

Alberta Wetland Policy Implementation Fact Sheet Agriculture

This Fact Sheet provides an overview on implementation of the Alberta Wetland Policy (the Policy) for agricultural producers.

Wetland Policy Background and Development

The Government of Alberta announced a new Wetland Policy for the province in the fall of 2013. 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 the economy.

The Policy represents a significant shift in wetland management and considers not only the physical area of a wetland but also the relative value it provides. Relative wetland value is based on the ability to store and supply water, improve water quality, provide habitat for wetland species, human uses, and the regional abundance of wetlands on the landscape.

Avoidance of any impact to wetlands is always the first priority and where this is not possible minimization of wetland impacts is the second priority. If permanent loss of all or a portion of a wetland is incurred because it cannot be avoided (and is approved), then wetland replacement is required for the portion that is lost.

Replacement requirements are established on the basis of wetland area lost and the relative value of that area.

For additional information, please visit:

- [Alberta Wetland Policy Implementation](#)

Why was the Policy developed?

A new Wetland Policy was required since Alberta has experienced ongoing loss of wetlands throughout the province. It is estimated that Alberta has lost two thirds of the wetlands in the White (Settled) Area of the province. Losses in the Green Area (Crown-owned land) are also occurring. Causes of loss include: urban expansion, agriculture, forestry, oil and gas development, and mining (Alberta Wetland Policy, 2013).

This is a go-forward policy in that wetlands approved to be drained in the past will not be subject to replacement requirements.

What value do wetlands provide?

Wetlands provide many critical functions and benefits, such as water filtration, groundwater recharge, drought and flood reduction, biodiversity support, and opportunities for tourism, boating, bird watching, nature photography, hunting and fishing.

When will the Policy be implemented?

Starting July 4, 2016, the Policy and its associated tools and processes must be applied to any activities disturbing wetland anywhere in Alberta (excluding federal lands). Wetland is defined by the Alberta Wetland Classification System.

How will the Policy impact agricultural landowners?

Landowners are able to develop their privately held land however they wish, provided they comply with local, provincial and federal legislation and policies.

All water in Alberta is managed by the Crown and therefore is under provincial jurisdiction. Under the *Water Act* (Section 36), all activities impacting a water body require an Approval, including ephemeral water bodies (a shallow water body that temporarily contains water after spring snowmelt or a heavy rainfall and typically dries up within a matter of days to weeks). Agricultural activities may include infilling, modifications, alterations, and drainage (surface ditches, buried tile, buried slotted pipes) as well as maintenance thereof.

Although ephemeral water bodies are not subject to a replacement requirement under the Policy, avoidance and minimization of impacts to these water bodies are still expected.

Alteration or occupation of the bed and/or shore of a Crown-owned water body requires a regulatory disposition under the *Public Lands Act* prior to the activity.

These legislated requirements existed prior to implementation of the Policy and remain unchanged. Activities in or near a wetland may also be subject to the Alberta Wetland Policy. Compliance with the *Water Act* and *Public Lands Act* is managed through legislated compliance programs.

It is the landowner's responsibility to ensure all regulatory requirements are met prior to commencing work in or near a wetland; approval officers will work with landowners to

ensure all applicable regulatory requirements are considered. For site specific questions.

- [Contact us](#)

Restoration

Wetland restoration on private land is voluntary; landowner interests will not be compromised by the wetland replacement program. The Government of Alberta's priority is to replace wetlands near the point of original wetland loss.

Ducks Unlimited will remain the primary replacement agent for the immediate future while Alberta Environment and Parks establishes an approach to the delivery of wetland replacement in Alberta. It is anticipated that Municipalities, Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, consultants, and other organizations will be able to deliver the wetland replacement service once a new system has been established.

Wetland Stewardship

Wetland stewardship is recognized in the Policy as an important component of effective wetland management. The Government of Alberta and its partners will continue to work with landowners to advance wetland stewardship through initiatives including education and awareness, voluntary programs, and/or incentives to encourage wetland conservation, restoration, and protection.

Alberta Environment and Parks is currently working with stakeholders to explore opportunities for enhanced wetland stewardship, including the creation of a wetland banking program. Grants are available from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry for restoring wetlands. A list of available programs can be found at:

- [Growing Forward 2](#)