed a number of themes that created several integrated recommendations for government that would be applicable to the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan and possibly provincially.

## **1. Increase government's capacity or change the current local level land-use planning model**

RAC observed that while government had responded to stakeholders' and industry's requests to modernize the land management and extraction of natural resources "system", government still lacked capacity (i.e., staffing) to deliver on the various aspects of land-use planning, approvals and monitoring. RAC observed that if government set the direction and provided leadership, facilitation and data/knowledge, other groups and organizations at a more local level could do the heavy lifting of planning, with government ultimately approving such plans.

An example of a governance model, which RAC often referred to, that could be leveraged further to fulfill such an approach is the Bighorn Advisory Group. The Bighorn model was seen to provide a level planning and implementation space for vested stakeholders, with government direction clearly outlined, and was viewed as a successful model for planning and delivering education and awareness programming for local land users. This model can also incorporate a variety of land-use knowledge, such as traditional ecological knowledge from local aboriginal communities. The final key ingredient to this model was clarity on members' roles and responsibilities.

Beyond providing leadership and clarity of desired outcomes, government would also need to strengthen its knowledge broker role. This would require government to enable data and information sharing in a qualitative and mapping form for parties living, playing or working in the area or region, in order to support local land-use recommendations and provide mechanisms for other data and information to be incorporated into local planning efforts.

Examples of where this local level planning could be completed, with government providing leadership, facilitation and information to a joint stakeholder planning table, included the development and implementation of various environmental management frameworks for the region (i.e., air, water and biodiversity) and subregional plans to address integrated land management and enhanced reclamation priorities.

## **2. Fully implement the policies and plans already in existence and concurrently ensure coherence between various provincial government programs**

RAC observed during its deliberations that in the absence of government having fully implemented some of its existing regulations, policy frameworks or programs, it was difficult to comment on what else should be done. Examples included recreation management, integrated land-use planning, wetland policy, efficient use of land policies, and reclamation requirements. If the existing regulations and policies were in operation, the regional plan could advance a number of other strategies, but without being able to evaluate the success of current regulations, policies and programs, it was difficult to advise on what “else” should be done in the region. Additionally, implementing current regulations, policies and programs would allow industry more time to support local and subregional efforts, as industry would spend less time navigating the decision-making system and more time working at the local planning level with government and other stakeholders on desired outcomes.

## **3. Recognize a suite of approaches for conservation recognition**

While RAC members came from all walks of life, they all valued conservation to ensure biodiversity will exist in the region 50 years from now. The debate was how to ensure such biodiversity persists. The learning is that there are many ways to “conserve” land for biodiversity outcomes and working from a suite of approaches, versus a singular approach, is the optimal way to bring industry, landowners, municipalities, environmentalists and recreationalists together to create “conservation for biodiversity” on public and private land. RAC observed that putting a fence around a piece of land and not touching it did not ensure biodiversity, but neither did complete development of the same land. RAC observed that government needs to look at land over time, assess the state of biodiversity in and around it, and then look at approaches or tools to manage for the next range of outcomes.

## **4. Provide collaborative leadership to address the realities of the Capital Region and Highway 2 Corridor growth**

Government needs to champion collaboration and provide governance support to Capital Region planning efforts to ensure the local governments around the table can integrate their planning efforts. If local governments and the provincial government could share planning knowledge at one table, the picture of what the Capital Region Area and Highway 2 Corridor will look like in 10, 20 and 50 years becomes much clearer, as does the picture for the ripple effects on the remainder of the region. Such planning requires government to be overt in its leadership and actions, but still in a respectful and collaborative manner by bringing municipalities, aboriginal peoples, communities and industries together to develop and implement this geographically targeted planning.

**5. Mature the relationship with the First Nations and Métis organization as well as with urban aboriginal peoples in the region to find a bridge culturally between the various approaches to planning**

Maturing this relationship requires a sustained presence by government, municipalities and industry with aboriginal communities and urban aboriginal populations to evolve the discussion from very small, local specific land site concerns to community-level based discussions that allow for all parties to benefit from the opportunities in the region. It requires sustained and consistent participation by all at the table with a community-to-community perspective, in addition to the government-to-government perspective. This approach will lead to a more mature, inclusive and expansive relationship that will ideally evolve the land-use discussions from the legal requirements of today to collaborative planning and opportunities exploration reflecting what the communities and urban aboriginals are seeking.

**6. Invest in a capacity building (expertise and experience) relationship with municipalities**

From infrastructure planning and environmental planning to recreation and tourism development, not all municipalities have the expertise or experience to conduct the planning and implementation in a variety of land-use planning aspects, never mind the funding. If government and municipalities approach discussions from the provision of experience and expertise, the relationship could become much richer and opportunity based.

**7. Rethink and retest traditional planning models and assumptions of what Albertans want**

Re-examine the changing makeup of those who live in the North Saskatchewan Region, what they seek in terms of community-level planning, what industries are coming to the region and the interdependences between these shifting attributes.

The concept of increased recreation around the Capital Region runs up against the concept of wetland retention and restoration, and maintaining healthy lakes. As illustrated in the Map of the North Saskatchewan RAC's Consolidated Recommendations (refer to pg. xvii of the Executive Summary), the concept of an urban recreation strategy of "100 kilometres or one hour" around the Capital Region translates into increased pressures on already sensitive water bodies.

Acknowledge the role of agriculture in the region, and the province, today, where Albertans want the industry to prosper, and where and/or on what planning criteria its land base will be over taken by other industries. This is the heart of the issue for the Highway 2 Corridor and the annexation debates around the Capital Region. In farther out rural areas, and some urban fringe areas, the question is about balancing modern day agricultural practices with land-use policies, such as the policy for wetlands, that are not as easily managed for.

**8. Maximize the use of clear, modern land-use regulatory approaches and a free market place for ecosystem services to address difficult land-use trade-offs**

If one assumes that the Capital Region and the Highway 2 Corridor are the manufacturing and transporting hubs for the region and the connectors to the north and south of the province, and perhaps east and west in the future, then the various policies around land use need to be collaboratively built between the province and municipalities and then provided to municipalities to implement. The use of market tools or ecosystem services, such as offsets, can then become true financial instruments which can start to address land-use valuations in the region, and ultimately in the province.

## The Proposed Vision for the North Saskatchewan Region:

The North Saskatchewan Region is a dynamic hub with a diverse and prosperous economy. Citizens, industry, governments and aboriginal peoples share responsibility for stewardship of our air, water, biodiversity, land and natural resources in a way that ensures current needs are met without compromising opportunities for future generations. A diverse economy provides enduring employment and contributes to the prosperity of all Albertans.

The region is home to Alberta's capital city of Edmonton, which includes the Industrial Heartland, a central area housing significant oil sands-related facilities (bitumen upgraders and petrochemical facilities), and is also a central hub for the movement of goods and access to markets. The energy, forestry and agriculture sectors are vibrant economic drivers in the region and consistently maintain or expand production of traditional export products, while pursuing additional business opportunities. Featuring the culturally and historically significant North Saskatchewan River and the Rocky Mountains, a strong tourism industry builds on the competitive advantage offered by the diversity of important aboriginal, historical, cultural and natural assets.

The region's air, water, land and biodiversity are sustained while ecosystems remain healthy and fully functioning. This is supported by integrated approaches to sustainable management with shared stewardship. There are both working landscapes and conservation areas to reflect the values and needs of Albertans. Through their traditional knowledge, aboriginal peoples share their intimate understanding of the environment.

### Proposed Regional Outcomes:

- Air quality is managed to support human and ecosystem needs through shared stewardship
- Watersheds are managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship
- Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship
- Community development needs are anticipated and accommodated
- Aboriginal peoples and their rights are considered and included in land-use planning development and implementation
- The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for recreation, active living, and the preservation and promotion of the region's unique cultural and natural heritage
- Lands are efficiently used to minimize the amount of area taken up by the built environment (*additional proposed outcome*)
- The region's economy is growing and diversified

### Proposed Strategic Directions

- Continuing economic growth for key economic land-use sectors and seeking opportunities to access new markets
- Managing air quality through continued collaboration
- Advancing watershed management
- Conserving and maintaining the benefits of biodiversity
- Advancing conservation and integrated management of Crown land
- Supporting and enabling stewardship and conservation on private lands
- Supporting growing communities through enhanced planning and collaboration
- Promoting efficient use of land by minimizing the amount of lands taken up in the built environment
- Considering the rights of aboriginal peoples and including them in land-use planning
- Providing recreation and tourism opportunities and preserving and promoting the region's unique cultural and natural heritage

# The Region's Draft Vision, Outcomes and Strategic Directions

## RAC's First Thoughts

RAC had the opportunity to discuss the draft vision, outcomes and strategic directions proposed for the region. The discussion was challenging as the various aspects of the 50-year vision, outcomes and strategic directions were very high-level and were informed by knowledge of the past and current insight of today. RAC observed that visions for Alberta set out in various past planning and development exercises, while inspirational, were set in a less complex situation than that of today.

That being said, RAC did note some considerations:

### The vision needs to:

- Excite Albertans and compel partners to collaborate to achieve the vision;
- Focus on creating the correct conditions for responsible development and growth;
- Spark an evolution in the business model of how government, aboriginal peoples, industry, local governments, stakeholders and Albertans work together; and
- Be amended to state the region is home to Alberta's capital city of Edmonton and the Industrial Heartland (i.e., as separate areas).

### The outcomes need to:

- Speak to the region having a "hub" that is driving the economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities in the region;
- Inspire a communicative and trusting relationship with aboriginal communities in the region;
- Speak to the triple bottom line of sustaining economic, environmental and social outcomes; and
- Incorporate measures and indicators but also trigger management responses when measures and indicators are not achieved.

### The strategic directions need to:

- Speak to more than "holding the line or status quo", but include improving and enhancing;
- Speak to time – 10 years versus 20 years versus 50 years – break down the timing to be provide more clarity on actions; and
- Recognize the Capital Region, Green Area to the west and White Area to the east integrated story of the region and how the interrelationships between the three, with the Capital Region being the centre hub, can create improved outcomes for the region and province as a whole

# Healthy Ecosystems and the Environment

RAC explored a variety of approaches to land-use planning for both public and private lands. RAC observed there were a number of ways to enable healthy ecosystems on either land base while allowing for economic activity. Their advice is captured under two sections:

- Managing wetlands and lakes as part of watershed management
- Supporting biodiversity
  - Through management of public lands
    - Through identification of conservation lands on public lands
  - Through stewardship of private lands

## 1. Managing Wetlands and Lakes as Part of Watershed Management

### RAC's First Thoughts

RAC observed that focussing its deliberations on managing wetlands and lakes as a subset of the watershed discussion was difficult. Government officials noted the reason for this focus was the need to get further advice on wetlands and lake management in the region in particular, given their high competing values for other uses (i.e., recreation, agriculture and municipal), the newness of where government was in its implementation of the [Alberta Wetland Policy](#), and the early days of a provincial lake management strategy.

RAC identified a number of policy challenges and opportunities for government to assess:

- The competing interests between recreation uses and stressed water bodies in the region;
- The lack of understanding or awareness of what is different on the land as a result of the new [Alberta Wetland Policy](#) and how the policy relates to what was already in place under the *Water Act*; and
- The opportunity for the marketplace (ecosystem services market tools) to change the approach to how wetlands are managed.

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

### Background on Watershed Management Provided by Government

Water supply and demand are key factors in the development and growth for the region. Economic development and population growth places pressure on water quality and quantity. These pressures, compounded by changing environmental factors and cumulative effects of growth, affect water and watersheds.

Watershed management and headwaters protection are essential for both water supply and water quality. The value and importance of wetlands, riparian lands and lakes to watershed health are increasingly being recognized. There is a growing effort to improve water quality, provide water storage and flood reduction, enhance groundwater recharge areas, and provide habitat for a range of plants and animals.

## Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government

Healthy, functioning watersheds can contribute to achieving biodiversity objectives. With increasing pressures and demands, it is important to further an integrated view across water supply, water quality, and aquatic ecosystems.

The Government of Alberta's approach to advancing watershed management includes:

- Managing water quality through environmental management frameworks (i.e., Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the North Saskatchewan River and Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Battle River);
- Lake management;
- Wetland management; and
- Other initiatives that advance integrated watershed management in the region.

The Government of Alberta will continue to use collaborative approaches to maintain and build partnerships in the region, including continued collaboration with the two Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs): the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and the Battle River Watershed Alliance. WPACs have demonstrated leadership in their contributions to watershed management and planning. The Government of Alberta will consider the work completed by WPACs when developing the regional plan and associated water management frameworks. Opportunities also exist for WPACs and other partners, such as the Alberta Water Council and the Alberta North American Waterfowl Management Plan (AB NAWMP) Partnership, to support development and implementation of various watershed management components in the regional plan and associated management frameworks.

The Government of Alberta will continue to support existing water management plans for the region, such as the [Approved Water Management Plan for the Battle River Basin](#) and the [Water Management Framework for the Industrial Heartland and Capital Region](#). Existing policies will also be supported and applied at the regional level, including the [Water for Life Strategy](#) and the [Alberta Wetland Policy](#).

The Government of Alberta has committed to the development of a Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the North Saskatchewan River for the mainstems of the North Saskatchewan River and Battle River. This management framework will incorporate and support the existing [Water Management Framework for the Industrial Heartland and Capital Region](#), and the [Prairie Provinces Water Board's Master Agreement on Apportionment](#) water sharing agreement. The management framework will set out water quality indicators

and thresholds to support the environmental outcomes for the region to manage the cumulative effects of all activities including point source and non-point source contributions.

The Government of Alberta understands the linkage between land use and watershed health, which will be addressed within the regional plan. Although watershed management strategies will be most prevalent in support of water outcomes, including direction around riparian management, source water protection, flood and drought mitigation, and water quantity, there is also a strong linkage to land management. This will include direction around recreation management on Crown Land, conservation area establishment, and direction to municipalities. Direction on wetland and lake management was requested of RAC due to their inherent complexity involving competing interests and values on both public and private lands.

## WETLAND MANAGEMENT

### Background on Wetland Management Provided by Government

Wetlands in the North Saskatchewan Region are diverse and abundant, and are ranked by the international conservation community as some of the most significant in North America. Wetlands in the region and adjoining area of Saskatchewan represent the core of the Canadian Prairie Pothole Region, an area that ranks highest in continental-priority, based on exceptional densities and numbers of breeding waterfowl and other wetland birds. This area contains some of the highest documented losses of wetlands (60-70 per cent) found within the Canadian prairies. These losses have been the result of multiple pressures.

Stewardship of wetlands on public and private land is an important component of effective wetland management in Alberta. A range of initiatives will encourage wetland stewardship activities to help sustain the benefits that wetlands provide. Successful wetland management requires the combined work of the Government of Alberta and other organizations and stakeholders.

The *Water Act* provides clarity around water ownership and water management in Alberta. This includes the approval process for impacts, diversions and use of water. The [Alberta Wetland Policy](#) provides the strategic direction and tools required to make informed wetland management decisions in the long-term interests of Albertans. The policy is intended to minimize the loss and degradation of wetlands, while allowing for continued growth and economic development in the province. The goal of the policy is to conserve, restore, protect and manage Alberta's wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society and economy. The [Alberta Wetland Policy](#) takes a relative wetland value approach to protect wetlands of the highest value, and to conserve and restore wetlands in areas where losses have been the greatest. Wetlands are managed by avoiding, minimizing, and if necessary, replacing lost wetland value. Wetland management considers the regional context.

There are many organizations undertaking wetland management and conservation activities across the region. Ducks Unlimited Canada delivers conservation programs at the local, regional and national levels, contributing to a healthier environment for waterfowl and all Canadians. Ducks Unlimited Canada is a leader in wetland conservation, delivering on-the-ground habitat conservation projects, education programs and public policy work to conserve, restore and manage wetlands. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is being advanced regionally through the Alberta NAWMP Partnership to protect wetland habitat and associated wildlife species. NAWMP is considered one of the most successful conservation initiatives in the world. Delta Waterfowl is the program administrator for the Alternative and Use Services program and has supported the establishment of the County of Vermilion River as a wetland restoration agent. The Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society (better known as Cows and Fish) works with agricultural landowners to support improved management of wetlands and riparian areas. Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) and watershed stewardship groups have also worked extensively with stakeholders and landowners to advance wetland knowledge, stewardship and management.

## Government's Approach Presented to RAC

Approaches to support regional wetland objectives:

- Biodiversity management frameworks could include wetlands as an indicator
- Linear footprint management planning or other subregional planning could focus on key wetlands
- Flood and drought mitigation work could establish priority wetland conservation areas
- Conservation approaches to support regional wetland objectives:
  - Public – conservation areas and Crown land management
  - Private – conservation easements
- Supporting stewardship partnerships that work with landowners (e.g., WPACs, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Cows and Fish)
- Municipalities could be provided with additional tools/support in decision-making

The Government of Alberta identified the following considerations for wetland conservation and restoration priority areas:

- Areas of high historical loss;
- Areas of higher wetland value;
- Current pressures;
- Current and anticipated future land use; and
- The role of public land versus private land wetland management approaches.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

When RAC discussed the advice area with the policy and data context provided by government, it became apparent for some RAC members that identifying physical locations for priority wetland areas conservation required robust data, particularly given that the advice area applied to both public and private land bases. Additionally, RAC also challenged the statistics presented by government, such as a 60-70 per cent wetland loss in some areas as other studies refuted that statement. That being said, RAC members had a healthy local knowledge of general vicinities that have higher density wetland areas than others in the region. RAC chose to put forward two baskets of advice to government. One basket focussed on considerations that government should address when implementing the newly approved [Alberta Wetland Policy](#) under the legislative frame of the *Water Act*. The second basket of advice used local area knowledge of those general areas in the region that could, after proper analysis, be included as possible areas for restoration and conservation of wetlands.

### ► **Wetlands policy implications – the Green, the White, and Capital Region/municipalities**

While there were common thoughts about wetland management and the implementation of the wetlands policy across the region, there were some unique aspects identified to the different areas of the region.

In the Green Area, it was recognized that current forest management practices and the various regulations and directives laid out by the Alberta Energy Regulator provided a fairly clear management approach for industry and their interface with wetlands during industrial development. The larger challenge was managing recreation-use in wetland areas. This activity was not seen to be managed in a manner that addressed the significance of wetlands in the same way that industrial practices were managed.

In the White Area, it became apparent that private landowners generally support wetland conservation as they recognize the value such lands contribute on a number of fronts. The challenge before many private landowners was clarity on what was deemed a wetland; how they would know they had a wetland as defined under the *Water Act* or the newly created [Alberta Wetland Policy](#), and the resulting authorizations or obligations that would be required of them as landowners. The other challenge that RAC identified was marrying the agricultural practices of today with larger interconnected land bases and large equipment, with small isolated parcels of wetlands.

Generally, for the Capital Region and municipalities, the discussion focussed on two thrusts. First, the recognition that a “wetland” can be constructed in many different ways and that it is the use of the wetland for biodiversity purposes that should be considered, in addition to historical loss or restoration. The example of this would be the storm water catchments in an urban municipality, which on any given day in the spring or fall can contain hundreds of waterfowl, and the various biodiversity attributes that comes with that. The second thrust was that a wetland market tool (e.g., offsets) should retain the

offset within the region at a minimum, and more preferably, within the municipality or area where the offset was initiated from.

► **Using the tools already there**

As RAC discussed the challenges of both restoring and maintaining priority wetland areas, they observed that in many instances, government was not always making use of what tools it already had. RAC was informed by government, and RAC members themselves, that the *Water Act* and the [Alberta Wetlands Policy](#) are quite clear around what one can and cannot do with wetlands, and the mitigation options available to those who are faced with having to employ mitigation strategies. Starting with education of why wetlands need to be retained and restored to the employment of market tools, RAC encouraged government to move forward on the wetland management approach that it speaks to, but does not always act upon.

► **Co-operating with partners and demonstrating leadership**

It was also observed by RAC that there were many different groups of Albertans who had an interest in restoration and retention of wetlands. From groups participating in the AB NAWMP to WPACs, municipalities, and the aboriginal communities who live around wetlands and rely on them for their traditional way of life and practice of treaty rights; government could be partnering much closer with these various groups to advance the proper management of wetlands.

► **Identification of wetlands**

When it came to deliberating the actual possible locations for restoration and conservation of priority wetland areas, RAC members spent some time first speaking to what government needed to do to inform such a discussion. At the time of RAC's deliberations, government was in the process of developing the map of Relative Wetland Value, which was being created as part of government's implementation of the [Alberta Wetlands Policy](#). It was observed that when identifying wetland areas for protection, impacted landowners and/or lease holders needed to be kept in mind; hence the need to have well thought out mitigation options for land users to employ. When actually identifying potential areas for focus, RAC noted that migratory birds and species at risk indicators were often good predictors of high value wetlands. Other tools that would be of assistance included: inventories described in the AB NAWMP; Government of Alberta's inventories of high historic loss; WPACs' priority areas; Watershed Restoration and Rehabilitation Program areas; and areas identified for biodiversity or water quality concerns and aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge.

In summary, a spectrum of views and inquiries were expressed by RAC during the debate including:

- Is compensation required to maintain current wetlands, given the *Water Act* already lays out the legal requirement to maintain wetlands? Is the current wetland

maintenance more a question of education and enforcement or does the market place have a role in terms of ecosystem services?

- What is the actual benchmark that should be set to address “historical loss” in wetlands?
- How do municipalities address offset gains and losses in a wetland offset program – at the regional level; at the municipal level?
- Identifying lines on a map for conservation of priority wetlands needs data as its foundation to inform such an exercise.

## ADVICE AREA: WETLAND MANAGEMENT

Identification of priority areas for wetland conservation and restoration to support implementation of the [Alberta Wetland Policy](#). This should include suggested tools to support identification of these priority areas.

### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 1.1. Implement the full suite of tools it has within the *Water Act* and [Alberta Wetland Policy](#), including addressing the incentives and offsets that are needed to address the economic benefits and challenges of maintaining and restoring wetlands. As part of the policy implementation, address the process of wetland replacement by facilitating offset program exchanges as close as possible, within the area or municipality if possible. A well-functioning market is required to provide cost-effective compensation options so that cross-regional exchanges would be the exception.
- 1.2. Educate and engage with landowners and lease holders regarding the actual identification of their wetlands, the values of those wetlands and options on how to mitigate loss to their wetlands, including the programs that are in play to support such mitigation.
- 1.3. Strengthen the current approach with partners by being more deliberate in the uptake of wetland management practices offered by partners.
- 1.4. Engage with aboriginal communities and provide capacity to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the wetlands inventory.
- 1.5. Ensure availability and cost-effective options for wetland offsets by allowing for additional mitigation agents (i.e., organizations that create offset options). In particular, allow for municipalities to have the opportunity to establish themselves as mitigation agents.

- 1.6. Explore the concept of various wetland creations (e.g., urban storm water catchments, industrial borough pits) and the possible role they could play in supporting biodiversity and wetland values in a variety of settings.
- 1.7. Give consideration to what tools could be offered to municipalities to integrate and protect wetlands in urban settings.
- 1.8. Work with municipalities to implement a streamlined process for when the wetland policy is implemented and reach an agreement on inventory, mitigation, restoration and replacement approaches.
- 1.9. Maximize the use of Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) to support watershed planning and management, and the development of the data and information that will be required for planning and decision-making around a number of water body types. Due to their significance in supporting biodiversity, consider wetlands as a biodiversity indicator in the regional plan.
- 1.10. Consider the priority areas for wetland conservation and restoration identified by RAC (refer to Figure 1: Map of Priority Wetland Conservation and Restoration Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 22), with the following direction:
  - The identified areas are only intended to prioritize places for securement of intact wetlands and wetland restoration.<sup>4</sup> Government, mitigation agents, and project proponents should prioritize securement and replacement activities in these areas based on robust data sets.
  - These priority areas do not imply protection or prohibition of activity.
  - These priority areas should not result in any new prohibition or regulatory burden over and above existing requirements under the *Water Act* and Alberta Wetland Policy. Securement and restoration are voluntary activities subject to the consent and participation of landowners.

The areas in Table 1: Priority Wetland Areas Recommended by the North Saskatchewan RAC (and mapped in Figure 1: Map of Priority Wetland Conservation and Restoration Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region) were recommended as RAC felt it was the best alignment with the criteria and support of the Alberta Wetland Policy objectives. The rationale attached to each location is provided to inform the RAC advice. At the time of deliberations, RAC also observed the relationship between the following wetlands and their value to aboriginal peoples. RAC could not necessarily identify the specifics of those values, but certainly made note of the general value to aboriginal cultures.

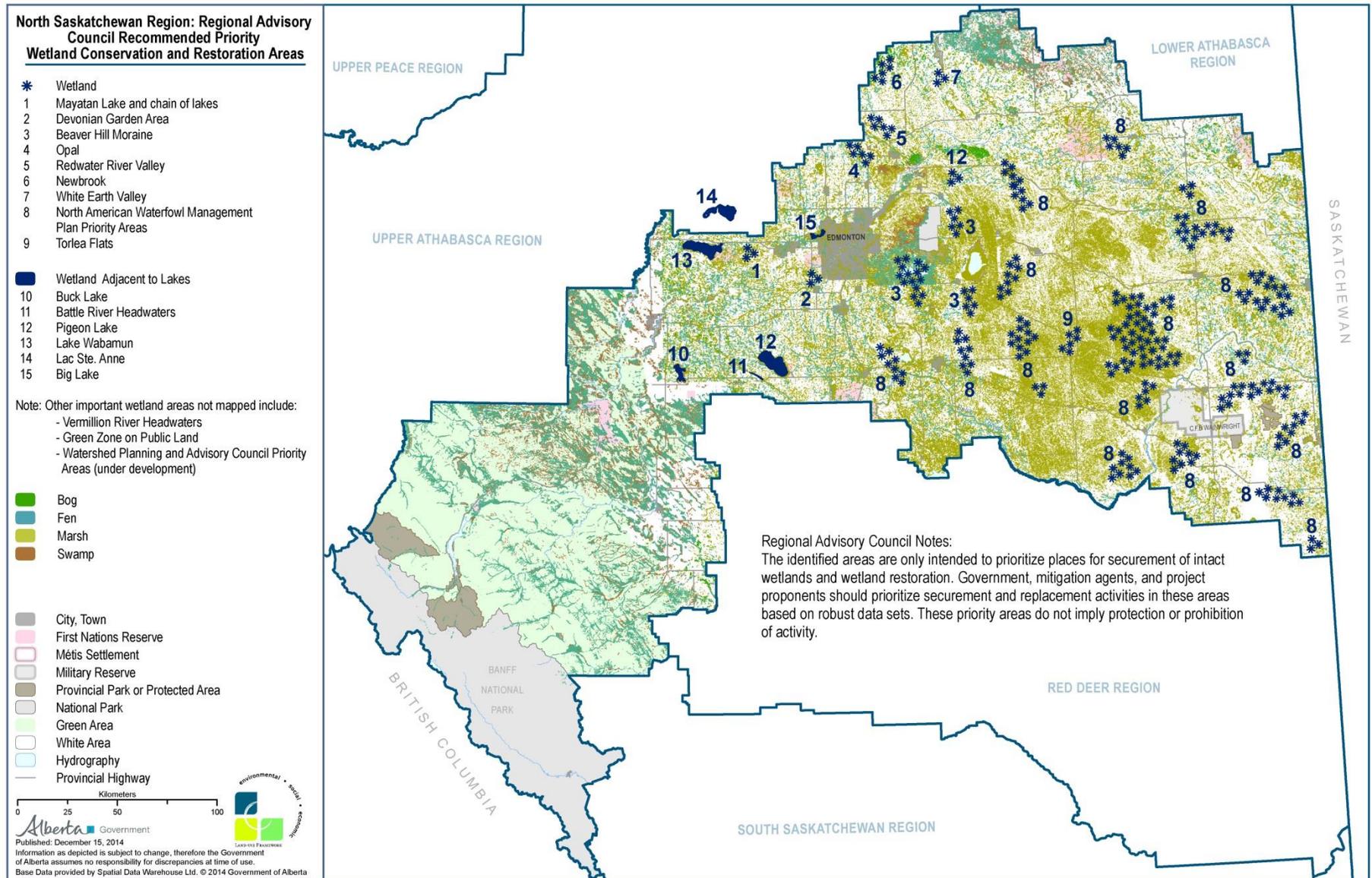
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<sup>4</sup> This differs from the recommendation question as shown in the Terms of Reference for Developing the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

Table 1: Priority Wetland Areas Recommended by the North Saskatchewan RAC

Selection of Recommended Priority Wetland Areas	Rationale	
1. Mayatan Lake and chain of lakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified by WPAC as a priority area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protected landscape</li> </ul>
2. Devonian Garden Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High water table</li> <li>Natural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crown lands</li> </ul>
3. Beaver Hill Moraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unique landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knob and Kettle landscape</li> </ul>
4. Opal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical significance</li> </ul>	
5. Redwater River Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drains into the North Saskatchewan River</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large agricultural area</li> </ul>
6. Newbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spans Upper Athabasca Region</li> <li>Occupied Crown land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plentiful bog and peat</li> </ul>
7. White Earth Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beaver activity in the area</li> <li>Plentiful water in the area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low disturbance</li> <li>Can be used for offsets</li> </ul>
8. North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) Priority Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta North American Waterfowl Management Plan priority area</li> </ul>	
9. Torlea Flats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lowlands</li> </ul>	
10. Buck Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stressed lake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural value</li> </ul>
11. Battle River Headwaters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrient control of lakes</li> </ul>	
12. Pigeon Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrient control</li> </ul>	
13. Lake Wabamun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stressed lake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural value</li> </ul>
14. Lac Ste. Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stressed lake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural value</li> </ul>
15. Big Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protected areas</li> <li>Environmentally sensitive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural value</li> </ul>
<b>Other important wetland areas not mapped include:</b>		
Vermillion River Headwaters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All lowlands</li> </ul>	
Green Zone on Public Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protected area</li> <li>Headwater</li> <li>Aboriginal use and territory</li> <li>High biodiversity</li> <li>Cultural use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recreational use</li> <li>Natural areas</li> <li>Environmentally sensitive areas</li> <li>Historically significant</li> </ul>
Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Priority Areas (under development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified by WPAC as a priority area</li> </ul>	

Figure 1: Map of Priority Wetland Conservation and Restoration Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region



## LAKE MANAGEMENT

### RAC's First Thoughts

RAC's deliberations and advice in this area spoke to the challenge facing the region around urban growth. From Capital Region growth pressures to Albertans across the region wanting access to lake front property, it became apparent that sustaining healthy lakes in the region would require a different approach to management of lakes and generally, different recreation strategies. It was also apparent that the data analysis of what effects humans or nature were having on the status of a "healthy" or "unhealthy" lake was still under development. Thus, the advice RAC could provide focussed much more on how to get a lake management approach and manage for unhealthy inputs into a lake, versus actual lake management strategies.

### Background on Lake Management Provided by Government

Alberta's lakes are important provincial assets. They play a vital role in the province's ecosystems and are used by municipalities, industries, farmers, homeowners, recreationalists and tourists. A province-wide approach is needed to ensure all lakes are managed effectively and consistently to maintain and improve their health.

Most of the activity that passes as "lake management" is actually people management. There are a wide range of regulatory and non-regulatory measures that fall into this category, including establishing buffers and setbacks from the shoreline, limiting point source and non-point source pollution, etc. Lake management can also be considered in terms of environmental and governance dimensions. Lake management is completed by Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and a number of partners, including the Alberta Lake Management Society, WPACs, watershed stewardship groups, municipalities, and others. From the [Our Water, Our Future, a Conversation with Albertans: Summary of Discussions](#), government frequently heard support for a provincial lake management framework. However, Albertans also expressed the desire to keep decision-making at the regional level.

The Government of Alberta has an education program (i.e., Respect our Lakes) that aims to raise awareness and build understanding about lake and lakeshore regulations. Surface water quality data is collected in extensive monitoring and research programs to assess the condition of aquatic ecosystems and the effectiveness of environmental policies and management practices. Select lakes have undergone sediment studies to look at historical conditions.

Numerous partners and stakeholders are also undertaking lake management activities. The Alberta Water Council has initiated the Managing and Monitoring Alberta's Lakes program. The Alberta Lake Management Society has compiled the Workbook for Developing Lake Watershed Management Plans in Alberta. Parkland County is developing a lake land-use management system that enables the county to consider the proximity to Wabamun Lake in

land-use decisions. Numerous other lake watershed management plans have already been developed and are being implemented by stakeholders.

## **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

The Water Conversation engagement initiative held in 2013 resulted in clear direction from the public, aboriginal groups and stakeholders for a provincial lake management initiative. A provincial lake management initiative could: support lake management and funding; address local needs and priorities while aligning with provincial social, economic and environmental objectives; clarify roles of lake management authorities; and be developed in consultation with key water management stakeholders.

## **RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS**

RAC's deliberations focussed on four practical approaches to advancing lake management outcomes in the region.

### **► Monitoring and science as a foundation**

While RAC members could articulate the challenges facing several of the lakes in the region, it became clear that there was a gap in the research available to assess which lakes need more management than others, and what specific strategies were needed for particular lakes. RAC encouraged government to work with other groups to leverage existing data and make the data open for other parties to work with. It was also noted that given the significant growth in recreational activities on lakes, the effects of such activity required further research.

### **► A plan to plan is needed**

RAC observed that in the absence of a lake management strategy for the region, and province, government did not have a systematic approach for addressing the growing pressures on the region's lakes. It was noted the strategy needed to be back stopped with specific lake management plans that address the basin around the lake, and build off of examples, such as the [Burnstick Lake Management Plan](#), that are specific, prescriptive and includes indicators of success. RAC members also suggested that government build governance models for each lake management plan in collaboration with stakeholders such as WPACs and lake stewardship groups. The governance models would need to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities for the various groups involved and would ideally be addressed through some of the work that the Alberta Water Council has initiated.

### **► Education and awareness as a preventative measure**

Given the public use of lakes in the region, RAC felt education and awareness for the public were critical in addressing many of the challenges facing lakes. RAC identified the need for clear and consistent messaging that build off of research and monitoring information, in combination with lake management plans that would provide the public

with very tangible insight and clarity on the do's and don'ts around lakes in the region. There was also suggestion that the educational program should inform local groups, who in turn could become more informed ambassadors on lake management approaches.

► **Regulatory and guideline approaches**

It was noted that government has regulatory tools at its disposal that would address behaviours and actions not conducive to healthy lakes in the region. It was not clear whether the regulations were the right ones, or if they addressed the changes in actions needed. It was also not clear if there was a consistent approach used on the application of the regulations versus guidelines, and if there had been an evaluation done to see where one was better than the other.

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## ADVICE AREA: LAKE MANAGEMENT

Achieving an appropriate balance for lakes in the region between a healthy environment with the current and future pressures and uses, including recreation, municipal, industrial and agricultural activities. This should include suggestions on strategies or approaches to best achieve this balance.

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### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 1.11. Develop a lake management strategy that includes roles and responsibilities of municipalities, government and stewardship groups, such as WPACs, and provides options for governance for particular lake plans, if needed.
- 1.12. Improve the application of monitoring and science concerning lake health by creating a classification system of lakes in the region that would identify and regularly update carrying capacity (recreational, industrial, community pressure), and provide criteria that would identify health of lakes based on certain attributes, including understanding of non-point source contributions.
- 1.13. Incorporate aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge and traditional land-use components concerning lake attributes into the lake monitoring program.
- 1.14. Leverage the implementation of the [Alberta Wetland Policy](#) where such policy could support the recovery of stressed lakes (e.g., Pigeon and Wabamun).
- 1.15. Employ the developed lake classification system to prioritize lake management planning and lake management health mitigation across the region to address those lakes in and beyond the "100 kilometre" urban recreation stressed area.
- 1.16. Increase the level of collaboration between government, WPACs and municipalities to address lake maintenance, management planning (recreation and community) and enforcement of proper lake community infrastructure development and maintenance (i.e., drinking water and septic systems).

- 1.17. Ensure the legislative and policy frameworks available to manage lakes are being fully employed.
- 1.18. Incorporate a healthy lake management component into the recreation strategy (refer to RAC's Recommendations to Government for the Management of Outdoor Recreation; pg. 75) that will address increased recreation pressures as a result of the "100 kilometre" urban recreation driver. Improve upon programming efforts targeted at education and awareness of lake use.

## 2. Supporting Biodiversity in the Region

RAC's advice on supporting biodiversity in the region is captured under two sections:

- Supporting biodiversity through management of public lands
  - Supporting biodiversity through identification of public lands for conservation
- Supporting biodiversity through stewardship of private lands

### RAC's First Thoughts

RAC spent a number of meetings discussing how governments (provincial and municipal), aboriginal peoples, landowners, stakeholders and industry can manage towards biodiversity outcomes. The Government of Alberta presented the biodiversity outcomes it was generally seeking for the region and what approaches were available to achieve such outcomes. In the Green Area of the region, the discussion focussed heavily on how to proactively manage, or reactively address, any long-term detrimental effects to biodiversity by industrial and motorized recreational activities, while enabling an efficient "working landscape" in the area. The discussion in the White Area of the region focussed on leveraging the private landowner stewardship ethic and opportunities for the market place to effect the desired stewardship behaviours, which would cumulate in biodiversity on private lands without impacting property rights. While there were limited impacts on the Capital Region or municipalities in these deliberations, there was recognition of the opportunity to use efficient use of land tools found in community planning (pg. 61) as a way forward to provide for biodiversity outcomes in an urban setting, as well as to address the fragmentation challenges raised by loss of agricultural lands in urban settings.

From a regional perspective, the most challenging discussion stemmed from identifying possible public lands to be "managed for conservation intent". The public lands presented by government were located across the region with varying land uses already occurring.

The debate over setting these lands aside for conservation stemmed from two places:

- Is setting land aside for conservation priorities the right way to ensure biodiversity (and what does conservation mean)?
- How much activity is too much activity on the landscape – do we understand how to best manage a working landscape so as to achieve both economic and conservation objectives on the landscape over time?

## **BIODIVERSITY IN THE NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGION**

### **Background on Supporting Biodiversity in the Region Provided by Government**

Biodiversity (biological diversity) represents the assortment of life on earth, including the variety of genetics and species, and the habitats in which they occur, all shaped by natural processes of change and adaptation. Biodiversity is everywhere, both on land and in water. It includes all organisms, from microscopic bacteria to more complex plants and animals.

The benefits received from biodiversity and healthy functioning ecosystems are important to the quality of life and ongoing prosperity of Albertans.

As Alberta's population and economy continues to grow, pressures on ecosystems are increasing, compounded by natural disturbances such as wildfires, insects and disease, therefore the effective management of biodiversity is becoming more challenging. The availability of significant plant and animal species and undisturbed spaces are important for all Albertans, and the cultural practices of First Nations and Métis. The challenge facing Alberta is balancing biodiversity outcomes while concurrently having a "working" landscape.

### **Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government**

Measuring ecosystem changes and planning for desired levels of biodiversity in the future are challenges that land-use planning will need to address.

The Government of Alberta is committed to using an integrated approach to address these challenges and to manage the impacts of multiple land-use demands and pressures. Achieving objectives for biodiversity, functioning ecosystems and natural landscapes will require a full range of management approaches to address the complex mix of public and private lands across the region. This means furthering the advancement of conservation and integrated management of public lands, as well as supporting and enabling voluntary stewardship and conservation on private lands.

Alberta's biodiversity policy is currently under development and will set provincial direction around management of biodiversity. The regional plan will include development of a biodiversity management framework which will set indicators and thresholds for biodiversity across the region on public and private lands.

On public lands this framework will in turn require the development of subregional and issue-specific plans on public lands, which may incorporate:

- Linear footprint management plans;
- Recreation management planning in priority areas; and
- Reviewing, streamlining and incorporating existing Integrated Resource Plans, as necessary.

On private lands, this framework will note the development and piloting of stewardship tools to facilitate and incent increased adoption of voluntary stewardship on private lands, which may include:

- Market-based tools which recognize the economic trade-offs associated with conservation in the agricultural sector;
- Further education and extension of beneficial management practices in the agricultural sector aimed at biodiversity preservation; and
- Increasing voluntary participation in ALSA's conservation and stewardship tools and efficient use of land tools.

## SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

### **RAC's First Thoughts**

While the Terms of Reference asked RAC to deliberate on which approaches best suited the advice areas, the bulk of the deliberations focussed on the approaches themselves and how to advance their effects.

### **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

Government tabled eight approaches currently used to manage for biodiversity outcomes on public lands in Alberta. These approaches are what government would use to achieve the objectives of a regional biodiversity management framework.

A biodiversity management framework:

- Establishes regional objectives for biodiversity;
- Identifies key indicators that represent the biodiversity found within the region;
- Provides threshold values for those indicators;
- Enables proactive management actions; and
- Provides for management responses in the future based on monitoring and assessment of the condition of indicators compared to the threshold values.

The framework provides context and guidance to identify the management actions and approaches that are needed to achieve biodiversity objectives. As part of this, planning at the subregional scale, for example, linear footprint management planning, determines and

describes in more detail how and where various approaches should be used to support the objectives and thresholds in the biodiversity management framework.

The eight approaches tabled by government to manage for biodiversity outcomes on public land, predominantly the Green Area, formed the foundation for RAC's deliberations on how to improve upon biodiversity outcomes while sustaining a working landscape that supports Alberta's economy on the public land base.

#### **Eight Approaches:**

1. **Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access** - Manage the extent, duration and rate of disturbance, and motorized access of linear footprint and land disturbance.
2. **Enhanced reclamation** - Continuous reclamation and rehabilitation of industrial footprints; supports principles of the integrated land management program.
3. **Forest management planning as part of sustainability forestry** - Focus on the health and resiliency of the forest and its ability to support biodiversity, watershed health, recreation and a vibrant forest industry.
4. **Comprehensive and integrated recreation management** - Sustainable recreation management provides a range of experiences aligned with forest management, linear footprint management and industrial access.
5. **Public land designations** – Public Land Use Zones; legislative control intended primarily to protect areas containing sensitive resources and manage conflicting land-use activities.
6. **Regulatory requirements** - Authorizations granted under legislation can include terms and conditions to place restrictions or requirements on an approved activity.
7. **Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools and best management practices)** - Strategies and guidance to manage and reduce the relative physical footprint of human activities on public land.
8. **Development of offset programs** - Market-based instruments, such as conservation offset programs that can increase the resources available.

Appendix A: Government of Alberta's Land-use Classification System and Management Intents, also provided in the Terms of Reference, was key for guidance on this discussion. The system includes permitted uses on public lands related to the energy and minerals industry, commercial forestry, grazing, recreational activities, linear infrastructure and multi-use corridors.

RAC was provided the following questions to help guide the discussions:

- Are these the right approaches?

- Are there other approaches to consider?
- What are the key approaches to focus on?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration?
- What are the impacts to partners, stakeholders (broad ranging), aboriginal peoples and the Government of Alberta?

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

Based on the eight approaches provided by government, RAC members spent considerable time discussing the merits of each approach and which approaches stood out as the most robust and had strong chances for success. Within each approach tabled by government, the deliberations outlined a number of actions that the province, municipalities and industry should act upon.

The actions identified under each approach to be considered were further informed by the economic discussions that RAC deliberated on (refer to the Economic Development section; pg. 78). The energy and forestry industry discussions in particular, bolstered the thinking around how to bridge the gap between economic gains while achieving biodiversity outcomes. RAC observed that the integration of economic return and biodiversity would require robustness in setting outcomes, targets and execution of integrated local level planning.

At the end of the discussions on government approaches, plus some additional concepts developed by RAC members, RAC determined which approaches worked best for the respective four advice areas, as outlined in the Terms of Reference.

### ► Approach 1: Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Use a systems approach with stakeholder ownership and government providing governance, which would also include co-ordination of interested/vested parties.
  - Set targets and thresholds and monitor progress with input from stakeholders, but allow industry to manage to the targets.
  - Address cases of dispute resolution, but government should not necessarily be left to shoulder the entire responsibility of linear access.
  - Develop a policy to limit liabilities that would address the various stakeholders conducting various uses on the same landscape.
- Manage and enforce existing policies and regulations more effectively. It is clear that current public sector resources (e.g., manpower) are not sufficient to manage the planning needed for current linear footprint.
  - Evaluate regulations to determine if they are clearly defined, whether they make sense and whether they need to be reviewed or changed.
- Manage for biodiversity, including watershed health and watershed quality.

- Expand engagement of aboriginal communities by partnering aboriginal knowledge with the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) to benefit from a traditional ecological knowledge base, and consider approaches that would allow culturally sensitive information, such as artifact discoveries, to be shared back with local First Nations and Métis organizations.
- Ensure the application of [The Government of Alberta's Policy on Consultation with First Nations on Land and Natural Resource Management, 2013](#) in landscape planning.
- Look to different approaches, depending on what point in time government is managing to; i.e.,:
  - Legacy management - aim at restoring disturbance;
  - Current management – aim at designated recreation use, impact to water sources; and
  - Future management – aim at developing subregional plans to minimize disturbance but honour tenure (utilization of forest planning tools that apply in large scale already).
- Leverage and link to initiatives such as the recreational trail management work, the Rig Street pilot, and any work underway on grizzly bear habitat.
- Employ similar land-use planning concepts, and/or tools identified in the [Efficient Use of Land Implementation Tools Compendium](#), on private land to work towards minimizing the fragmentation, degradation, and/or premature conversion and loss of agricultural lands by linear infrastructure such as pipelines, transmission lines and road networks.

## ► Approach 2: Enhanced reclamation

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Target high value areas to achieve biodiversity outcomes:
  - Use a risk-based approach, especially in environmentally sensitive areas; and
  - Determine if the land can be reclaimed to its original/equivalent use, or examine alternative uses.
- Follow through and enforce existing rules for timely reclamation where it is not currently occurring.
- Develop options for industry to employ innovative techniques and surpass conventional practices. Options do not need to be financial, but could be in the form of recognition or efficiency of application.
- Improve co-ordination of efforts between municipalities and the province with respect to reclamation planning and processes.
- Provide clarity on desired reclamation outcomes to industry and then let industry focus reclamation efforts in certain areas to achieve such outcomes.

- Ensure reclamation efforts improve the landscape.
  - Do not import soil used for reclamation that is detrimental to the landscape.
- Devise a strategy for legacy management that addresses the realities of what is out on the landscape today by identifying and tracking old linear disturbance that does not have an “owner” on the public land base as a starting spot.
- Consider pipeline right-of-ways, well sites and roads that are no longer in use, or needed for recreation, such as staging areas or trails.

► **Approach 3: Forest management planning as part of sustainable forestry**

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Look for opportunities to use innovative practices, new tools, and explore new uses for logging by-products and wood waste.
- Consider alternatives to clear-cutting, where appropriate, such as selective logging practices.
- Limit or prohibit timber harvesting where it adversely affects watershed quality, such as harvesting too closely to rivers or riparian areas.
- Employ the principles and outcomes from sustainable forest management to support a biodiversity framework for the region.
- Collaborate with the forestry industry to develop an education or awareness campaign to help Albertans understand the impacts of mountain pine beetle infestations to sustainable forest harvesting.

► **Approach 4: Comprehensive and integrated recreation management**

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Invest in education and enforcement to address increased recreational activities such as off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and random camping.
- Contract with municipalities to supply emergency services (i.e., RCMP and peace officers) and waste disposal and explore cost recovery alternatives for such programming.
- Delegate responsibility for recreation management to well-established and responsible user groups, such as recreational OHV clubs or associations to support planning of areas and monitoring of use, (not enforcement).
- Increase engagement and participation with recreation and industry players and municipalities that are collaborating on land-use planning.
- Support the development and implementation of subregional access management plans by leveraging local level planning groups. Such plans could manage all footprint, including recreation and industrial use.
- Designate trails for different sizes and types of off-highway vehicles.

### ► Approach 5: Public land designations – Public Land Use Zones

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Use Public Land Use Zones strategically, not as a reaction or response to circumstances.
- Ensure road systems utilize links with designated trails.
- Expand Public Land Use Zones for Green Area on public lands that do not have a planning tool in place to support integrated land management and manage the collective footprint.

### ► Approach 6: Regulatory requirements

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Manage existing regulations more effectively.
  - Increase monitoring, compliance and enforcement of existing regulations.
  - Provide clarity regarding current regulations and their applications.
- Delegate responsibility for recreation management to user groups (i.e., self-monitoring, such as recreational OHV clubs or associations to manage trails).
- Consider modernizing the enforcement processes, from prescriptive regulations to use and outcomes-based objectives. This requires an educational push first to effect change in behaviours.

### ► Approach 7: Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land, and best management practices)

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Provide clear direction around how voluntary practices occur and the expected outcomes of such practices. Clear outcomes will allow for voluntary practices to become the “norm” and ensure efficiency for those working on the landscape is achieved.
- Develop processes to enable stakeholders to support integrated land management. Processes need to be adaptive and iterative, and cover the development of surface and subsurface extraction over a long period of time.
- Develop incentives to foster interest among stakeholders to implement voluntary integrated land management, efficient use of land tools or other best management practices. For example, demonstration of participation with voluntary initiatives can help satisfy regulatory requirements and/or lead to more efficient and timely approvals.
- Strengthen linkages with voluntary initiatives to improve biodiversity management for the region.
- Work with municipalities to understand the role the agriculture industry has in integrated land management. This work will support linkages with conservation and wetland options with the agriculture industry.

- Encourage multi-use corridor proponents to collaborate with government to develop plans that support comprehensive regional infrastructure planning.

► **Approach 8: Development of offset programs**

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Encourage voluntary offset management as they are a useful tool to meet legislative and regulatory requirements or obligations.
- Leverage the learnings from the Specified Gas Emitters Regulation to encourage private industries to reduce their emissions.
- Ensure offsets demonstrate additionality, (i.e., adding to the land base), and are used to address local issues first before considering wider geographic areas.
- Determine who will be monitoring the outcomes of using an offset program.

**New Approaches**

RAC developed and offered two additional approaches, with varying degrees of support.

► **Approach 9: Comprehensive education and awareness**

This approach garnered the most support out of the two new approaches developed by RAC.

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Develop a comprehensive (Alberta-wide) strategy to inform the public on what biodiversity is and why it matters.
  - Incorporate early education targeted to youth.
- Link education with regulatory provisions for using public natural resources. For example, create an educational component along with obtaining vehicle-use licenses (i.e., provision of educational materials at time of licensing or enforcement penalties must be addressed before licensing can occur).
- Learn from examples of other successful education initiatives, such as those happening in the Bighorn area. The Guardian Program was an example of a best practice approach which was proven, but lost its funding.

► **Approach 10: Initiate a user-pay program for recreational activities, such as off-highway vehicle use, to help fund recreational infrastructure and enforcement**

This approach scored the lowest for support as a priority for government to pursue; however RAC supported putting forward the approach.

RAC's suggestions to government:

- Investigate various user-pay systems through examination of systems in use in other jurisdictions.
- Look into licensing options for recreational vehicles.

During the discussions on the various approaches for supporting biodiversity through management of public lands, key themes emerged:

- The Government of Alberta needs to focus on clarifying, monitoring and enforcing standing policies and regulations as opposed to creating new ones which parallel them.
- Policies and regulations around permitted land-uses need to be clear.
- Responsibility and authority for enforcing regulations can be shared between the province, municipalities, industry, agriculture, stewardship organizations, the recreation industry and people who recreate.
- Compliant behaviour is the objective; incentives can be a more effective approach to achieve successful outcomes over punitive measures for non-compliance, but both a carrot and a stick need to be in play.

### ADVICE AREA: SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

- Opportunities to improve the way working landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity.
- Strategies to minimize human footprint and fragmentation of landscapes.
- Approaches to be used to better integrate industrial access management.
- Approaches to be used to improve the timely and progressive reclamation of disturbed lands.

#### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

Having completed a thorough examination and analysis of the Government of Alberta's proposed approaches, and having contributed additional approaches, RAC members then identified and prioritized the approaches they felt were the best vehicles towards achieving biodiversity outcomes. RAC advice below also includes the corresponding recommendations outlined under each approach discussed previously.

Table 2: RAC Recommendations for Supporting Biodiversity through Management of Public Lands

Advice Areas	RAC Recommendations for Best Approaches
2.1 Opportunities to improve the way working landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)</li> <li>• Enhanced reclamation</li> <li>• Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access</li> </ul>

Advice Areas	RAC Recommendations for Best Approaches
2.2 Strategies to minimize human footprint and fragmentation of landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access</li> <li>• Enhanced reclamation</li> <li>• Comprehensive education and awareness</li> </ul>
2.3 Approaches to be used to better integrate industrial access management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)</li> <li>• Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access</li> <li>• Regulatory requirements</li> <li>• Comprehensive and integrated recreation management</li> </ul>
2.4 Approaches to be used to improve the timely and progressive reclamation of disturbed lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced reclamation</li> <li>• Enhanced management of linear footprint and industrial access</li> <li>• Voluntary practices (integrated land management, efficient use of land tools, best management practices)</li> </ul>

## SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH IDENTIFICATION OF PUBLIC LANDS FOR CONSERVATION

### RAC's First Thoughts

The previous section on management of public lands addressed approaches towards achieving biodiversity outcomes on public lands by using various land management tools to allow for both biodiversity and a working landscape. Given the research is still pending on whether or not a working landscape can contribute fully to biodiversity outcomes, government asked RAC to consider another approach, establishing and managing conservation areas to contribute to the long-term sustainability of Alberta's ecosystems and biodiversity. RAC heavily debated the advice in this area, given a number of unknowns were at play, i.e., RAC was informed that [A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes \(Revised 1984\)](#) would be replaced with the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan, the province was undertaking a coal category review, and it was very apparent that recreational pressures are escalating each year. Government had also explained that it supports national and international agreements with regards to conservation. Aligning with international definitions of conservation at a local level is difficult and the concern about how such lands would be managed by government was forefront for some members. The final challenge that RAC had with conservation areas was that the determination of the criteria used to assess the possible areas, and the management tools, i.e., Appendix A, used to

manage such lands in the future, were not intended for RAC advice. This caused some concern as RAC was troubled at times with the inconsistent management approaches between different parts of government on conservation lands to date.

## Background on Identification of Public Lands for Conservation Provided by Government

The intent of conservation areas is to manage for biodiversity and ecosystem function. A conservation area network should address gaps in the representation of natural subregions, ensure diversity and representations of land cover types, address important wildlife habitat and species-at-risk, maximize opportunities for connectivity, and address watershed management, headwaters protection and wetlands conservation.

Alberta's Plan for Parks sets out provincial objectives based on targets for Alberta's natural regions and subregions. The North Saskatchewan Region contains some of the most under represented natural subregions in Alberta, including Central Parkland, Upper and Lower Foothills, and Dry Mixedwood. Conserving these identified landscapes has the potential to make progress towards filling land representation requirements. The North Saskatchewan Region is essentially the only region that can fill representation gaps in the Central Parkland natural subregion on public lands and is also the best opportunity to fill gaps in the Foothills natural region.

**Conservation Area:**  
A clearly defined geographical space dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of biological diversity and ecosystem.

There is a range of land cover types found within each natural subregion. It is important to have a representation of various land cover types across landscapes to support biodiversity (e.g., a mix of coniferous forest, deciduous forest, mixedwood forest, shrubs and wetlands).

The North Saskatchewan Region contains areas important to wildlife, including ungulate areas and winter ranges, key wildlife habitat, and major river corridors. The region is also home to a number of species-at-risk, including grizzly bear, piping plover, barred owl, bull trout, white bark pine, and limber pine. This is a result of habitat loss, disturbance and landscape fragmentation, direct mortality, environmental contaminants, introduction of exotic/invasive species, and the cumulative effects of all these factors.

## Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government

The potential tools for use within the North Saskatchewan Region include:

- **Wildland Provincial Parks:** These are established for the conservation of natural and associated cultural features with significant opportunities for backcountry and wilderness recreation and experiencing nature in a relatively undisturbed state. Wildland Provincial Parks protect relatively large, ecologically healthy and functioning landscapes that are representative of Alberta's natural diversity and retain their vegetation and features in a natural state.

- **Conservation Public Land Use Zone:** These are Public Land Use Zones for conservation purposes established under the *Public Lands Act*. The management intent of these areas will be maintaining biodiversity and headwaters protection, and permitted and not permitted activities can be managed with the same legislative authority as other conservation areas. However, the Public Land Use Zone is a flexible tool which can have regulated conservation or biodiversity standards for human activities (e.g., ecosystem-based forestry practices, and sustainable grazing) in addition to standard Public Land Use Zone conditions to manage recreation and public access in a specific area.
- **Heritage Rangelands:** These are established for the conservation of representative areas of Alberta's prairies, using grazing via long-term leases (20 years or more) and traditional ranching practices to maintain the native grassland ecology. They are located only within the Grassland and Parkland Natural regions of Alberta and on significant grasslands within the Montane subregion of the Rocky Mountains natural region. Heritage rangelands ensure protection of native grasslands while continuing the traditional grazing approach that has stewarded these lands for generations.

### Government Approach Presented to RAC

The Government of Alberta presented 34 areas of public land in the region that met the following criteria for identifying lands as conservation areas:

- Areas that are representative of the biological diversity of the region (e.g., landforms, species, and vegetation)
- Areas of sufficient size and that provide landscape connectivity with existing conservation areas
- Areas with little or no industrial activity
- Areas that support aboriginal traditional uses
- Areas that are currently managed for conservation intent

These areas could be managed to protect sensitive habitats and maintain ecological systems and processes while allowing for certain permitted uses; see Appendix A: Government of Alberta's Land-use Classification System and Management Intentions.

Government bundled the 34 areas of land in the Green and White Areas of the region into three approaches:

- Securing existing areas with conservation intent - little to no impact to economic activity (seven areas)
- Optimizing biodiversity and conservation values - moderate impact to economic activity (13 areas)
- Optimizing biodiversity and conservation values and fill key representation gaps - considerable impact to economic activity (14 areas)

With government's approaches provided as context, RAC was asked to provide recommendations on a network of conservation areas that balanced biodiversity and conservation values with economic implications.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The concept of "balance" formed the foundation RAC's deliberations to prepare for the task of identifying areas of public land as potential new conservation areas. The discussions revolved around trade-offs in how areas were managed today versus in the future. Unlike the challenge in the identification of wetland deliberations, RAC did have the data sets to be informed of opportunity costs from an economic stand point versus opportunity cost from a biodiversity stand point.

RAC reflected on the value that conservation areas add towards strengthening biodiversity in the region and to Alberta's need to demonstrate intent to manage to biodiversity outcomes on a national and international stage. The debates focussed primarily between the points of immediate and medium-term economic effects of land being set aside versus the long-term effect of not setting land aside to ensure biodiversity outcomes still exist in the region in 50 years. RAC also debated the merit of whether leaving an area of land alone without any management action would actually sustain biodiversity; these debates are presented below. It is worth noting that of all the RAC advice areas, these deliberations were the most challenging and complicated, as it clearly presented the dilemma facing government every day, i.e., trading economic, social and environmental values off of one another.

### ► Benefits and impacts of conservation areas

- While government had included known economic impacts on those lands identified and clarified that most economic activity would be honoured, there were some concerns that unknown future economic potential could still be lost. The flip side to the economic concern was the value proposition of ecosystem services and those businesses that rely on conservation lands to be intact.
- RAC members observed the societal pressure on government to demonstrate values of biodiversity and that the longer government waits to take action, the more difficult and costly it will be to take action, given the mounting population and economic growth.
- RAC members also noted that biodiversity can happen at any scale, location or time and that to attempt to re-establish in the future what is already in place today could be far more costly and near impossible than to maintain what is already available.
- In a few cases, only limited knowledge is available concerning the ties of aboriginal peoples to the land in these areas. Conservation lands could be a benefit to aboriginal peoples, but understanding and gaining further insight to those lands and ties to aboriginal peoples would be valuable.

- Some areas were seen as too small, disconnected and difficult to manage from a public land conservation intent perspective, given their lack of connectivity to other related land uses. These areas were often in the Central Parkland natural subregion and are the most difficult for the province to retain.
- Ensuring a financial value was placed upon the ecosystem services was flagged, but without a true understanding of cost, RAC members debated where that value might land.

#### ► **Managing to intent**

- It was noted that several of the proposed areas are already currently being managed for conservation intent, through policies such as [A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes \(Revised 1984\)](#), with multiple-use classifications. Designating those areas for conservation under a regional plan would formalize the land's protection for the long term and help towards achieving international recognition for environmental initiatives.
- Some skepticism was expressed about how the newly designated conservation areas might be classified for use rather than being classified for outcome intent. This spoke to the challenge presented to government. RAC observed there were inconsistent approaches on the ground between government land managers, from a stakeholder perspective.
- The Government of Alberta's current track record of managing land was called into question, one example being the "West Country" (land west of Highway 22). As in the previous discussion on supporting biodiversity through management of public lands, RAC members encouraged the province to be consistent with enforcement of existing legislation before introducing any new regulations.
- How would boundaries between conservation areas and working landscapes be managed?
- Several RAC members spoke to the value proposition of using Public Land Use Zones in the Green Area of the region as a conservation area management intent tool.

## ADVICE AREA: SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH CONSERVATION AREAS

Identification of potential new conservation areas to support biodiversity, specifically the identification of new potential conservation areas that are managed to protect sensitive habitats and maintain ecological systems and processes.

### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 2.5. RAC reached consensus to support conservation designations for 25 of the 34 identified areas of public land that met the criteria for conservation, as presented by government. The details of those areas of land are in Table 3: Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC.

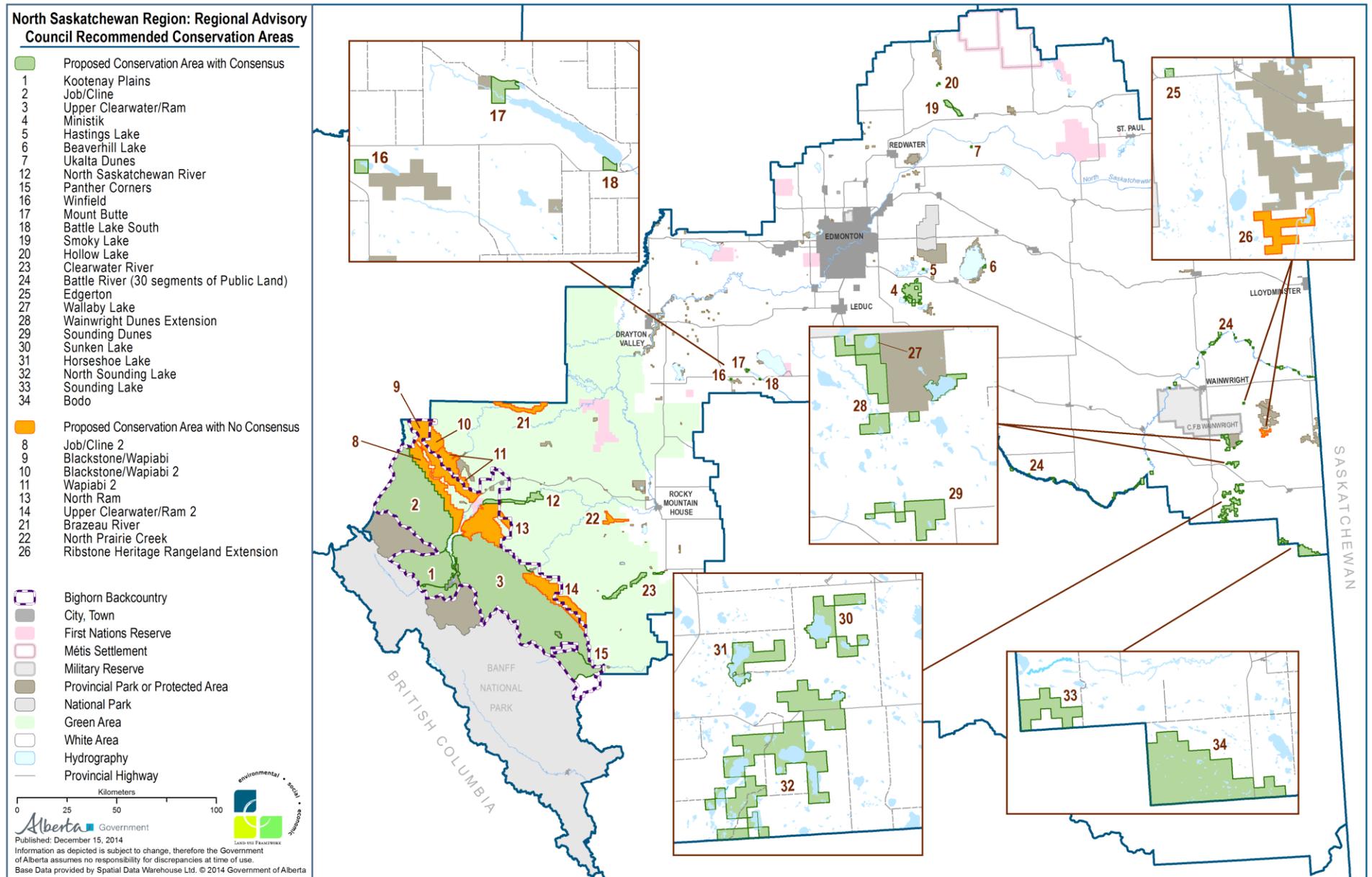
The nine areas of land that did not reach consensus were primarily due to concerns regarding economic and social implications and unintended consequences flagged during deliberations. As well, not enough RAC members saw the benefit of conserving these lands for biodiversity outcomes outweighing the potential economic and social impacts.

Table 3: Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC

Approach	Map Reference No.	Name of Area	Conservation Designation	
			Supported	Not supported
<b>Approach 1:</b> Securing existing areas with conservation intent – little to no impact to economic activity	1	Kootenay Plains	√	
	2	Job/Cline	√	
	3	Upper Clearwater/Ram	√	
	4	Ministik	√	
	5	Hastings Lake	√	
	6	Beaverhill Lake	√	
	7	Ukalta Dunes	√	
<b>Approach 2:</b> Optimizing biodiversity and conservation values – moderate impact to economic activity	8	Job/Cline 2		X
	9	Blackstone/ Wapiabi		X
	10	Blackstone/ Wapiabi 2		X
	11	Wapiabi 2		X
	12	North Saskatchewan River	√	
	13	North Ram		X
	14	Upper Clearwater/Ram 2		X

Approach	Map Reference No.	Name of Area	Conservation Designation	
			Supported	Not supported
	15	Panther Corners	√	
	16	Winfield	√	
	17	Mount Butte	√	
	18	Battle Lake South	√	
	19	Smoky Lake	√	
	20	Hollow Lake	√	
<b>Approach 3:</b> Optimizing biodiversity and conservation values and fill key representation gaps – considerable impact to economic activity	21	Brazeau River		X
	22	North Prairie Creek		X
	23	Clearwater River	√	
	24	Battle River (30 Segments of Public Land)	√	
	25	Edgerton	√	
	26	Ribstone Heritage Rangeland Extension		X
	27	Wallaby Lake	√	
	28	Wainwright Dunes Extension	√	
	29	Sounding Dunes	√	
	30	Sunken Lake	√	
	31	Horseshoe Lake	√	
	32	North Sounding Lake	√	
	33	Sounding Lake	√	
	34	Bodo	√	

Figure 2: Map of Conservation Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region



## SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH STEWARDSHIP ON PRIVATE LANDS

### RAC's First Thoughts

Given the large land base in the region that is privately owned, the discussions on private land biodiversity were spirited and thoughtful. A stewardship ethic shone through these discussions which allowed for creative thinking and identification of innovative opportunities on private lands, while respecting property rights at the forefront.

RAC identified two policy challenges that government could explore further:

- Related to the discussion on the continuing loss of agricultural land (refer to the section on Agriculture; pg. 78), government should determine and clearly articulate what agriculture means in Alberta and what role agricultural land will play in the future for both biodiversity and food production.
- Connecting the use of market tools and biodiversity on private lands and agriculture land fragmentation, an old approach may be worth looking at again. The concept of private land recreation options should be revisited, this time from the perspective of addressing growing recreational pressures within the one hour catchment area of the Capital Region, as well as creating increased market valuation in lands better served for conservation purposes.

### Background on Supporting Biodiversity Through Stewardship on Private Lands Provided by Government

Sixty per cent of the land in the North Saskatchewan Region is privately owned. As such, encouraging a stewardship ethic and the voluntary use of conservation tools is an essential concept to supporting the achievement of biodiversity objectives for the region. Alberta landowners have a strong tradition of stewardship and voluntary conservation initiatives. However, current efforts need to keep pace with Alberta's rapid population and economic growth.

While land users and landowners have a primary role in land stewardship and conservation on private lands, the Government of Alberta works with Albertans, industry and other levels of government to facilitate new stewardship opportunities and strategies to protect and enhance Alberta's environment.

Just as stewardship on public land is a shared responsibility, so too is following a suitable approach towards sustaining biodiversity on private lands. Landowners wish to be recognized for their voluntary stewardship efforts, and it is important for government to facilitate these efforts and develop the necessary frameworks and pilots for their continued and expanded use.

Fostering education and growing awareness of exemplary stewardship have also been identified by the Government of Alberta as important vehicles towards achieving its strategic direction related to biodiversity.

Many individuals and groups are already undertaking private land stewardship. However, greater awareness of these groups and their activities could lead to:

- Increased co-ordination of funding and activities;
- Ability to leverage funding to increase stewardship activities and reduce administrative costs; and
- Development of innovative ways to recognize private landowners for stewardship.

In addition to the many beneficial management practices currently employed by private landowners, ALSA provides the legislative basis for stewardship and conservation tools, which include:

- Conservation offsets;
- Conservation easements, including those for agricultural lands;
- Transferable development credits; and
- Conservation directives.

To date, these tools have not been widely adopted in the province. Their increased use by private landowners and or municipalities will be essential to achieve provincial biodiversity outcomes.

### Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government

Alberta farmers and ranchers are recognized for their strong tradition of land stewardship and conservation, whether working alone or in partnership with the Government of Alberta, local municipalities, producer groups, watershed stewardship groups, conservation groups or various land trust organizations that exist throughout the province. The rural landscapes many Albertans value today are a result of their efforts.

The Government of Alberta’s approach to advancing stewardship and conservation on private lands is to explore and develop new methods and strategies that recognize the contribution that private landowners and their land can provide to achieving provincial biodiversity objectives, particularly those of the Central Parkland region. These approaches may include voluntary opportunities that not only recognize the value of current contributions, but explore opportunities that reward additional stewardship efforts by private landowners throughout the region.

As farmers and ranchers are dependent on the economic returns they earn from the land, the Government of Alberta is committed to the exploration, piloting, and facilitation of

#### Conservation on Private Land:

The responsible management and care of our land and natural resources to voluntarily support the long-term preservation of locally defined biological diversity and ecosystem processes.

#### Stewardship of Private Land:

An ethic whereby individuals, industry, communities and governments work together to responsibly care for and manage Alberta’s natural resources to ensure they are sustained or enhanced for future generations.

economic tools and the development of market-based instruments that are not only voluntary in nature, but which provide business opportunities for private landowners while assisting in the achievement of provincial biodiversity goals.

### **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

Government presented four approaches for RAC to surface what government could do to increase stewardship behaviours on private lands in support of biodiversity in the North Saskatchewan Region. The four approaches included:

1. Utilization of the stewardship tools in ALSA
2. Use of an online stewardship portal to track and celebrate stewardship on private lands
3. Use of awareness campaigns to increase uptake of tools
4. Use of pilots in specific locations of the region that would address an immediate need and educate other landowners

## **RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS**

Throughout the discussions on private land stewardship, RAC consistently spoke to cultural and land management shifts that have occurred in agricultural practices over the past 20 years that, in effect, have increased stewardship and conservation on private lands. The drivers behind these shifts were both environmental and economic, as was the case with the examples of increased adoption of no-till production or improved fertilization practices.

RAC embraced the concept of biodiversity outcomes on private lands, but struggled with some of the approaches put forward by government due to the difficulty in the application of the tools or the questionable impact that such an approach might ultimately have. For each approach, RAC provided perspectives and recommendations on how to move forward.

### **► Approach 1: Utilizing the stewardship and conservation tools in ALSA**

In short order, RAC quickly came to the conclusion that the current tools (transfer of development credits, conservation easements and conservation offsets) were not getting a particularly high adoption rate, primarily due to lack of awareness and understanding of the tools and perceived availability of a possible market place. It also became apparent to RAC that government lacked a strategy on the tools and the physical location of a central hub that would co-ordinate, track and provide the necessary education, policy and regulatory frameworks, thus hampering any systematic uptake by landowners and/or municipalities.

In the absence of a strategic provincial approach to the use of the tools by governments (i.e., federal, provincial and municipal), RAC noted specific examples, such as those presented by Ducks Unlimited, the County of Parkland's programming, and the County of Vermillion River's Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program. Generally, RAC felt that

governments could learn principles and approaches from these existing examples and extend them further in the region.

If government wants to start addressing biodiversity on private lands concurrent to the issues of agricultural land fragmentation (refer to the section on Agriculture; pg. 78) and agricultural land valuation, capitalizing on the tools in ALSA is a possibility. However, RAC felt there were a number of additional policy requirements that governments at both the provincial and municipal levels would need to address. The ALSA tools could initially be focused in significant urban growth areas such as the Capital Region and along the Highway 2 Corridor, a region where high value agricultural lands are being rapidly converted to industrial, commercial and/or residential use. Recognizing the disparity that this policy shift would likely create between those living along the urban corridor or Capital Region and those who do not, RAC recommended that different tools would need to be modelled elsewhere in the region depending on proximity to urban development.

RAC briefly touched on the concept of a land advisory board, not as focussed as the Agricultural Land Commission found in British Columbia, but rather developed to provide advice and recommendations to both provincial and municipal governments on difficult land-use choices and the potential options that could be exercised in making land-use decisions. Again, this option could be initially piloted in those areas feeling the immediate pressure of today's developments in the region (e.g., the Capital Region and Highway 2 Corridor).

Finally, in the context of using market tools to trigger further stewardship of biodiversity on private lands, RAC discussed the merit of using private land to address low impact recreational pressures while supporting biodiversity concurrently. Initially, there was some concern about the historical connection of this advice to earlier policy proposals, such as paid hunting, that were not well received by Albertans. However, the approach raised by RAC focussed on the concept of creating a market for private land biodiversity that could concurrently address conservation and low impact recreational pressures in the region. It also addressed triggering market valuations for lands that would be better left for conservation values, but were not economically sustainable at this time for the landowner to do so.

#### ► **Approach 2: Stewardship portal**

RAC quickly came to the conclusion that a stewardship portal was not an investment government should take on at this time, given the other options that exist to increase stewardship on private lands, such as those identified in ALSA or the use of pilots (point four listed earlier). If government still chose to proceed with a portal, RAC suggested that government consider:

- Respecting landowners' privacy (i.e., participation has to be voluntary, not mandatory);
- Keeping the tool simple with a defined scope (i.e., provincial or regional);

- Linking the tool to the approach recommended in implementing the tools in ALSA to support tracking and the production of a “report card” against outcomes or particular targets; and
- Providing education on stewardship tools on the portal (as those educational needs flagged in Approach 1 regarding the tools in ALSA) or stewardship practices (as learned in pilots).

► **Approach 3: Collaborative public awareness campaigns**

RAC recognized the need for public awareness and education in order to increase private land stewardship. They observed that land management practices are often generational and that trust in a different practice, or uptake of a tool such as those in ALSA, takes time and proof. To address the trust and proof point, RAC encouraged government to leverage awareness efforts already underway by different parties and to partner with groups and individuals who are focussed on stewardship initiatives, or who are working with aboriginal peoples to affect biodiversity outcomes on private land. RAC also noted that the use of such campaigns would highlight Alberta’s advancements in private land management, and the stewardship ethic of landowners, to audiences watching Alberta from afar.

► **Approach 4: Establishing private land stewardship pilots**

RAC was very supportive of conducting pilots on private land in order for landowners to have hands-on experience with the use of stewardship tools, such as those in ALSA or practices found in government’s [Efficient Use of Land Implementation Tools Compendium](#). While the areas identified by RAC for the implementation of potential pilot programs are somewhat less focussed on high pressure areas adjacent to urban municipalities (e.g., the Highway 2 Corridor), RAC felt that by working with local landowners to pilot the ALSA tools and the efficient use of land practices in these areas, they may extend to further pilots and programs that are more targeted to the urban growth areas along the Highway 2 Corridor. Regardless of location, RAC felt it was important to work with local landowners, stewardship groups and municipalities to identify which pilots are appropriate for the area to achieve local and provincial-level stewardship and conservation objectives. Further, those who participate in these early pilots (e.g., landowners, stewardship groups, and industry) should be assured by the Government of Alberta that their voluntary participation would be formally recognized as the pilots become operationalized.

Based on RAC’s local knowledge and insight of the region, they felt the Wainwright area would be the optimal first pilot as there are wildlife management-ranching challenges that require research and practical management options, land cover management strategies to maintain uplands stewardship and specific grassland types such as rough fescue.

The Pigeon/Buffalo Lakes area was the next pilot that RAC felt would be a good investment. The particular emphasis here would be on nutrient and uplands management and could be done in collaboration with the County of Camrose, given the municipality's relationship with the water bodies.

The Beaver Hills area was supported closely behind the Pigeon/Buffalo Lakes area as it is connected to the Beaver Hills initiative, which is nominated to become a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Biosphere reserve. Additionally, the Government of Alberta is currently the only stakeholder not engaged with the groups working on stewardship initiatives in this area.

The Opal/Rochester area received limited support due to the level of current development activities on the landscape and the challenges that such activities provide at this time. While RAC members noted the need for private land stewardship initiatives in the area, the complexity of doing so at this point in time of rapid development, seemed less effective than pursuing one of the other suggested pilot areas. That being said, the caveat was noted that over the next 50 years, industrial activity will have shifted and the biodiversity opportunities would be present. As such, this area should be looked at again when the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan is reviewed.

RAC also explored the notion of other areas in the region that government may want to look at for pilots, including:

- Strawberry Creek (to address drinking water protection, riparian land and source runoff minimization);
- Victoria Trail (to address historical significance and proximity to Métis settlements);
- Vermillion River area (to leverage existing initiatives and the area's unique land features);
- Royberg Ranch (already a University of Alberta resource, therefore less complicated to practice pilots on);
- Whitemud (has a number of grazing and agriculture activities and is a connector to the north and Métis settlements); and
- Smokey Lake, including the Beaver Hills area (to address historical significance and proximity to Métis settlements).

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## ADVICE AREA: SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH STEWARDSHIP ON PRIVATE LANDS

- Provide recommendations on what the Government of Alberta can do to recognize private landowners for their stewardship and conservation initiatives (monetary and/or other alternatives).
  - Insight on the limitations facing the promotion of the use of voluntary tools on private lands for conservation and stewardship, including how the Government of Alberta can increase private landowner awareness and use of voluntary tools.
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### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

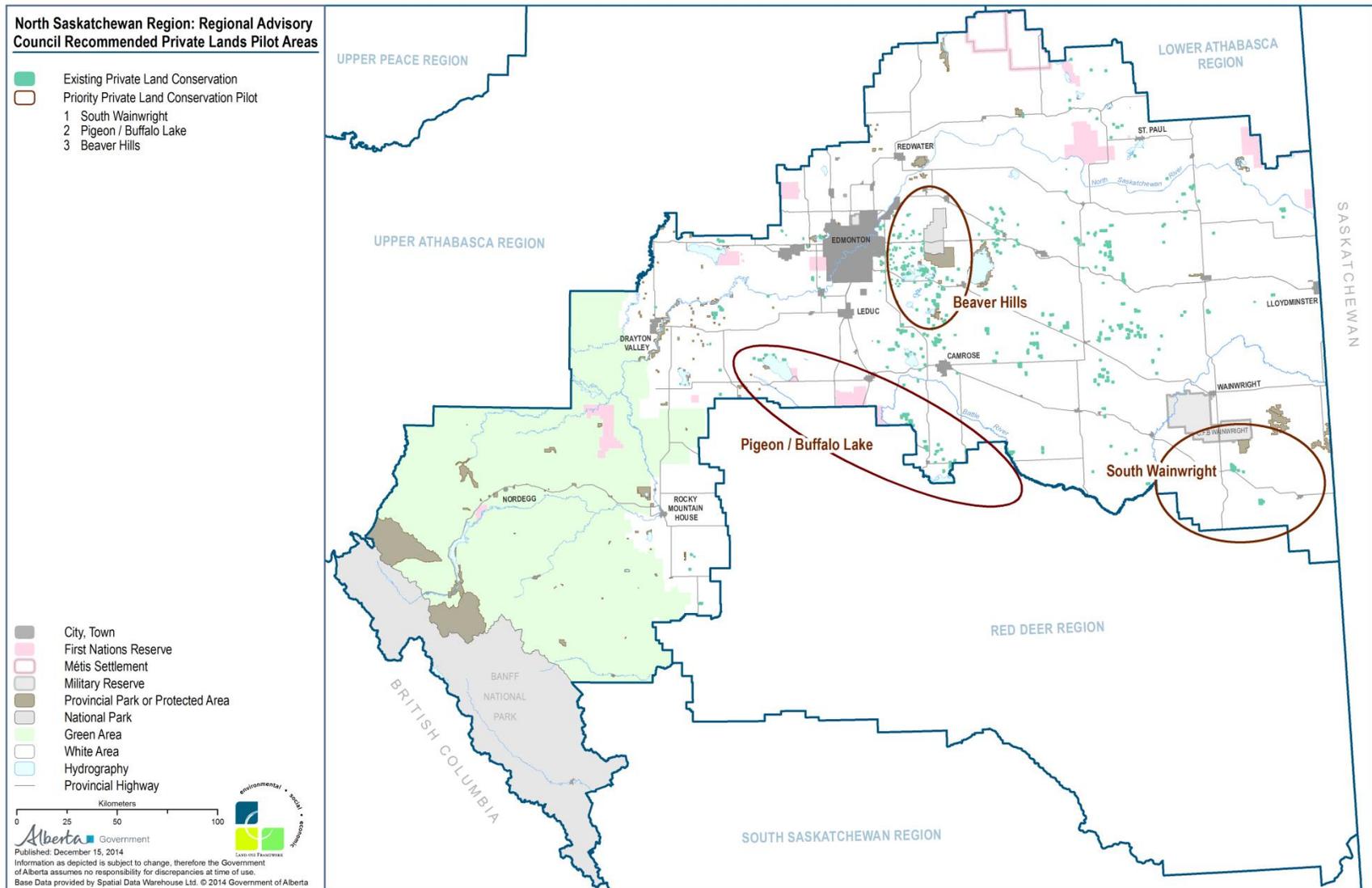
- 2.6. Mature the ALSA private land stewardship tools (i.e., transfer of development credits, conservation easements, and conservation offsets). Government, in collaboration with municipalities and landowner groups, should develop a long-term strategy and action plan that provides leadership for the tools to be implemented, keeping in mind the limited maturity that these tools have in Alberta at this time. Key strategy and action plan elements to include are:
  - Provision of what outcomes (e.g., biodiversity) the tools are trying to effect
  - Creation of a central co-ordination hub that polls parties who develop or manage the tools to inform and monitor the uptake of the tools and their effect on the desired outcomes
  - Provision of educational and awareness services for both local governments and landowners
  - Modelling of different methods for tool implementation (i.e., varying length of application of a tool on a land base, understanding the economics of tool application occurring across municipal boundaries)
  - Efficiency reviews of the administration and processing required to access and implement the tools
  - Exploration of sustainable funding approaches that allow the marketplace and private landowners to interconnect while addressing long-term “land lock down” concerns by landowners; this approach is currently modelled under the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program
  - Research and test other long-term tools that could be employed for municipalities to access outside of land trusts specifically
- 2.7. Build off of and learn from successful stewardship programs already in existence and adapt such programs to the new approach to agriculture (i.e., larger continuous land base farms).
- 2.8. Encourage the application of private land biodiversity in the context of protecting and improving wetlands.

- 2.9. Seek opportunities to collaborate and build off of existing private land stewardship awareness campaign efforts and maximize partnerships with groups and individuals who are demonstrating excellence in private land stewardship towards a biodiversity outcome.
- 2.10. Conduct private land stewardship pilots to test stewardship tools and practices and increase private landowners' awareness. RAC prioritizes the Wainwright area as the first pilot that government should focus on. (Refer to Figure 3: Map of Private Lands Pilot Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 52).

*(It is noted that there was one RAC member abstention from the voting process on this recommendation due to their concern that not enough information was provided to comment on the pilot projects accurately).*

- 2.11. Explore the policy implications and opportunities to achieve biodiversity on private lands while concurrently addressing recreational pressures through private land recreation models.

Figure 3: Map of Private Lands Pilot Areas Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region



## People-Friendly Communities with Healthy Economies

This section of the RAC report contains the remaining advice areas as guided by the Terms of Reference:

- Identifying mechanisms to strengthen relationships and increase the current level of aboriginal peoples' involvement in regional planning
- Community Growth and Community Planning
  - Implementation of the efficient use of land principles, including managing for where petroleum and petrochemical investments are expected to occur
  - Strengthening regional infrastructure, community planning, and development
  - Facilitating efficient transportation of products to local, national and international markets
  - Increasing the current level of collaboration, involvement and partnership by and between various groups (e.g., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) and the Government of Alberta, in the area of land-use planning
- Management of Outdoor Recreation
- Economic Development (Note: In addition to advice on agriculture and tourism and recreation, as directed by the Terms of Reference, RAC also offered industry sector considerations to government)
  - Agriculture
  - Tourism and recreation
  - Other industry sector considerations

### 3. Inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples in Land-use Planning

#### RAC's First Thoughts

While this section is a stand-alone advice area as per the Terms of Reference, RAC felt quite strongly that the advice reflected in this section was relevant and important for consideration throughout the other advice areas. While not always evident in the deliberations or recommendations themselves, RAC continuously checked back to see if their advice considered the needs and aspects of the region's First Nations and Métis peoples – both at the community level and in urban settings. To this latter point, it is worth noting that RAC members were cognisant of the growing urban aboriginal population in the region, and that land-use planning for non-settlement Métis and urban First Nations was still a consideration that needed to be front of mind. Furthermore, RAC's cultural awareness and growth in understanding of aboriginal land-use perspectives were significant, and demonstrated the value

proposition behind their recommendations regarding a longer-term relationship as a policy shift that government needs to make as it matures its relationships at the community level with First Nations and Métis peoples.

It became clear to RAC that there was a tremendous information repository with aboriginal communities in traditional ecological knowledge that could become core to Alberta's land-use planning, approvals and monitoring system. Such information could flow out of meaningful consultations, but should not be expected unless such consultation occurs. The aboriginal speakers who presented and engaged with RAC during some of the meetings also spoke to the desire to partner with various groups in land-use planning in different ways.

The final aspect that stood out in RAC's journey was the "quiet renaissance" that seemed to be occurring with those aboriginal communities and aboriginal peoples in urban centers who were actively seeking mutually beneficial partnerships with their local neighbours, including private landowners and municipal governments. Such evolution gave RAC reason to pause about what opportunities could be in the future for the region, and the aboriginal communities and aboriginal peoples who reside within.

## **Background on Inclusion of Aboriginal Peoples in Land-use Planning Provided by Government**

Aboriginal peoples have long had a close relationship with the land, and given their intimate understanding of the local environment, wildlife and aquatic ecosystems, they are able to contribute to land-use planning in a unique way through the sharing of traditional knowledge.

Information on ecosystems and the impacts of human development on plants and animals that use these habitats can be obtained through the use of traditional knowledge and western science, both of which are valuable to the regional land-use planning process.

Access to Crown land, abundant with plants, fish and wildlife, is important for the continued practice of First Nations' and Métis way of life.

The Government of Alberta is committed to honouring the constitutionally protected rights of First Nations and Métis peoples and seeks opportunities to consult and engage with aboriginal communities by inviting them to share their traditional knowledge to inform land and natural resource planning.

Some of the concerns, from the perspective of aboriginal peoples that was heard throughout the regional planning process, include:

- Fundamental differences on the power relations inherent in consultation/engagement;
- Treaties and legal status;

- Consultation and the regional plan process;
- Traditional knowledge and traditional land uses;
- Participation in land-use planning and influencing environmental governance; and
- Community well-being and economics.

## Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government

Alberta recognizes that those First Nations and Métis communities that hold constitutionally protected rights are uniquely positioned to inform land-use planning. It is important that aboriginal peoples continue to be included in the land-use planning process so that potential adverse impacts to the aboriginal way of life and First Nation treaty rights can be considered when land-use decisions are being made. Consulting First Nations and Métis organizations on regional planning and reconciling interests are essential to developing and achieving shared regional visions. In accordance with applicable government policy, the Government of Alberta will continue to include First Nations and Métis peoples in the land-use planning process and consult and engage with their communities whenever a government decision may adversely affect the continued exercise of their constitutionally protected rights.

The Government of Alberta will build on recommendations brought forward through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and South Saskatchewan Regional Plan as they are appropriate to the North Saskatchewan Region.

## Government's Approach Presented to RAC

The Government of Alberta presented RAC with an overview of the process to date with respect to consulting and engaging with aboriginal peoples in Stage 1 of the regional planning process. At the time of writing, the Government of Alberta had met on 56 occasions with 36 First Nations and Métis organizations. These meetings included:

- One-on-one sessions
  - Community meetings
  - Elder meetings
  - Individual workshops
- Aboriginal workshops
  - Multi-group workshops (separate for First Nations and Métis organizations)
  - Stewardship Minister's forum for Chiefs and Métis leaders

In addition to hearing the Government of Alberta's approach to inclusion of aboriginal peoples in land-use planning and an overview of feedback from consultations with aboriginal peoples, RAC had opportunities to engage with representatives from First Nations and Métis organizations on several occasions for a sharing of insight and perspectives.

On August 12, 2014 RAC members listened to members of a First Nations group present. Topics covered an overview of First Nations' historical and spiritual ties to the land, and traditional ways of life and how that connects with the land. The presenters shared their goals for the future.

At the September 23, 2014 meeting, representatives for the Métis Nation of Alberta addressed RAC members. They provided a historical perspective of aboriginal rights and title, as well as some the differences between settlement and non-settlement Métis. They shared aspects of Métis culture, traditional ways of life and ties to the land, and visions for the future, especially for Métis youth.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

Having had the benefit of the various First Nations and Métis speakers and presentations over the tenure of RAC's meetings, RAC had an increased capacity to explore this area of advice. That being said, there was some concern about how much advice RAC could truly offer in this area.

RAC members' dialogue focussed on two theme areas:

### ► Looking at land through different lenses

The words spoken by First Nation and Métis guests, combined with the personal perspectives shared by First Nation and Métis RAC members, offered all members of RAC a view into the aboriginal world. It was clear that how aboriginal communities approach or think about land use, compared to how government and others view land use, are vastly different. It could be said that First Nations and Métis peoples view land as a living element of which they are a part, while those who have settled the land and utilize its resources view land as a resource that needs proper management and care to maintain its production capacity. RAC also recognized that in many ways, those who make their living (e.g., agricultural producers) and tie their own cultural identity to maintaining a sustainable land base have much in common with their aboriginal neighbours, and there are many opportunities for these likeminded groups to work together. Overall, RAC observed that bridging these somewhat opposing views and values requires time and trust by all sides. While trust was seen to be building in some instances, it was still seen to be in the early phases, given how recent the concept of consultation has been in play in Alberta. In many instances the federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders have only started the journey to build strong, consistent, trusting relationships that allow for information exchanges with First Nations and Métis organizations.

### ► Aboriginal communities and the economy

RAC noted that the cultural presentations acknowledged the economic needs of First Nations and Métis organizations. Their learning from those discussions surfaced a number of options that Alberta may wish to explore provincially, not just in the North

Saskatchewan Region. The foundation for any economic development with aboriginal peoples was seen as something that needed to be built up from the community level, rather than having an economic strategy handed to the community.

There were a number of examples surfaced by RAC where they had observed or participated with First Nations and Métis organizations in economic ventures. These ventures were seen as being successful as they were built between the aboriginal peoples' community and the local surrounding community collaboratively. Many of these ventures were built off of common values that the aboriginal peoples' communities and local surrounding community both held close. One such example noted was the values-based wildlife management approach that addressed both the Bighorn area outfitters and the local aboriginal peoples' communities.

RAC members noted pilots and programs that were seen to be effective in other jurisdictions in advancing the economic conditions for First Nations and Métis organizations. Whether it was options to address on-reserve financing, education and training, or creating community capacity to engage in business opportunities from the community outward, RAC observed that the opportunity was there, but time, trust and commitment was needed to effect the changes.

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## **ADVICE AREA: INCLUSION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN LAND-USE PLANNING**

Identifying mechanisms to strengthen relationships and increase the current level of aboriginal peoples' involvement in regional planning.

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### **RAC's Recommendations to Government:**

- 3.1. Be perseverant and patient with growing its relationship with the aboriginal communities in Alberta. Keep in mind that establishing common ground is a process and Alberta has only begun; it is less about advising and more about participation and building trust.
- 3.2. Recognize that the time frames that government and industry seek to reach resolution on land-use decisions are different from the time frames of aboriginal peoples. To mitigate this difference, government should consider investing in long-term relations with the First Nations and Métis organizations, particularly noting consistency of having the same staff involved and providing sufficient time to allow for First Nations and Métis organizations to engage in discussions and processes, not just singular community representatives. This recommendation would also start to address the capacity issues in the communities.

- 3.3. Make use of community-based planning approaches that would create integrated planning (i.e., cumulative effects planning versus project-by-project planning).
- 3.4. Acknowledge and respect the value of traditional ecological knowledge held by aboriginal peoples. Work collaboratively to find the best ways that traditional ecological knowledge can inform land-use plan development, monitoring and state of landscape reporting.
- 3.5. Create standing stakeholder groups with nominated members from the First Nations and Métis at the community level who will advise government at the local planning level and the implementation of the plans, and create the opportunity for community-to-community dialogue rather than government-to-government only discussions.
- 3.6. Examine pilots and models working in neighbouring jurisdictions (e.g., the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Fund) on land-use planning approaches and financing options for First Nations and Métis organizations.
- 3.7. Build off of the evolving economic discussions occurring with some aboriginal communities in the White Area (eastern side) of the region to further the understanding and potential opportunities for all aboriginal communities in the region.
- 3.8. Implement First Nations and Métis cultural awareness as a core training need for government staff, and partner with municipalities and industries who also wish to participate in such training. Include training on how to communicate with and amongst aboriginal peoples.
- 3.9. Support land stewardship training and sustainable placements with aboriginal communities to allow for sustainable capacity-building within aboriginal communities.
- 3.10. Explore options that include off-settlement Métis and urban aboriginal populations in land-use planning within municipalities.

#### 4. Community Growth and Community Land-use Planning

The advice areas captured in this section were originally separated out under social and economic outcomes in the Terms of Reference:

- Economic: Implementation of the efficient use of land principles including managing for where petroleum and petrochemical investments are expected to occur
- Social: Strengthening regional infrastructure, community planning, and development

Economic: Facilitating efficient transportation of products to local, national and international markets

Social: Increasing the current level of collaboration, involvement and partnership by and between various groups (e.g., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) and the Government of Alberta, in the area of land-use planning

### **RAC's First Thoughts**

RAC's deliberations on community planning highlighted the interrelated aspects of these advice areas and were robust given the high level of experience with municipal planning in RAC. These advice areas pertained mainly to the White Area and Capital Region (and its extension south along the Highway 2 Corridor) due to development pressures (residential, industrial, commercial and transport) in the Capital Region and surrounding lands. The different growth strategy needs for the Capital Region versus the eastern portion of the region (east of Highway 36) or the Green Area highlighted the challenge in trying to have a one-size-fits-all approach for municipal land planning. All three areas of the region promote growth, but how they manage that growth was the heart of the issue.

The community planning issues in the Green Area focussed on the issues of smaller, single residential developments in pockets around the community, and that Green Area municipalities' growth and development opportunities are complicated by the need to negotiate with government for any development expansion, given expansion in their municipalities typically means accessing public land.

There are three policy opportunities that RAC observed government could explore further:

- While government is very familiar with planning for resource extraction in the Green Area public lands, it is less familiar with municipal planning in the Green Area, and public lands are needed for such planning by the municipalities. Municipal planning will be more and more relevant as the Green Area draws more recreation users and urban population grows.
- With the Capital Region Area and Highway 2 Corridor rapid growth and its ripple effects across the region, a number of cooperative planning activities at a subregional level must occur in the immediate future to address current pressure points in infrastructure and transportation. Government needs to lead and facilitate the development of planning and funding options while being mindful of the role of the various municipal and industrial partners.
- The progressive implementation of market tools (i.e., ecosystem services) that address land-use challenges in these high growth pockets could provide options to landowners and municipalities as they leverage efficient use of land tools.

## Background on Community Growth, Community Land-use Planning and Transportation of Products Provided by Government

Economic growth attracts people to live, work and play in the region. In turn, sustainable and people-friendly communities are required to support population growth, and to retain and attract an engaged workforce.

Alberta continues to experience population growth, which results in more land being required for building communities, expanding on industrial and commercial developments, and for municipal infrastructure such as roads, sewers, etc. Pressure is placed on the ability to maintain sustainable communities. Ensuring there is also adequate regional infrastructure to support and promote economic growth is an important consideration that will require a high level of collaboration, co-ordination and integration from municipal and provincial level planning. Therefore, the efficient use of land principles are useful for decision-makers to ensure that only the necessary amount of land is used to meet these growing needs.

Land-use planning is undertaken at both municipal and provincial levels. Provincial legislation, policies and programs for land-use planning and resource management can affect municipal interests. Similarly, municipal decisions and actions affecting land-use and development can impact the success of provincial objectives designed for the benefit of all Albertans.

Decision-making in community land-use planning relies on the collaboration of major players in the North Saskatchewan Region:

- The Government of Alberta, including regulatory agencies
- Municipalities
- Industry and landowners
- First Nations and Métis organizations
- Stakeholder groups

The province provides the leadership in land-use planning through the *Municipal Government Act*, which is the legislative document for municipal governance, and stipulates what, why and how municipalities deal with issues within the jurisdiction of municipalities.

- Part 17 of the *Municipal Government Act* delegates planning and development authority to municipalities, with some exemptions, such as approvals of the Alberta Energy Regulator.
- Part 17 also sets out the legal requirements for making planning and development decisions, such as:
  - Items to be included in the statutory plans (both mandatory and optional)
    - Mandatory, such as the land-use bylaw or Municipal Development Plan (when population exceeds 3500)

- Non-mandatory, such as Area Structure Plan
- What decisions can be made and the conditions that can be imposed on the applications, (e.g., dedication of reserves, development and off-site levies) on subdivision and development applications; and
- The land-use decision-making process, (i.e., approval process, such as approval by bylaws, approval by development and subdivision authority, and the appeal process, etc.).

The Provincial Land Use Policies (PLUPs)<sup>5</sup> provide high-level co-ordination with consistent municipal and provincial approaches in areas of provincial responsibility, and provide direction regarding land-use patterns and co-ordination to achieve land-use efficiency.

Municipalities make land-use decisions to achieve the purpose of Part 17 Planning and Development of the *Municipal Government Act*. In doing so, municipalities are required to make decisions in compliance with provincial and federal legislations and regulations as well as any municipal bylaws and policies. Industries, landowners, stakeholders, First Nations and Métis organizations all play important roles in providing input and feedback to decision-makers (both at the provincial and municipal levels) in order to make an informed decision.

The Government of Alberta recently released the Efficient Use of Land Implementation Tools Compendium which includes six efficient use of land principles and serves as a resource for land-use planners and decision-makers to reduce the footprint of human activities. The tool compendium describes 29 voluntary best practices that can reduce the amount of land required for development of the build environment. Many of these tools are already in use in Alberta and implementation of the efficient use of land tools is voluntarily.

Government is using Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plans (CRISPs) to plan for Alberta's three oil sands areas: Athabasca, Cold Lake and Peace River. CRISPs are long-term strategic infrastructure plans to accommodate population and employment growth as oil sands development expands. CRISPs are designed to be adaptable to potential future changes in oil sands production, as well as economic or other indicators. The CRISP approach, which engages and consults with stakeholders including industry, municipalities, First Nations, Métis organizations as well as the current and future residents of the region, will need to continue.

The Industrial Heartland, in the northeast part of the Capital Region, is uniquely positioned to capitalize on the development of Alberta's vast energy resources, expanded market access and expected increases in bitumen and synthetic crude oil production. The area has the largest concentration of industrial activity in Alberta, and sits at a crossroads of

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<sup>5</sup> Municipal land-use decisions must be consistent with Provincial Land Use Policies. (Sec. 622 MGA) Under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA), Provincial Land Use Policies will no longer apply where a regional plan has been approved. Once approved, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan will replace the Provincial Land Use Policies in the North Saskatchewan Region

extensively developed transportation infrastructure as well as oil, natural gas and bitumen pipelines and transmission lines.

Transportation systems, highways, rail, transit, and air, are crucial to the movement of people and goods in and out of the region, to local, provincial, national and international markets. Transportation systems are a key consideration of community growth and land-use planning. The region is well positioned to be Alberta's supply hub and its gateway to international and domestic markets.

### **Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government**

The Government of Alberta will encourage and promote collaborative planning approaches for all players in the region including stakeholder groups for feedback in land-use decisions. It will participate, co-operate and facilitate the community development process. It will also continue to work with municipalities in the region and across the province to build an effective transportation network to move people and goods across the region and beyond.

The province will continue to recognize the Capital Region Growth Plan: Growing Forward as a growth management plan, and use the Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plan process to augment and facilitate planning for the Cold Lake Oil Sands Area.

The province will continue to promote and encourage the use of efficient use of land principles to minimize the amount of land in the built environment. This includes working with municipalities, land-use decision-makers and land users to build awareness and understanding of the efficient use of land principles, how they might be applied and how their effectiveness would be measured over time.

The province will continue to abide by the policy that private property rights are valued.

The Government of Alberta will also continue to work with partners and stakeholders to:

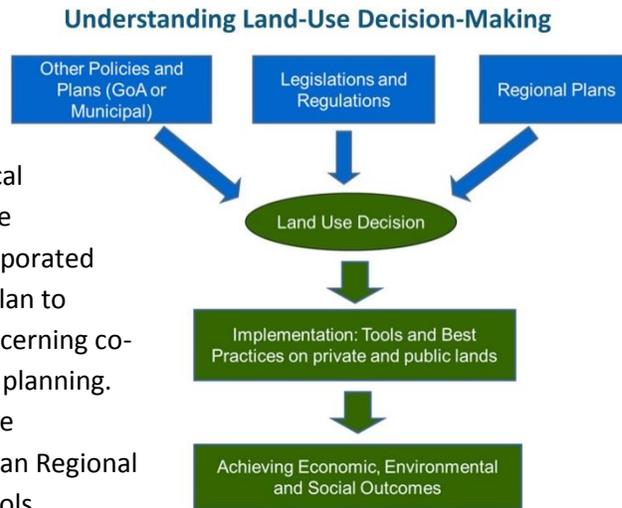
- Develop an integrated, efficient and competitive transportation and utilities system;
- Develop a robust, reliable and efficient utility and transportation network to connect the region to rest of province, the rest of Canada and internationally; and
- Build transportation and utility corridors to consolidate critical infrastructure within pre-defined areas to utilize land efficiently.

### **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

The Government of Alberta presented to RAC an overview of the process and approaches to land-use decisions.

There are four major players involved in land-use decisions – the province, municipalities, landowners/ developers, and stakeholder groups.

Government continues to provide the leadership in providing the required legislative framework through the *Municipal Government Act* for local authorities to undertake local land-use decisions. It is intended that the Provincial Land Use Policies will be incorporated into the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan to provide guidelines and expectations concerning co-operation and co-ordination in land-use planning. The efficient use of land principles will be incorporated into the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan and decision-makers will use the tools compendium to help reduce the footprint from built environment. Lastly, government will use the Cold Lake CRISP to continue to monitor the infrastructure requirements for the Cold Lake Region.



Municipalities will continue to exercise the delegated authority in making land-use decisions within their municipal boundaries and to collaborate with other players in the community land-use planning realm to achieve the purpose of Part 17 Planning and Development of MGA. In doing so, municipalities are required to make decisions in compliance with provincial and federal legislations and regulations. The Capital Region Board continues to play an important role in addressing growth in the Capital Region. When the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan is approved, the Capital Region Board must act in accordance with it.

Individual property owners and developers are usually the initiator of a development proposal to meet certain needs. Once the municipality receives an application, the municipality makes a decision and makes references to legislative and policy requirements.

Stakeholder and interests groups will provide input to decision-makers on their interests and persuade the decision-makers to consider their input in their decisions.

To effectively address the challenges brought by the increased growth to the North Saskatchewan Region, RAC was presented with the information on how the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan set forth the expectations for co-operation and integration with land-use decision-makers to collaborate with one another in order to achieve the regional outcomes, such as the efficient use of land outcomes.

The Government of Alberta presented RAC with two approaches for transportation infrastructures:

- Developing a transportation strategy for Alberta that will cover all forms of transportation, connections, and ways to move people and products. It will also

provide an overarching direction to help guide decisions on transportation investments, policies and programs. In doing so, the strategy will provide a vision for Alberta's transportation system over the next 50 years.

- A key part of a long-term transportation network is the “economic corridors”. These corridors connect communities, provide efficient transportation for industries, and benefit the entire provincial economy. The planning done in the 1970's for the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary is an example of how transportation needs must be anticipated and strategically thought through.

It is important that Alberta relies on an integrated transportation system of roads, rail, airport and public transportation that benefits our children, families, workers, and businesses. It is essential all the pieces work and are in sync to support a high quality of life and help secure our province's economic future. The Government of Alberta plays many roles in the development and implementation of a long-term vision for transportation, including advocating with the air, marine and rail industries, and influencing, regulating, managing, and delivering many different parts of the transportation system. The Government of Alberta will continue to do this, in close collaboration with government, municipalities, industry partners, and the public.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

### ► **The great debate – when should government be more clear on land-use policies?**

Portions of RAC deliberations in these advice areas focussed on the roles and responsibilities of government and the municipalities. There was concern identified that government may not be expressing its provincial policy interests, with respect to land-use planning, to municipalities as clearly and as intentionally as it could. RAC delved deeper into where government needed to be more present in community-level planning and in what role.

### ► **Learnings from comprehensive regional infrastructure sustainability plans and other planning processes**

Government's approach to local area and/or issue planning in the Fort McMurray and Cold Lake oil sands regions was considered a positive move forward in government demonstrating leadership and co-ordinating the various participants and stakeholders to come together to share information. Backing up the CRISP process was the use of modelling and scenario planning which, similar to the integrated land management principles, required all participating parties to put their data and information on the table. Conducting a process similarly to a CRISP process in the Industrial Heartland area was seen as an option to address the downstream effects of the [Lower Athabasca Regional Plan](#) and all the developments stemming from that region which directly impact the Industrial Heartland.

### ► **The opportunities of petrochemical sites**

Leading out of the CRISP approach in the Industrial Heartland, RAC discussed the current challenges with the ad hoc approach to petrochemical placements in the region. While RAC is highly supportive of the petrochemical industry, the discussion noted the need to cluster the investments. For municipalities to actually properly plan for such investments in a cluster approach, support from the province for higher level land-use planning and options will be needed. There are models already being employed elsewhere in the world to address industrial clustering (e.g., Singapore and Germany).

### ► **Can efficient use of land principles and tools assist?**

While RAC did not dispute the value proposition of the efficient use of land tools, they did observe that there were still several instances where government will have to provide policy and/or regulatory frames to actually allow for the uptake of the those tools by municipalities. RAC members also proposed there is a need to create some consistency across the province on some land-use planning approaches (such as annexation and managing density) while leaving other zoning decisions to the municipalities. RAC also observed that government needs to provide more education and capacity to municipalities to apply the efficient use of land tools. There was an exploration around how market tools, like ecosystem services, could be used to enable the efficient use of land tools as they provide options to address some of the land valuation challenges and choices around land development.

### ► **Land-use planning and infrastructure – of one mind**

The blending of infrastructure planning policies (including transportation infrastructure) and land-use planning policies is seen as a requirement and to date, not one that has been done as closely as it could have been. Planning and governance models, such as those learned from [The Water Management Framework for the Industrial Heartland and Capital Region](#) can be applicable to land use and infrastructure (including transportation) planning. In order to keep land-use planning and infrastructure (including transportation) joined, government needs to link integrated planning processes and sustainable funding models. RAC members observed that when funding models shift or became disjointed (as in the cases of the Municipal Sustainability Initiative and Green Trip), planning and infrastructure developments (including transportation) quickly became separated and ad hoc.

### ► **Transportation infrastructure systems - building options**

RAC identified that in order to address the regional transportation infrastructure deficit, there is a need for some flexibility in engineering standards. For example, in several instances transportation infrastructure, like bridges and roads, may be only needed for a time period of approximately 40 years, as they are developed for a particular industrial activity with that assumed lifespan, versus engineering structures for much longer periods, like conventional 75-year lifespans.

RAC also suggested that government should look at those pinch points in the transportation system which require relatively quick or simple fixes in some cases, and which address high demand or safety issues such as heavy haul volume or commercial rail needs. Many of these relatively quick fixes might address system challenges at a cheaper cost than some of the more costly and complex system fixes proposed.

RAC also discussed the importance of maintaining transportation infrastructures, rather than putting emphasis on building new infrastructures.

► **How to fund transportation infrastructure systems?**

RAC understands the financial considerations of having a robust transportation system. Members had a fulsome discussion on sustainable funding options for government to contemplate. They reflected on the experiences of other jurisdictions in the use of tolls and public-private partnerships. RAC noted that the region supports massive amounts of industrial transportation: the two high load corridors running north-south (Highway 36 and 22) and highways running east-west along those north-south routes such as Highway 39. It was observed that industry was effecting changes to their transport models where they could. For example, in the absence of a safe and robust transportation system for workers who travel significant distances to and from job sites, companies have been known to invest in their own transportation solutions, such as building work camps and utilizing commercial bussing options. As a result of these types of shifts, RAC suggested there is plenty of opportunity to explore funding partnerships with industry and governments to address safety, pinch points and high load corridors. They also put forward the concept that transportation system components, rail for example, be assessed operationally to see what the effect would be if the component were operated as a utility rather than as a duopoly or monopoly.

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## ADVICE AREA: COMMUNITY GROWTH AND COMMUNITY LAND-USE PLANNING

- How can the Government of Alberta, municipalities, landowners and industry collaborate in the implementation of the efficient use of land principles?  
*(Note: this is an advice area added by government in addition to the Terms of Reference)*
  - Enhancing efficient land use in areas where petroleum and petrochemical investments are expected to occur.
  - Strengthening regional infrastructure, community planning, and development in order to support economic expansion and population growth.
  - Facilitating efficient transportation of products to local, national and international markets.
  - Increasing the current level of collaboration, involvement and partnership by and between various groups (e.g., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) and the Government of Alberta, in the area of land-use planning.
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### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 4.1. Step into the municipal land-use planning ring and provide further support and possible requirements to enable municipalities in areas such as annexation, density and sensitive land-use matters. This also includes working with municipalities on how growth will occur within the priority growth areas around the Capital Region Area and Highway 2 Corridor to ensure the financial viabilities of all municipalities are maintained, or strategies are put in place to address those communities no longer financially viable.
- 4.2. Assess the opportunity of linking efficient use of land tools for municipalities with land-use market tools, like ecosystem services.
- 4.3. Expand the Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plan (CRISP) model. Facilitate and provide data and information to conduct an immediate and medium-term land-use/infrastructure plan (including transportation, infrastructure and industrial planning, and the Industrial Heartland's eco-industrial plan) for the Industrial Heartland, taking into consideration the downstream effects of the Lower Athabasca Region; and that the North Saskatchewan Region is the hub for the market access strategy of the province. This approach would be of particular value for the Industrial Heartland given the continuing investments in the petrochemical industry.
- 4.4. Provide additional capacity in the form of training and advice to municipalities in the use of efficient use of land tools, and work with municipalities to evaluate the tools' effectiveness and ability to create sustainable communities in an Alberta context.

- 4.5. Facilitate and act as a knowledge broker to immediately develop a transportation plan to address pinch points in the region where immediate and straight-forward responses are required.
- 4.6. Ensure any further subregional planning efforts incorporate infrastructure planning, including transportation.
- 4.7. Work with municipalities on sustainable infrastructure funding options.
- 4.8. Provide options in transportation infrastructure system designs, depending on the expected life of the infrastructure required.
- 4.9. Develop a policy in consultation with municipalities and industry that addresses sustainable transportation infrastructure funding, including assessments of where tolls and public/private partnerships are options.
- 4.10. Review the transportation infrastructure system attributes and assess where there might be governance or operational model changes required, given the significant growth in demand and limited growth in supply.
- 4.11. Work with municipalities to provide them with capacity to mature their planning capabilities, including exploring options with neighbouring aboriginal communities to support mutually beneficial land-use opportunities.
- 4.12. Consider addressing the aggregate extraction challenge by requiring municipalities to identify where gravel resources are in their municipal development plans so they can co-ordinate the extraction of their resources in accordance with land-use planning.
- 4.13. Evolve the current government partnership and collaboration models with various groups (i.e., non-profits, private sector, aboriginal and local governments) to maximize the skills, knowledge and relationships in these groups while bringing leadership, facilitation, clarity of direction and knowledge to the table.

## 5. Management of Outdoor Recreation

### RAC's First Thoughts

While there was only one advice area for this topic in the Terms of Reference, RAC spent a significant amount of time discussing the policy issues facing the region in the area of outdoor recreation management. There were four very different policy challenges and opportunities RAC felt government could explore further:

- Considering the substantive growth in use of the public lands in the Green Area for recreation, modernize the approach to recreation management as a comprehensive program in the Green Area including enforcement, education and planning components.

- The recreation demands from the Capital Region Area suggest the need for a 100 kilometre or one hour radius recreation strategy for the Capital Region Area. There is an opportunity to develop a strategy with municipal partners such as those in the Capital Region Board as well as other stakeholders like aboriginal communities and private landowners.
- Sustainable funding options need to be developed and implemented to respond to the massive increase in recreation demands in both the public lands of the Green Area and private lands of the White Area in the region. Facilitating discussions and solutions with different recreation groups will put new options on the table and not leave it all on government to address.
- Build off of the success of the Bighorn governance model and the members at that table to identify the best practices “governance approach” and the possible use of the model to different portions of the Green Area.

## **Background on Management of Outdoor Recreation Provided by Government**

Outdoor recreation is an important regional land use that provides significant economic, social and environmental benefits to regional communities, individuals and visitors.

An outdoor recreation opportunity is the ability for an individual to participate in a desired recreation activity within a preferred recreation setting. In many cases, outdoor recreation in the region is a “natural resource-based industry.” The availability and quality of many outdoor recreation opportunities in the region depend on the combination of natural or human-made features and appealing settings. As land use in the region has intensified, there is the need to purposefully plan for meeting outdoor regional recreation needs and maintaining recreation features and settings.

## **Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government**

The North Saskatchewan Region provides a full diversity of outdoor recreation settings. However, these settings are not equally distributed throughout the region and the region is largely dominated by more front country settings, which tend to be close to urban centres, are easily accessible by car, and are frequently visited by day-users (e.g., developed campgrounds, urban parks, and public recreation areas). Population growth increases the demand for recreational activities occurring on Crown lands. This increases pressures on the provincial parks system and the use of existing linear access for recreation on public land, which delays restoration of linear footprint and impacts the environment.

The focus of delivery of outdoor recreation in the regional planning context is on Crown land (i.e., on public lands and in parks and protected areas). The Government of Alberta will use an integrated approach to address the challenges and manage the impacts of multiple land-use demands and pressures. Meeting the objectives for recreation will depend on a range of approaches and actions which include: developing a comprehensive and integrated

recreation management approach to manage outdoor recreation on public lands; re-classifying and consolidating existing parks in the region to ensure that all sites are appropriately classed under the existing parks legislation; and developing a regional trail system plan in collaboration and co-ordination with stakeholders.

Public, not-for-profit and private sectors are all important for planning and delivering the region's recreation system. Identifying new recreation and park areas on public land to meet growing demand will consist of a combination of physical, biological, cultural, constructed and/or geographical factors that can provide recreation and tourism opportunities. Clustering use, improving safety for diverse users, reducing environmental damage and connecting to the surrounding trail systems are important considerations. Public lands and land within the provincial parks system provide diverse, sustainable and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to healthy lifestyles and a diversity of recreational opportunities. The Government of Alberta presented RAC with an overview of how it currently delivers and manages outdoor recreation and approaches for enhancing infrastructure and amenities throughout the region.

### **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

Maintaining areas that provide diverse recreation settings near highly populated areas is important to meet growing outdoor recreation needs and to address changing trends toward more day-use opportunities.

The demand for both structured and unstructured outdoor recreational opportunities is growing, and these forms of active living are a significant aspect of the quality of life in the region. Managing to ensure quality outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism experiences while minimizing environmental impacts and maintaining locally, regionally and provincially significant recreation and tourism features while also respecting land-based industry's ability to operate is not without its challenges.

The Government of Alberta intends to enhance and expand existing recreation areas, and is considering establishment of new areas, and has asked RAC for its advice. Three approaches were presented to RAC for consideration.

Approach 1 – Identify where the Government of Alberta should place priority in terms of developing the proposed new recreation management planning areas.

Approach 2 – Where should the Government of Alberta place priority in terms of investing new funds to upgrade the existing provincial parks system?

Approach 3 - Where should the Government of Alberta focus in terms of adding new public land base to the provincial parks system?

### **Criteria for Advice for Expanded or New Recreation Areas Provided by Government:**

- Focus of recreational areas recommendations should be directed towards enhancing recreational opportunities within and adjacent to existing recreation and parks areas, or enhancing management of existing areas to accommodate changing demands.
- Recommendations for any potential new or expanded areas should be for high recreation and tourism value and must meet either one of the following criteria:
  - The potential new or expanded area increases the supply of a recreational opportunity where demand for the activity currently outpaces supply; or
  - The potential new or expanded area will result in an increased supply of recreational opportunities where there is a trend towards an increasing future demand.

## **RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS**

Throughout the RAC proceedings, the topic of recreation management continuously surfaced. Before RAC deliberated the approaches that government placed before them, RAC spent some time exploring what they saw were the critical recreation management issues facing the region and some options of how to address these issues. It became clear that the challenges facing the Green Area of the region are quite different than those challenges in the White Area, particularly around the Capital Region area.

While RAC members recognized the economic and social value that recreation brings to the region, the two main challenges that RAC focussed on was the availability, or supply, of recreating land spaces for all types of recreating, and the management of recreating activities, particularly motorized, in unmanaged Green Area public land locations.

### **► Demand outpaces supply – are there options?**

The demand for various recreation activities has outpaced the supply of the opportunities. The region's rapid population growth has outpaced recreation opportunity growth. Limited supply of provincial campsites in close proximity to the Capital Region has put added pressure on municipalities to seek creative opportunities to develop camping and recreating experiences at the municipal level. RAC encouraged government to think about reaching out to private sector and private landowners to create financially sustainable recreation opportunities like camping and trails near major urban centres.

RAC also observed that the demand on camping spaces is affected by the economic activity on the landscape, referring specifically to workers who make use of camping facilities near worksites rather than stay in a hotel or the work camp itself. Employers need to be sensitive to this behaviour and ideally find ways to address this.

The limited availability of funds for provincial parks infrastructure suggests that there will be a continuous trade-off between maintenance of facilities versus expansion of

opportunities. Strategies and management actions to address the changes in the region's demographics (i.e., growing number of seniors, rising immigration, etc.) come at a cost that the province currently does not appear to be funding.

RAC explored funding options that government could capitalize on including:

- Partnering with municipalities and private industry; and
- Implementing user fees for day-use parks and trails.

The first option requires government to be more proactive in engaging and responding to opportunities that are presented. The second option, while perhaps controversial, is utilized in other jurisdictions and can be sensitive to citizens' ability to pay, provided the fees clearly align to the service they are being charged against.

### ► **Managing the “motorized” random camping experience – a challenge and an opportunity**

RAC identified concerns with the current management approach, or lack thereof, concerning random camping, or more specifically to the motorized vehicle use associated with random camping (as random camping can also be non-motorized). RAC was supportive of managed motorized use and strongly stressed the need for government to significantly improve its partnerships with industry in the region to build effective motorized recreation opportunities. RAC also heavily encouraged the need for government to put a recreation management program in place that included the three E's: enforcement, education and engineering, on public land in the Green and White Areas of the region. It was observed that the *Public Lands Act* provides for this enforcement, but government has not operationalized the tools or the programs to effect what the act provides for such as the Public Lands Administration Regulation. RAC also identified the need to build back a culture of “respecting the land” in the region. While most users are respectful in their access and use of public land, it was noted that an increase in habitat and watershed destruction and abandoned garbage on public land speaks to a land respect ethic that has been lost. Starting to teach that ethic through the school education system and by providing opportunities for youth and their families to learn how to recreate respectfully could change the effects on public land significantly in the future.

### ► **Governance of recreation**

The last area of concern that RAC raised before commenting on the approaches presented by government focussed on governance of the landscape. There were two major thrusts:

- Which part of government (and under what legislation) manages the Crown lands?
  - RAC cited concerns regarding the varying approaches that government field staff had depending on which uniform they wore. RAC noted that they

thought government could do a better job of working together amongst themselves on the landscape.

- Leverage success from the governance model being used in the Bighorn.
  - The Bighorn Back Country governance model was cited as a best practice that government should leverage as it looks at how to manage other parts of the Green Area in the region for recreation and biodiversity outcomes.

Government provided RAC three approaches for advice regarding planning for recreation areas, investment in parks and park expansion.

► **Approach 1 – Prioritize areas for recreation management planning**

Approach 1 focussed on where government should do recreation management planning (similar to what was done in the Bighorn) over the next two to five years. RAC noted they would like all of the areas to have a management plan in place, but understood given limited resources, priorities would need to be set.

Table 4: Priority Areas for Recreation Management Planning

Priority Areas for Recreation Management Planning Over the Next 2 – 5 Years	Priority – Highest to Lowest
Upper (East) Planning Area	1
Long Lake Planning Area	2
Lower and Center Planning Area - (equal support)	3
Upper (Central) Planning Area	4
Ram Planning Area	5
Upper (West) Planning Area	6

The top two identified priority areas scored very closely to one another as a result of where the most critical demand was emanating from – namely the Capital Region Area of the region.

When RAC reviewed the areas put forward by government, they noted that use of the governance tool like the Bighorn was critical to success, and again, heavily encouraged government to leverage the success from the Bighorn.

► **Approach 2 – Invest new funds to enhance and upgrade the existing provincial parks system**

Approach 2 asked RAC to advise government where money was best spent to enhance and upgrade the existing provincial park system. Government had provided a focussed list of high need areas for RAC to prioritize. The priority highlighted below again supported RAC commentary concerning increasing supply of recreating opportunities near large urban centres within a 100 kilometre or one hour radius of the Capital Region Area.

Table 5: Identified Priorities for Investing New Funds to Enhance and Upgrade the Existing Provincial Parks System

Identified Priorities for Investing New Funds to Enhance and Upgrade the Existing Provincial Parks System	Priority – Highest to Lowest
Pigeon Lake Provincial Park	1
Long Lake Provincial Park	2
Calhoun Bay Provincial Recreation Area	3
Crimson Lake Provincial Park	4
Fish Lake Provincial Recreation Area	5
Goldeye Lake Provincial Recreation Area	6
Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area	7

► **Approach 3 – Add new land base to the provincial parks system**

The final approach presented by government focussed on expanding the provincial park system in the region. The challenge that RAC surfaced in this approach was that government was already trying to address aging infrastructure and address recreation on existing Crown (public and park) lands; what was the benefit to putting public lands into a narrowly defined park system? Government acknowledged the need to look at intended uses in these additional lands while trying to address increasing demands for recreation opportunities. There were also some observations that the economic impact of transferring the land designation to the park system may have some unintended economic effects, for example, the only areas within the 100 kilometre range of the Capital Region not supported were a result of the locations being considered key aggregate deposits. Lastly it was noted that some of the suggested expansions were not accessible to the everyday user of a parks system.

Table 6: Identified Areas for Expansion to the Provincial Parks System

Map Reference No.	Name of Land Area	Addition of Land Area to the Provincial Parks System	
		Supported	Not Supported
1	Preachers Point Provincial Recreation Area		X
2	Bighorn Dam Provincial Recreation Area	√	
3	Crescent Falls Provincial Recreation Area		X
4	Alexo-Saunders Provincial Recreation Area		X
5	Jackfish Lake Provincial Recreation Area	√	

Map Reference No.	Name of Land Area	Addition of Land Area to the Provincial Parks System	
		Supported	Not Supported
6	Chambers Creek Provincial Recreation Area		X
7	Crimson Lake Provincial Park		X
8	Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area	√	
9	Buck Lake Provincial Recreation Area	√	
10	Eagle Point Provincial Park		X
11	Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area	√	
12	Bellis Lake Provincial Recreation Area	√	
13	Long Lake Provincial Park	√	

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## ADVICE AREA: MANAGEMENT OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Expansion or establishment of new recreation areas – Provincial Parks, Provincial Recreation Areas, Public Land Recreation Areas, etc.

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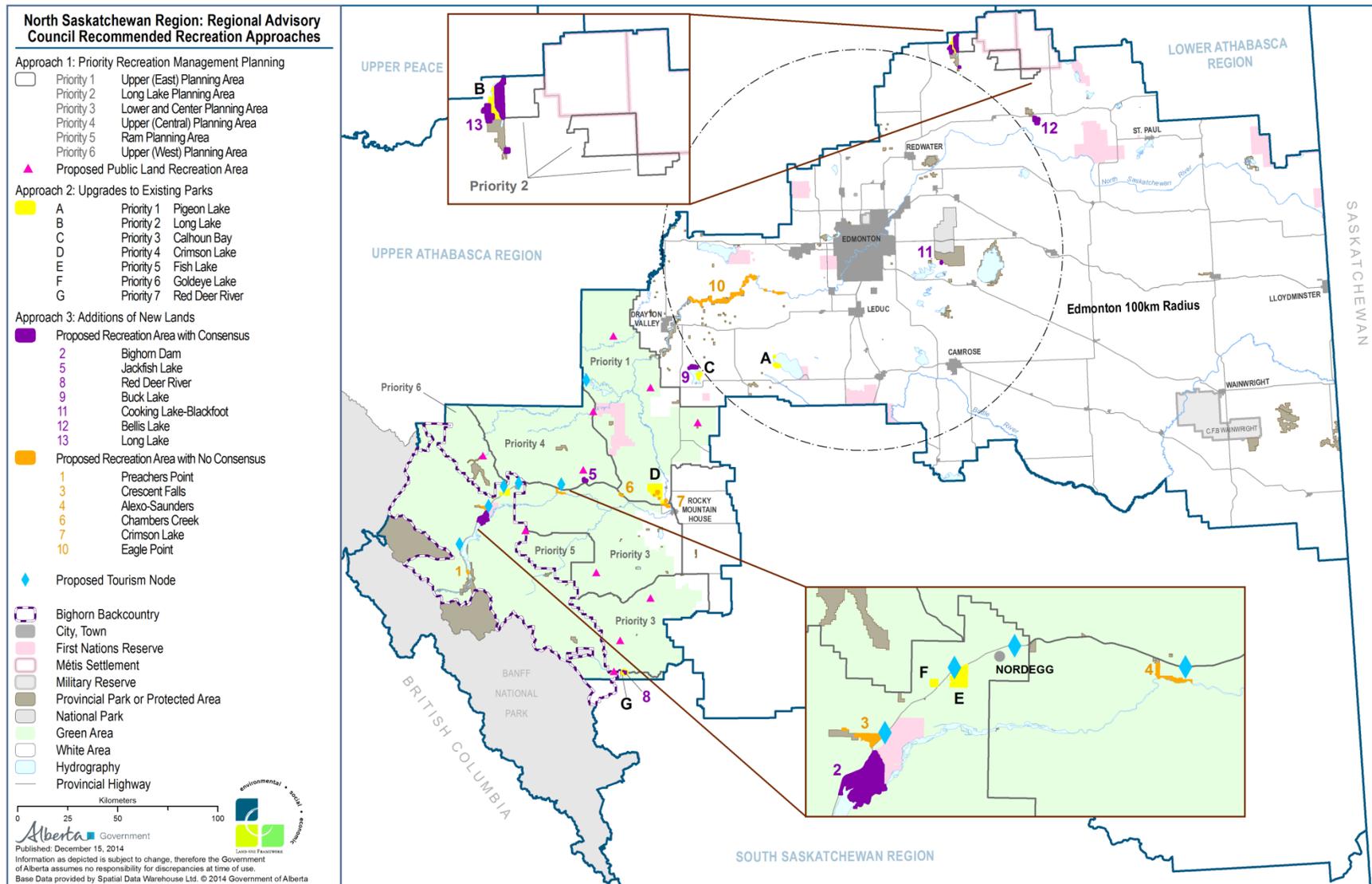
### RAC's Recommendations to Government:

- 5.1. Reach out to municipalities and industry to leverage ideas and initiatives to create recreation opportunities. Specifically look at options which allow for variations around reclamation of industrial sites that may create alternative recreational opportunities.
- 5.2. Consider alternative revenue generation opportunities based on different recreation strategies that clearly outline the service received in exchange for the fees.
- 5.3. Develop, in partnership with municipalities, a recreation/tourism plan that incorporates what the region's urban population seeks in the 100 kilometer radius of the urban corridor and how that demand might be met.
- 5.4. Partner with municipalities to prioritize and enable the development of tourism development nodes in the Green Area of the region (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan

Region; pg. 77) and support the necessary governance that would include government, aboriginal communities, municipalities and industry.

- 5.5. Build and model Crown land governance structures off of the Bighorn governance model for the entire Green Area in the region.
- 5.6. Establish a permanent and sustainable recreation enforcement program in the Green Area of the region. Provide the program with the appropriate tools by implementing the tools available under the *Public Lands Act*, and include the aspects of education, engineering and enforcement.
- 5.7. Manage the public and parks land for the intended use seamlessly as one government and streamline, where possible, the administrative and procedural rules between the two land bases.
- 5.8. Prioritize recreation management planning in the Upper (East) Planning Area and the Long Lake Planning Area first, followed by the Lower and Center Planning Area, Upper (Central) Planning Area, Ram Planning Area, and Upper (West) Planning Area.
- 5.9. Invest in upgrading and enhancing the parks infrastructure at Pigeon Lake Provincial Park, followed by Long Lake Provincial Park, Calhoun Bay Provincial Recreation Area, Crimson Lake Provincial Park, Fishlake Provincial Recreation Area, Goldeye Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area.
- 5.10. Develop the Bighorn Dam Provincial Recreation Area and expand the lands by Jackfish Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Red Deer River Provincial Recreation Area, Buck Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, Bellis Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Long Lake Provincial Park in order to increase the land base available to the provincial parks system.

Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region



## 6. Economic Development

### RAC's First Thoughts

The Terms of Reference provided for advice related to the agricultural and tourism industries, specifically agricultural land fragmentation in the White Area and tourism leases in the Green Area of the region respectively. RAC members felt there was merit in also having some deliberations on other relevant sectors in the region including forestry, coal, aggregate and oil and gas. Their deliberations and where appropriate, observations for government, are found on pages 86-90.

A common theme that arose from these discussions meriting possible further review by government focussed on developing a model and understanding of the carrying capacity for resource development, applying to all industries and sectors, and being much clearer on where government stands on such industries as surface mining (coal and aggregate) and agriculture.

## AGRICULTURE

### Background on Agriculture and Fragmentation Provided by Government

Agriculture is the second largest economy in the North Saskatchewan Region, and its largest renewable economy. Maintaining a viable agricultural land base is a key challenge in the region, and the Government of Alberta recognizes concerns by the general public with the loss of high quality agriculture land to other uses, especially surrounding the Capital Region.

Loss of agricultural land base occurs through:

- Fragmentation, which occurs when once contiguous areas become divided into separate fragments isolated from each other by other, non-agricultural land uses. It can occur within a parcel of land by access roads, oil and gas developments and/or linear infrastructure; and
- Conversion, defined as a land-use change from an agricultural use to a non-agricultural use. Conversion can be temporary (e.g., upstream oil and gas development) or permanent (e.g., country residential, urban and/or industrial development).

### Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government

The Government of Alberta will continue with the intent of the current Provincial Land Use Policy through regional planning, but will add regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of agricultural land fragmentation and conversion. This reporting will be done by land sustainability class, municipality, and by the Land-use Framework regions, thus allowing for direct comparisons across the province at various scales.

The new policy approach moves towards “expecting” rather than “encouraging” municipalities to limit fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land. Although direction provided by the Provincial Land Use Policies focuses on the maintenance of large contiguous blocks of agricultural land, the Government of Alberta also recognizes the value and importance that smaller parcels play within the agricultural economy and in supporting rural communities. It will work with and encourage landowners to voluntarily take action to maintain and preserve agricultural land.

### **Government’s Approach Presented to RAC**

The Government of Alberta is committed to a collaborative approach to address challenges related to the impact that multiple land-use demands and pressures have on the complex mix of public and private agricultural lands across the region. Maintaining an agricultural land base into the future is an important aspect to ensure continued economic success of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Government highlighted the many factors that are known to influence the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land. These factors include: the current condition of the agricultural economy; shifting demographics in the agriculture sector; technological influences in the urban and rural population; increasing land values, municipal policies and laws, limited knowledge on climate variability; and the future expansion possibilities for agricultural lands, particularly in northern Alberta, and perceived notions of food security.

In addition to recognizing the value and importance that both large contiguous blocks of land as well as smaller parcels play within the agricultural economy, government committed to the continued monitoring and reporting on of the extent of fragmentation and conversion of agriculture land to non-agricultural uses. It is expected that this published information could be used to inform not only the public on the extent of agricultural land loss over time, but to assist municipalities and other land managers in making local-level land-use planning decisions.

In terms of maintaining agricultural land in support of a diverse agricultural economy and for achieving provincial biodiversity goals, government will focus on:

- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on agricultural land loss;
- Developing and facilitating the voluntary adoption of beneficial management practices towards the continued advancement of private land stewardship; and
- Encouraging and supporting the continued stewardship and conservation of Alberta’s private working landscapes through voluntary adoption of appropriate conservation tools, such as those identified through ALSA and/or the Efficient Use of Land Implementation Tools Compendium.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

RAC deliberations on this topic focussed quickly on the heart of the issue and who can play a role in addressing the situation.

### ► What is the problem?

RAC members observed the increasing loss of agricultural land to urban development along the Highway 2 Corridor was a function of economics and the lack of government policy. The economics appeared fairly straightforward: land near urban areas is worth more for development than to retain it as efficiently-sized agriculture land parcels for crop or livestock production. In the absence of government and direct municipal land-use policy approaches concerning the shift in use of agricultural lands, it is left to the landowner and the market place to determine the most economic use of the land in question.

### ► Agriculture policy

RAC members felt strongly that there was a need for government to be up front about what role the agriculture sector plays in the province as the largest renewable industry, and as a significant contributor to the food supply in the world market. It was observed that in absence of a policy statement from government that it was not clear for land-use planners or municipalities how, in fact, they should be addressing the fragmentation and conversion of high-producing agricultural lands.

Efficiency in agricultural production was discussed, particularly given where land is being lost, namely the higher class lands along the Edmonton-Calgary Corridor. It was noted that with the advent of technology and innovation, that production on the lower class lands was rising exponentially. This triggered questions around what the actual loss to food supply was as a result of the land being lost to development. That said, it was also noted that the cost of production on these lower class lands was greater as yield rates continued to grow.

RAC explored what options were available to address the economic realities of agricultural land being converted. As noted in previous advice areas, the concept of using market-based tools was touched on, with the recognition a significant amount of work needs to be done to move such tools from concept to reality.

RAC discussed the British Columbia and Ontario land reserve concept and the international “high-rise” agriculture practice (i.e., a technology-intensive urban farming practice that involves the cultivation of crops and/or livestock in multi-story buildings in a primarily artificially augmented environment that uses artificial light sources, hydroponics (for water and nutrients) and/or aeroponics (soil-less production)). In the first instance, the view was that limited agricultural land and/or specialized very high-value crops in the British Columbia and Ontario models was the driving factor in the creation of the land reserve-type programs. The high-rise concept was not dismissed, but

viewed as an additional opportunity that could be learned from, albeit with Alberta's current land base, it was not seen as an approach that would be taken up in the immediate future, even with the Capital Region's interest in eating locally, foods grown within 100 kilometres of one's home. There was a thought to encourage urban agriculture where it could be effective.

One final option that was explored was the creation of a land oversight/advisory organization to address some of these sensitive decisions. There was not consensus with RAC members on the use of such a body at the time because of concerns around scope and property rights, but there was a view that governance on this issue was needed and further policy research and analysis was step one in moving forward on this problem.

## **ADVICE AREA: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – AGRICULTURE AND FRAGMENTATION**

Maintaining a viable agricultural land base to support growth and diversification of the agricultural industry.

### **RAC's Recommendations to Government:**

- 6.1. Develop an agriculture policy that lays out the role of agriculture, including clarity in what land inputs and food outputs are desired, and the respective land-use policies that should be considered as a result of the industry's role.
- 6.2. In combination with providing municipalities with further support for community planning decisions, consult and consider what expertise support and market tools municipalities need to make difficult choices in land development.

## **TOURISM**

### **Background on Tourism Lease Tenure on Crown Land for Recreation and Tourism Provided by Government**

The diversity of the region, in both its natural values and its culture, provide a high potential for recreational and tourism opportunities that has not been fully realized. Tourism will play an important role in developing the potential of the region by providing both the services and products that will attract a wide demographic of visitors and increase the diversity and number of users who come into the region. A competitive tourism industry depends on a sufficient supply of land where the integrity of attractive features, settings and scenery are maintained and long-term access is provided.

A Pathway to Growth: Alberta's Tourism Framework 2013-2020 identifies the vision, priorities and objectives for tourism that could diversify the province's economy with a goal

of growing revenue by 32 per cent by 2020. The industry contributes to the province's economy through job opportunities and small business activity.

Government offers a variety of services, such as the Alberta Tourism Recreational Leasing Program for those seeking to invest in and develop tourism projects in Alberta. Generally, proposals are private sector developments that offer tourism and commercial recreation opportunities to the public. The Alberta Tourism Recreational Leasing Program process is managed under the *Public Lands Act*, and applies to public land. The process is designed to handle tourism and commercial recreation development proposals on public land using a competitive process. The process ensures that commercial recreation and tourism activities occur on the most appropriate sites, and are operated in a manner that supports sustainability of economic, social, and environmental values.

Public land leases under the Public Lands Administration Regulation are provided for a maximum of 25 years in length; leases can be renewed if the term is more than half completed. For operators who do not need a facility or long-term lease (climbers, white-water rafting groups, trail riders, etc.) an access permit, trail riding permit or temporary field authorization is typically issued as a permit rather than a lease.

Proposals for recreation or tourism leasing on provincial park lands fall under the *Provincial Parks Act* and lease lengths have no legislated length. Lease tenure averages approximately 10 years and up to 25 years in length and must align with the management intent of the park.

### **Regional Plan Approach Provided by Government**

The Government of Alberta will collaborate with stakeholders to explore implementing longer-term tenure to attract tourism investors and developers.

### **Government's Approach Presented to RAC**

Alberta's Tourism Framework actively encourages entrepreneurial investment in traveller-focussed development of innovative tourism experiences, destination renewal, and new destination areas through new collaborative partnerships with regions, communities and industry stakeholders. This approach will create and enhance traveller-focussed experiences by identifying and prioritizing areas holding high tourism value.

Increasing the tenure and streamlining the leasing process has been identified by stakeholders as the best way to reduce barriers for tourism investment and encourage development opportunities that would provide destinations and tourism products that are attractive, competitively priced and accessible. Generally, tourism projects are capital intensive and long term in nature, and the current leasing structure and tenure length is thought to create restrictions that inhibit this long-term capital investment. The risk is that by maintaining the status quo, opportunities for tourism development and overall growth of tourism could be lost. This requires an ability to secure leases in a timely and efficient

manner that is long-term in tenure. An important consideration is that long-term leases could potentially be a risk to government, as the Crown is ultimately responsible for the condition and restoration of public land. If conditions are not followed there may be the risk of additional costs such as site cleanup, maintenance or removal of infrastructure, and restoration of land to original condition. Government offers a variety of services for those seeking to invest in and develop tourism projects and works with investors, developers and other stakeholders to help identify potential tourism opportunities.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

RAC's deliberations on this area were focussed predominantly on the economics of running back country tourism ventures and managing the back country tourism locales with compatible industrial or other recreational activities.

### ► **The business of tenure**

RAC members had mixed views on the length of tenure on recreation leases. While some members thought shorter term leases (10 years or less) were long enough, others noted that a longer term lease (greater than 25 years) was needed to allow for a business plan that would show investment return for the tourism operator.

The other aspect of tenure that came up was renewal and transferability of recreation leases. There was some sense by RAC that government is not always consistent in its treatment of recreation lease holders and that government has the ability to negatively impact a back country tourism investment depending on how government chooses to renew or allow for recreation lease transfers. There was also a sense that the current process to receive recreational lease approval (over three years) was too long for any serious investors to engage in due to the instability in what the outcome may or may not be.

### ► **Back country tourism needs viewscapes and wildlife**

RAC members observed that it was critical to the sustainability of a back country tourism operator to maintain what, in fact, made it a tourism destination in the first place – its viewscapes and the creatures that live within those viewscapes. It was observed that proper wildlife management was imperative for economic development of a number of tourism-based industries. This led to RAC noting that government needs to identify those back country tourism locations and tourism opportunities it wants to capitalize as part of its tourism investment strategy. By informing the market place of where and what government is looking for investment in the back country, the investment community can respond appropriately, for both land and wildlife management. Furthermore, this approach by government assumes that government will have assessed where viewscapes and industrial or recreational activity are compatible and where they are not, thus not triggering a detrimental industrial or recreational impact on a tourism investor whose base business is founded on viewscapes.

It was noted by RAC that viewsapes require “buffers” and the policy on such a concept as a viewscape buffer is not present today. For example, providing a random camping experience next to a tourism operator who utilizes the same landscape, but charges a fee would be detrimental to investors. In other words, guidelines should be developed to consider the tourism business interests on leases and help address concerns about being impacted by adjacent recreation or industrial development. Government might need to look at “buffers” around tourism leases to provide a tourism operator with the proper opportunity. Issues such as not allowing random public access to the tourism operator’s facilities, like trails and other facilities, were identified as examples of such concerns. If this buffer approach is to be done, it requires a more deliberate planning approach than by just application review and approval; as such an approval could have unintended consequences on those that were on the landscape prior and the tourism investor themselves.

► **Tourism strategy for the region**

Throughout the discussions RAC circled back to question government what the tourism strategy is for the region. They felt by understanding what government’s strategy is, they could better inform what role and requirements were needed by back country tourism operators, as well as addressing the recreational pressures nearer to major centres as discussed in the parks expansion advice. There was also some thinking that linking of a tourism strategy with other recreation systems such as the federal park systems would be advantageous.

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**ADVICE AREA: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – TOURISM LEASE TENURE ON CROWN LAND FOR RECREATION AND TOURISM**

Attracting tourism investors and developers (specific to Crown land) through longer-term tenure.

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**RAC’s Recommendations to Government:**

- 6.3. Streamline the application process for tourism and recreational leases to shorten the current timeline substantively and assess current tenure terms. Longer-term lease opportunities should be considered for tourism and recreation (up to 99 years) depending on the type of development proposed and assessed under specific criteria for lease length.
- 6.4. Develop a back country tourism strategy that links to the tourism nodes (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77), tourism and recreation lease application process and addresses where compatible activities (industrial/recreational) and

viewscales can occur, and communicate the strategy as such to the investor community.

- 6.5. Put policies and/or guidelines in place that provide clarity for the management of lands adjacent to lease lands (buffers) for tourism and recreation in relation to potential influences of growing recreational use such as random camping and development.
- 6.6. Work with municipalities to assess what tools and programs would build capacity in municipalities to take on more tourism development opportunities at the local government level, noting that public land access would be a critical infrastructure component.
- 6.7. Identify and develop a tourism strategy for the region's destination areas and "nodes" (refer to Figure 4: Map of Recreation Approaches Recommended by RAC for the North Saskatchewan Region; pg. 77).

## FORESTRY

### Background on Forestry Provided by Government

Forests in the Green Area public land are an important renewable resource for Alberta, covering more than 60 per cent of the province. They provide environmental and economic benefits to all Albertans, in addition to being a source of recreation for residents and visitors.

The forest industry contributes significantly to Alberta's economy and communities through primary and secondary manufacturing, exports, stumpage fees, jobs and industrial taxes.

Established under the *Forest Act*, the province manages forestry on public lands through a tenure system that awards limited rights to the timber. Three main tenure systems exist in Alberta: forest management agreements, timber quotas and timber permits. The scale of these tenures range in geographical size, term, tree species, obligations and volume of timber allocated. Note: all of the forest tenure types require the holder to perform reforestation.

- A forest management agreement is the most comprehensive tenure type and includes the surface rights to establish, grow and harvest timber within a defined area, but also the obligation to develop comprehensive forest management plans to ensure the long term sustainability of the forest.
- Timber quota and timber permit tenure systems are both typically volume-based, giving the right to a set volume or percentage of the annual allowable cut from an area.

Alberta manages its forests by applying the principles of sustainable forest management and responsible stewardship through existing legislation and policy. The province has a set

of mandatory performance measures that guide forest activities on Alberta Crown land. These performance measures are based on criteria and indicators developed in accordance with international standards for sustainable forest management. They take into account diverse criteria including the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of forest ecosystem health and socio-economic benefits to society.

Because the majority of forest activities in the province are conducted on Crown land, policy assurance is led by the Crown through the regulation of tenure holders' activities in the forest: forest management planning activities, forest inventories, timber extraction, re-forestation and reducing risks to Alberta's forests and communities from wildfires, insects and disease. Through these regulated activities, the Alberta forest industry contributes significantly to the health of communities and the environment.

Strategic documents such as the Alberta Forest Products Roadmap help inform the forestry aspect of regional plans.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The following comments reflect the summary of RAC's discussion and are provided to government as considerations in the drafting of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

- Note the value of forest management as a landscape planning approach that is designed to achieve biodiversity outcomes and sustain an economic stream.
- Ensure carrying capacity of the forest land base is understood and managed to minimize losses.
- Leverage integrated land management pilots as a means to promote integrated land management to manage tradeoffs between footprint management and economic development.
- There is a close relationship between forestry, oil and gas and recreation, as laid out in the biodiversity on public lands land management approaches. Challenges are posed by their different planning horizons which are driven by different lifecycles of resource development and market forces.
- Incorporate wildfire management planning into forest management initiatives.
- Forest practices play an important role in source water protection and the industry takes that role seriously.

## COAL

### Background on Coal Provided by Government

The North Saskatchewan Region currently produces approximately 65 per cent of Alberta's coal.

Bituminous metallurgical coal is essential for making steel and is found within the Foothills and Front Ranges and has seen increased investment and related activity as a result of rising

Asian demand. This type of coal may be mined by open-pit or underground techniques based on the depth at which the coal is found below the surface.

There are a series of northwest-southeast sub-bituminous thermal coal fields that straddle the central part of the region near Wabamun and Camrose.

Coal development in Alberta is guided by A Coal Development Policy for Alberta (1976) and associated coal categories that guide where development can and cannot occur. The Government of Alberta is currently assessing opportunities to update the 1976 coal policy, primarily to ensure alignment with current and future coal sector dynamics.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The following comments reflect the summary of RAC's discussion and are provided to government as considerations in the drafting of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

- Consider the effects of coal development in the private land of the White Area and agricultural land withdrawal.
- Principles of coal development from a land-use perspective overlay with aggregate development. Has government explored the policy interface on surface mining at large in today's land-use climate?
- Encourage collaboration between municipalities, government and industry to capitalize on reclamation of surface mining sites for a variety of uses, not necessarily original use, pending the changes to the social, economic and environmental concerns of the environment around the area such as recreation leveraging. Keep in mind reclamation occurs as industry moves along in development, so earlier collaboration is better.
- The review of the coal categories currently by government complicated the discussion for RAC around conservation lands in the Green Area, as there was some hesitancy around providing advice on conserving lands with known coal reserves that government may make available for potential exploration or development. There was concern, given government had just accepted applications for minor coal exploration in June 2014. Government should ensure that the review of the coal categories be completed before the final NSRP is released to provide certainty to industry and investors.

## AGGREGATE

### Background on Aggregate Provided by Government

Aggregates are essential components of infrastructure development and maintenance. Aggregate materials are found throughout the region on both private and public lands, commonly by river valleys, terraces, glacial deposition channels and potentially overlaying

coal deposits. Aggregates are extracted under the authority of a surface materials lease approved by the Crown.

Aggregate mining often requires land disturbance to extract surface materials such as sand and gravel. Government promotes the use of best practices, allocates surface materials and monitors extraction to provide opportunities for responsible development of public lands. Operators are required to develop mining plans and that include mitigation measures for environmental concerns. The land must be reclaimed to equivalent or better environmental conditions and economic productivity levels. Continued management and monitoring of extraction operations is needed as part of cumulative effects management.

Government encourages municipalities to work with industry and the provincial government to identify areas of existing and future extraction of surface materials.

## RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The following comments reflect the summary of RAC's discussion and are provided to government as considerations in the drafting of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

- Principles of aggregate development from a land-use perspective overlay with coal development.
- Aggregate development is a significant challenge for municipalities as they find themselves caught in economic and environmental challenges. Aggregate developments can trigger transportation issues, environmental concerns and recreation headaches (when misused) and many municipalities are ill equipped today to manage for such challenges.
- Municipalities could use some planning support by government to assess what they have for inventory and how best to develop that inventory. Such planning inventory could then be built into the municipal development plan.
- Municipalities and government need to collaborate on transport of aggregate due to the number of challenges and issues that arise at the local level.
- There is an opportunity to explore such regulatory tools as *Agricultural Operations Practices Act* to support government and municipalities in their development of aggregate resources. Align the allocation policy with the sensitive lands information, such as major river corridors and environmentally significant areas. It is worth noting some of the concerns on White Area conservation lands identified by government were related to their current aggregate values and the debate of whether those aggregate inventories could be drawn upon.
- As in coal site reclamation, assess opportunities more frequently for recreation development versus initial reclamation requirements.

## ENERGY (OIL AND GAS)

### Background on Oil and Gas Provided by Government

The North Saskatchewan Region contains abundant energy resources, including:

- Conventional oil and natural gas;
- Oil sands and unconventional hydrocarbons (e.g., shale gas and shale oil);
- Coal; and
- Renewable energy.

The long history of petroleum and natural gas exploration in the region has led to extensive industrial development throughout production areas. The region hosts extensive infrastructure to support petroleum and natural gas exploration, development, and transmission.

Oil sands are the largest single contributor to regional oil production. Approximately one-third of the Cold Lake Oil Sands area overlaps the North Saskatchewan Region. The Montney and Duvernay shale formations contain unconventional resources which could potentially generate gross marketable values in the billions of dollars and be a significant contributor to the Alberta economy.

Pipelines, gas plants, access roads and other features (e.g., seismic lines, well-sites and pipeline right-of-ways) are already in place in the region that may be used for future exploration and development purposes.

Increasing market access through pipeline capacity, or even by rail, will result in an increase in resource development and an overall economic benefit to the province. As the pace of unconventional development increases however, there will be greater need to monitor environmental impacts, particularly those related to water. Dealing with these growth pressures will be essential to maintaining social license to continue to develop Alberta's abundant resources.

### RAC'S DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS

The following comments reflect the summary of RAC's discussion and are provided to government as considerations in the drafting of the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

- Having clear rules regarding access to energy, and processing and transportation of energy resources is critical. Maintain physical access to freehold petroleum and natural gas resources.
- Ensure policies are in place to promote research, development and investments in renewable energy production and promote the social value of such developments.
- The energy sector can be a key partner in tourism and recreation development opportunities if they are included in planning discussions, potential liability and

ownership issues are addressed, and the opportunity for amendments to reclamation options is provided in an efficient manner. Historic sites such as Leduc Number 1 and recreation sites like Chungo can become tourist destinations.

- The oil and gas sector is innovative and has found other options to address the pipeline challenges of the day, but those new options have a significant impact on local communities, municipalities and national infrastructure, such as railways.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Government of Alberta's Land-use Classification System and Management Intents

	Primary Management Intert	Potential Tools	New Petroleum and Natural Gas	New Metallic and Industrial Minerals, Coal, and Other Crown	Surface Materials	Commercial Forestry	Grazing	Off-Highway Vehicle (on designated trails)	Hunting and Trapping	Fishing	Linear Infrastructure	Multi-use Corridors	
White Area - Settled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Settlement</li> <li>Agriculture</li> <li>Compatible Resource Development</li> </ul>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
White Area - Public Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agriculture - grazing</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Compatible Resource Development</li> </ul>	Public Land Use Zones	√	√	√	√	√	√ For grazing lease permission of lease holder is required for recreational access. Access will be managed pursuant to the Public Land Administration Regulation and its schedules.	√	√	√	√	
Green Area - Public Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Watershed Protection</li> <li>Recreation</li> <li>Compatible Resource Development</li> </ul>	Public Land Use Zones	√	√	√	√	√	√ For grazing lease permission of lease holder is required for recreational access. Access will be managed pursuant to the Public Land Administration Regulation and its schedules.	√	√	√	√	
Conservation Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Watershed protection</li> <li>Low impact recreation</li> <li>Agriculture-grazing</li> </ul>	Wilderness Area	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	
		Ecological Reserve	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	
		Wildland Provincial Parks	×	×	×	×	√	√	√	√	√	×	√
		Natural Area	×	×	×	×	√	√	√	√	√	×	√
		Heritage Rangelands	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	√ (access is by leaseholder permission)	√ (access is by leaseholder permission)	×	√
		Public Land Use Zones for Conservation	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	√	√	×	√
Recreation and Parks Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recreation and tourism</li> </ul>	Provincial Parks	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	√	×	√	
		Provincial Recreation Areas	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	√	×	√	
		Public Land Recreation Area	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	

## Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

### **Aboriginal peoples of Alberta**

Includes those First Nations and Métis communities of Alberta that hold constitutionally protected rights within the meaning of section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

### **Additionality**

Additionality refers to the idea that a conservation offset should make a measurable contribution to the achievement of an environmental outcome that would not otherwise have been achieved based on existing legal requirements or responsibilities.

### **Beneficial Management Practices**

Management practices or techniques recognized to be the most effective and practical means for meeting goals, while minimizing adverse environmental and other effects.

### **Conversion of agricultural land**

Refers to land-use change from an agricultural use to a non-agricultural use, such as urban development. Conversion may be temporary, even if long-term (e.g., upstream oil and gas development) or permanent (e.g., country residential, urban and/or industrial development).

### **Crown land**

Crown land includes all provincial and federal government lands. Provincial parks (administered under the *Provincial Parks Act*) and surface and subsurface of public land (administered under the *Public Lands Act* and the *Mines and Minerals Act*) are examples of provincial Crown land.

### **Cumulative effects**

The combined effects of past, present and reasonably foreseeable land-use activities, over time, on the environment.

### **Disturbance**

A discrete force that causes significant change in structure and/or composition through natural events such as fire, flood, wind or earthquake; mortality caused by insect or disease outbreaks, or by human caused events.

### **Ecosystems**

The interaction between organisms, including humans and their environment. Ecosystem health/integrity refers to the adequate structure and functioning of an ecosystem, as described by scientific information and societal priorities.

**Ecosystem function**

Processes that are necessary for the self-maintenance of an ecosystem such as primary production, nutrient cycling, decomposition, etc. The term is used primarily as a distinction from values.

**Environmental management framework**

An approach intended to provide clarity and transparency around management to achieve desired (ambient) environmental conditions and broaden the focus of accountability to all actors. They represent a cumulative effects management approach to meet desired environmental conditions and enhance our current environmental management system by encouraging collaboration and integration.

**Forest Management Agreement**

A large, area-based agreement between the Province of Alberta and a company. It gives the company the right to establish, grow, harvest and remove timber from a particular area of land.

**Fragmentation**

The process of reducing the size and connectivity of an eco-region or habitat. The resulting reduction in the total habitat area, the isolation of patches of habitat from each other and the increase in edge effects can affect the ability of organisms to maintain healthy populations and to survive.

**Fragmentation of agricultural land**

Occurs when once contiguous agricultural areas become divided into separate fragments isolated from each other by other, non-agricultural land uses. Fragmentation can also occur within a given agricultural parcel of land by access roads, oil and gas developments and/or linear infrastructure.

**Green Area**

The unsettled portion of the province, primarily forest lands not available for agricultural development other than grazing.

**Habitat**

The sum of the environmental conditions in which an organism lives, or the physical and biological environment that provides essential food, water and shelter for an organism.

**Headwaters**

The source and upper tributaries of a stream or river.

**Multi-use corridors**

A dedicated land area identified by Cabinet for co-location of linear infrastructure that supports critical economic linkages and is in the public interest. May include one or more of: public highways and roads, electric transmissions, high-speed rail and rail, pipelines, water management, telecommunication towers and underground fibre-optic cables and recreation trails.

**Non-point source**

Pollution from diffuse points with no point of origin.

**Point source**

Pollution that originates from one, easily identifiable cause or location.

**Private lands**

Lands privately owned by individuals, groups, companies or organizations that make decisions about how it is used or managed within existing legislation.

**Public lands**

Land owned by the provincial government, which makes decisions about how it is used and managed, including for agriculture, forestry, resource development, habitat conservation and protection of watersheds and biodiversity.

**Reclamation**

The process of reconvertng disturbed land to its former use or other productive use (equivalent land capacity).

**Recreation**

All those things that a person or group chooses to do in order to make their leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable and more personally satisfying so as to enhance social functioning, assist in individual and community development and improve quality of life.

**Recreation feature**

A biophysical, amenity, cultural or historic feature which supports or has the potential to support one or more recreation/tourism activities.

**Recreation opportunity**

The availability for a person to engage in a preferred activity within a preferred setting to obtain a desired experience.

**Riparian lands**

The areas where water and land meet and interact. They usually are distinctly different from surrounding lands because of unique soil and vegetation characteristics that are influenced by the presence of water above the ground and below the surface.

**Shared stewardship**

An ethic whereby citizens, industry, communities and governments work together to responsibly care for and manage natural resources and the environment.

**Subsurface**

Subsurface is used to describe the resources (e.g., oil and gas, coal, metallic and industrial minerals such as limestone) identified in the *Mines and Minerals Act*. It also refers to titles, rights and activities to access those resources below the ground. Subsurface resources do not include sand and gravel as these are considered surface materials.

**Surface**

Resources, activities and development that occur on the land (e.g., sand, gravel, topsoil, roads and buildings). In land ownership, surface title includes the land and the space above and any sand, gravel, peat, clay or other substances that can be excavated through surface activities. Land titles usually carry a mineral reservation, which excludes subsurface resources; mineral titles for those resources are usually granted separately.

**Tourism**

Marketing of the enjoyable and other features of a travel destination and provision of facilities and services for the pleasure of travelers (tourists).

**Tourism development nodes**

Areas on public, municipal and private lands that have been identified through planning as comprising a cluster of natural and built features, scenery and settings providing unique opportunities for potential recreation and tourism development. Tourism nodes will be positioned through a collaborative process with the support of the associated land manager and will be utilized to focus potential tourism investment and infrastructure development.

**Watershed**

All lands enclosed by a continuous hydrologic-surface drainage divide and lying upslope from a specified point on a stream.

**Wetlands**

Wetlands are land saturated with water long enough to promote formation of water altered soils, growth of water tolerant vegetation and various kinds of biological activity that are adapted to the wet environment. Wetlands are highly diverse, productive ecosystems that provide a host of ecological services and form an integral component of Alberta's diverse landscapes. They play an important role in sustaining healthy watersheds by protecting

water quality, providing water storage and infiltration, providing habitat for wildlife, fish and plants and sustaining biodiversity. Alberta is home to a rich and varied array of wetland ecosystems, including bogs, fens, marshes, swamps and shallow open water wetlands.

**White Area**

The settled portion of the province.