
**TALKING WITH ALBERTANS ABOUT A NEW WETLAND
POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:**

WHAT WE HEARD SUMMARY

Prepared for:

THE ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

Alberta Water Council Wetland Policy Project Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wetland Policy Project Team (“WPPT”) was asked by the Alberta Water Council (“the Council”) to obtain stakeholder input on issues relating to a recommended Alberta Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan. Stakeholder perspectives were gathered via workbook submissions, a series of public workshops, an open invitation to provide submissions, and discussions with First Nations and Métis groups. Workshop design and facilitation, input, analysis and reporting were carried out by an independent consultant, IMI Strategics.

Five hundred and ninety useable workbooks were received during the period of mid-summer to mid-October 2007. As well, 219 individuals participated in seven workshops held across Alberta in the fall of 2007. Responses have been broadly categorized as having been received from community, industry or government members/representatives. The WPPT also received 21 written submissions from organizations that chose to contribute their input to the consultation process through a collective contribution, representing input from across their sector or organization. The GoA also provided a single coordinated response.

The WPPT hosted a series of five meetings with Aboriginal representatives between February and April 2006 in three different communities. Discussions included representatives of each of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8, and the Métis Nation of Alberta. These discussions identified many areas of similarity with other consultation input. They also raised other concerns including the need for congruent federal and provincial policies; protecting Treaty rights; incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge; the duty to consult with First Nations; and ensuring aboriginal community views and interests are included in the development review and approval process.

In general, respondents agreed that wetland conservation was important and should be considered in land-use planning and decision-making. As well, there was general agreement that a new Wetland Policy should apply to all areas of the province, however, most respondents were concerned with how the policy would be tailored to reflect the differences in geography between the Green and White Areas. There was also general agreement that the policy goal should be to maintain or increase wetland area, however, there were concerns expressed regarding the feasibility and desirability of *increasing* wetland area. Respondents emphasized the need to have tools, which could include regulation, objectives, incentives and education, to achieve this goal. Most respondents strongly agreed with the proposal that the Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan be integrated into existing legislation, policies and programs of the government.

There was general support for applying the proposed mitigation approach across the province and to all proponents. However, participants from all categories indicated that they felt the proposed approach would only be effective if there were appropriate tools associated with it. There was general support that, in the absence of sufficient knowledge on how to measure and restore wetland function, using a science-based ratio of wetland area restored to wetland area lost was appropriate. Opinion differed as to what the appropriate ratio should be. Opinion was almost evenly divided as to whether waterbodies constructed primarily for stormwater management and wastewater treatment should be considered as one option for compensation for wetland loss if they can mimic at least some natural wetland function.

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Generally, there was agreement that ephemeral waterbodies should be recognized as wetlands and that they should be included in the wetland mitigation approach proposed for the new policy. Support was strongest in community respondents and weaker in government and industry respondents. However, there was strong agreement that education and awareness programs and initiatives should also be developed to enhance the stewardship of ephemeral waterbodies.

Key messages from the consultations as to what is necessary to make the policy successful include:

1. Develop a better understanding of wetland function and benefits; the relationship between wetland area and function; the costs and benefits of maintaining or increasing wetlands on the landscape; and their value in comparison to other land uses and values.
2. Direct effort into looking at how we can better manage wetlands including ensuring we have shared definitions and classification tools; sound science to support the policy and its implementation; the tools and expertise required (e.g. inventories, health assessment techniques, education and awareness, best management practices/ codes of practice, reclamation techniques, etc.) for a long-term, adaptive management approach with built in continuous improvement.
3. Make the policy flexible and sensitive to regional issues while still fair with a consistent regulatory approach. Clarify and understand the financial and legal implications of the policy and its implementation including the burden on proponents, municipalities and landowners.
4. Wetland conservation cannot occur in isolation of other land and water initiatives. Ensure integration with other federal, provincial and local policies, legislation and programs.
5. Support implementation and achievement of the policy by using a collaborative and coordinated approach and by adequately resourcing the infrastructure required to carry out implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The *Wetland Policy Project Team* ("WPPT") was asked by the Alberta Water Council ("the Council") to obtain stakeholder input on issues relating to the development of a new Alberta Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan. The purpose of the consultation was to determine what stakeholders have to say about wetlands in order to ensure that the WPPT can reflect their views in its work.

Stakeholder perspectives were gathered via workbook submissions, a series of public workshops, an open invitation to provide submissions, and discussions with First Nations and Métis groups.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALBERTANS TO PARTICIPATE

Workbook Submissions

The WPPT provided a Wetland Consultation Workbook ("the workbook") to Albertans online and in hard copy at various provincial and municipal venues across the province. A total of 590 useable workbooks were received during the period of mid-summer to mid-October 2007. Among these, 197 stakeholders identified themselves as community members; 83 identified themselves as government representatives; and 145 identified themselves as having an industry perspective. The remaining 195 respondents did not categorize their perspective.

Workshop Participation

Interested stakeholders identified by the WPPT were invited by letter to provide their input on the workbook through a series of workshops held across Alberta in the fall of 2007. Two hundred and nineteen individuals participated in seven workshops held in Bonnyville, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie. Of those, 60 identified themselves as members of the community, 69 identified themselves as government representatives, and 88 identified themselves as having an industry perspective.

Each workshop employed two data collection techniques. First, small-group discussions dealt with five questions that had been identified previously by the WPPT on issues where it was felt that input was needed to clarify, inform, and guide the content and intent of the a new recommended wetland policy. This interactive technique provided an opportunity to garner an understanding of the rationale behind viewpoints expressed by stakeholders in attendance.

Second, at the end of each workshop all participants were asked to complete an individual comment form to rate their personal agreement on the same five questions. A sixth question that rated the importance of conservation to them as an individual was included in the comment form but was not addressed in the small-group discussion component of the workshops. The comment form gave each participant an equal opportunity to express their personal views in addition to providing their input into the group discussions.

The five questions which provided the basis for the workshop discussion were:

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- Should the policy goal of the GoA be to maintain or increase wetland area? (Corresponds to Section 3 of the workbook).
- Should a new wetland policy apply to all areas of Alberta including both the Green and White Areas? (Corresponds to Section 2 of the workbook).
- Should ephemeral waterbodies be recognized as wetlands in Alberta? (Corresponds to Section 5, #2 in the workbook).
- Will the proposed wetland mitigation approach effectively contribute to wetland conservation in Alberta? (Corresponds to Section 5, #1 in the workbook).
- Is wetland restoration an important and effective tool for ensuring the recommended wetland policy goal is achieved? (Corresponds to Section 5, #3 in the workbook).

Independent Written Submissions

The WPPT received 21 written submissions from organizations that chose to contribute their input to the Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan consultation process through a collective contribution, representing input from across their sector or organization. Submissions were received in a number of formats, including letters, reports, emails, and partial or complete workbooks. Of the submissions received, 10 identified themselves as representing industry, eight were from the community, and two were received from municipal governments. The GoA also made a single coordinated response.

Because the format of written submissions varied considerably and many focused on only one or a subset of the issues, the responses were summarized individually by perspective category, since it was not possible to create a valid analysis across all the diverse submissions. The written submission comments were reviewed in relation to the workbook and workshop summary reports. Places where written submissions were not aligned with workshop and workbook results are noted in the text.

The above processes, including the workshop design and facilitation, input analysis and reporting, were carried out by an independent consultant, IMI Strategics.

Aboriginal Discussions

The WPPT hosted a series of meetings with Aboriginal representatives to gather their input on the a recommended Provincial Wetland Policy and its Implementation Plan. Five meetings were led by Henry Arcand, an independent consultant contracted by Alberta Environment. Meetings were held between February and April 2006 in three different communities, with discussions including representatives of each of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8, and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

SUMMING UP THE CONSULTATION INPUT

Feedback gathered from each of the processes described above has been combined and summarized in this report. Because many of the responses received by the WPPT followed the organization of the workbook, this report follows that structure and presents consultation input by workbook question.

Section 1 – Finding the Right Balance

“Wetland conservation is important to me, even if it means foregoing other land use activities in a particular area”

Overall, 90% of workbook respondents and 86% of workshop participants agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that conservation was important to them, even if it meant foregoing other land-use activities. The need to balance conservation of wetlands with other land-uses was repeated many times in responses to this question and was the most common comment of both those who agreed and disagreed with the statement.

Some respondents who agreed with the above statement identified wetland inventories and mapping as being necessary to support land-use decisions, which would in turn need to be supported by appropriately trained provincial and municipal staff and legislation. The need for accountability at the provincial and municipal government levels to support, monitor and enforce any proposed wetland policy was also noted.

Some participants who disagreed with the statement were concerned the policy had more to do with penalties than conservation, and that it would have a negative economic impact. Other concerns were related to our ability to understand and measure the costs and benefits of wetland conservation.

“Like other land uses and values, the costs and benefits of wetland conservation should be a consideration in land-use planning and decision-making.”

Eighty-three percent of workbook respondents who answered this question agreed that the costs and benefits of wetland conservation should be considered in land-use planning and decision-making. This question was not asked at the workshops. Among those who supported this statement, some recognized the importance of wetlands in providing ecological benefits and stated that consideration of wetlands in decision-making and planning was long overdue. A number of supportive respondents mentioned that it would be less expensive to protect wetlands now compared to trying to replace them in the future at a greater cost and reduced functionality.

Among those who disagreed with the statement, some noted that wetland conservation should not take priority over other land-use activities and that wetlands cannot be managed in isolation. Some respondents said they felt the statement was imbalanced and would limit future economic and social benefits at the expense of conservation. Respondents were also concerned that the recommended Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan would duplicate existing policy and regulations in the Green Area. Finally, it was suggested that there should be a method of accounting and financially compensating for development losses suffered by landowners if a new recommended wetland policy was implemented.

Section 2 – A Policy for the Entire Province

“A new Wetland Policy should apply to all areas of Alberta including both the Green and White Areas”

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This question was asked in the workbook and at the workshops. Overall, 93% of workbook respondents who answered this question agreed that a new wetland policy should include both the Green and White Areas, with three-quarters strongly agreeing and 18% somewhat agreeing. Results of the workshops were similar, where 91% of participants agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with the statement. Some of those who supported including both the Green and White Areas in a new policy stated they felt it would be more consistent and fair when protecting and restoring wetlands across the province. Some also felt it would aid proponents in understanding what is required of them, since the same policy would apply in both parts of the province. Some said that including the Green Area was of particular importance due to the development pressures it is currently experiencing.

Some of those who were opposed to including the Green Area were concerned that it is not yet technically feasible to restore peatlands since they take thousands of years to develop naturally. As well, some mentioned that practices that are currently in place in the White Area may be prohibitive to industry in the Green Area and that there is a lack of area available for mitigation. Finally, some respondents felt there was no evidence to suggest there was a problem with wetland loss in the Green Area.

Perhaps most importantly, both respondents who supported and those who opposed the above statement were concerned about how the policy would be tailored to reflect the differences in geography between the Green and White Areas. Respondents noted that the two areas had different types of wetlands, different development pressures, and varying restoration and reclamation challenges. Many respondents, both those agreeing and those disagreeing with the statement, felt that the tools and practices would need to be different in each Area to achieve successful implementation of the policy.

Section 3 – Setting a New Provincial Goal

“The Government of Alberta will maintain or increase wetland area (and hence wetland functions) in Alberta to maintain the ecological, social and economic benefits that wetlands provide. To achieve this goal, the Government of Alberta will work with Albertans to proactively protect, conserve and encourage the restoration of wetlands, thereby helping to ensure healthy watersheds that provide safe and secure drinking water supplies, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.”

Overall, 90% of workbook respondents agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with the proposed policy goal. The workshop participants were asked an abbreviated version of the question and 90% of them also agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that the policy goal should be to maintain or increase wetland area. Some respondents who supported the goal did not like the word *increase* in the proposed new policy because they felt it implied that created wetlands could adequately replace lost natural wetlands. These same respondents felt that the policy goal should instead emphasize the restoration of natural wetlands and the maintenance of wetland function.

Some of those who raised cautions about the goal indicated that a regional approach should be taken that would account for varying conservation urgencies. In particular, some respondents felt the policy was being driven by wetland issues in the prairie region of the province and that the policy was not applicable in the Green Area. Other respondents who did not support the proposed policy goal noted that most of the present damage to wetlands occurred through previous government policy and, therefore, the Province should not be passing the costs of that damage on to present-day industry. Many respondents, both for and against the goal, indicted the need for tools to support the policy goal, such as an inventory, to address a benchmark and a better understanding of wetland function.

It should also be noted that there was some confusion in both the workbooks and at the workshops regarding the scale at which the policy would be implemented. Some participants thought it would be implemented at a watershed scale, others within biogeographical regions (i.e. boreal, aspen-parkland, mountain, etc.), while still others understood that it would be implemented at the provincial scale.

“How do you think maintaining or increasing wetlands can be achieved in Alberta?”

Workbook respondents emphasized the tools that would be needed to achieve the policy goal. These tools included various legislative and regulatory measures such as increased enforcement, restrictions on ATV use, and assorted municipal and provincial development regulations. Suggested fiscal tools included incentives to protect wetlands, and assorted financial penalties for those who drain or damage wetlands. Finally, a number of education and awareness tools were brought forward including greater industry-government-community cooperation, more data and information collection, and the need for more public education. These types of tools are repeated in the independent submissions. This question was not asked of workshop participants.

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“What do you suggest as an alternative goal to achieve wetland conservation in Alberta?”

Responses to this question were very similar to the previous question's answers. This question was not asked of workshop participants. Most of the rephrased goals altered the words *maintain* or *increase*. Some respondents felt the goal should be to *maintain*, since they felt an increased wetland area was not desirable. Others wanted the goal to be to *maintain and/or increase*, which would allow for increase in some areas of the province and maintenance in the others. Still other respondents felt those words should be removed altogether. Finally, another group of respondents felt that the policy should focus on maintaining wetland function without reference to area.

Section 4 – Setting Outcomes to Achieve the Goal

Outcome #1 – Creating Awareness

“Albertans are aware of, and value, the functions and benefits that wetlands and wetland riparian areas provide”

Overall, this outcome was strongly supported. Ninety-six percent of workbook respondents agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with the proposed outcome. Seventy five percent strongly agreed with the outcome. However, some felt that the end goal of education and awareness should be that Albertans are able to make informed decisions about wetland trade-offs. This question was not asked at the workshops.

Most of the comments regarding this outcome stated the groups and organizations they felt should be targeted for increased education and awareness. Commonly cited groups include municipal governments, proponents, industry professionals, volunteer groups, and students.

Outcome #2 – Improving Our Knowledge

“Albertans have the knowledge to effectively protect, conserve, and restore wetlands”

This outcome was also strongly supported. Ninety-two percent of workbook respondents agreed with the proposed outcome, with 72% strongly supporting improving our knowledge. This question was not asked at the workshops. Some comments from those who agreed with the statement articulated the types of research they would like to see. These included mapping and classification work, monitoring and evaluation research, and new tools that would enable landowners to value and care for the wetlands on their property. Finally, some respondents indicated that although improving our knowledge was important, it was more important to turn the data into useful, practical information that is widely available and understandable. Those who disagreed with the outcome often said they felt we had enough information to act and felt that doing more research could stall on-the-ground progress.

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Outcome #3 – Recommending Wetland Objectives

“Recommendations for wetland protection, conservation and restoration are made for watersheds across Alberta”

This outcome was strongly supported by workbook respondents. Ninety-two percent of those who answered this question (either strongly or somewhat) agreed with the outcome. Seventy-one percent of respondents strongly supported it. This question was not asked at the workshops.

Comments received on this outcome were similar regardless of whether participants were supportive of the outcome or not. Respondents were concerned that Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) and other volunteer groups lack the necessary capacity to achieve this outcome, particularly in the areas of funding, expertise, and authority. Many respondents felt WPACs would be too slow, inconsistent, would compromise too readily in order to reach consensus, or worked at an inappropriate scale to undertake this work. Many of these respondents suggested that the GOA should work with these organizations to provide oversight, enforcement, funding, goals, standards, and integrated legislation. Some respondents suggested the provincial government should undertake this work alone, while others strongly disagreed and felt that setting such objectives required broad participation from the community including industry, landowners, environmental groups, indigenous groups, and others. They supported WPACs or other organizations undertaking this work, but only with additional funding, technical expertise, and a method that ensures consistency across the province.

Outcome #4 – Using Incentives

“Where appropriate, incentives to promote wetland protection, conservation, and restoration are available, while disincentives to these activities are removed”

This outcome was strongly supported by workbook respondents. Overall, 96% of those who answered this question agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with the objective. Seventy-four percent of respondents strongly agreed. This question was not asked at the workshops.

All respondent groups were generally supportive of using incentives to protect wetlands. The few respondents who raised concerns noted that the process needed to be bureaucratically efficient and accessible. Some industry and community respondents stated that current provincial and municipal programs that promote wetland drainage should be terminated.

Community respondents were generally in favor of combining incentive programs with strict consequences and penalties backed by regulation and enforcement. Industry respondents sometimes stated they felt any incentives developed should not be punitive in nature. Both community and industry respondents were supportive of landowners being financially compensated for performing environmentally sustainable behaviours that benefit society. Industry respondents noted the need for developing Best Management Practices relating to wetlands. Government respondents were most likely

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to suggest employing a suite of tools, including education, incentives, penalties and others, instead of focusing on only incentives and disincentives.

Outcome # 5 – Coordinating Activities

“The Wetland Policy and Implementation Plan is successfully integrated into the legislation, policies, and programs of the Government of Alberta and its partners”

This outcome was supported by workbook responses. Overall, 94% of workbook respondents who answered this question supported (either strongly or somewhat) integrating wetland activities with other provincial government initiatives. Most respondents (74%) strongly agreed with the proposed outcome. This question was not asked at the workshops.

Industry, government, and community respondents all noted problems with the current system including inconsistent government regulation, conflicting legislation and policies, inconsistent application and enforcement of policies and regulations, and poor government coordination and collaboration. They often cited them as reasons for the new policy to be integrated and coordinated and as reasons for greater collaboration. Many respondents suggested policies that should be carefully coordinated with a new Wetland Policy. Common suggestions included the Land Use Framework, Integrated Watershed Management Planning Process, and the Water for Life strategy.

Those who disagreed with the outcome were likely to say it was too vague or simplistic to agree with. They wanted to know which policies, regulations and programs would be coordinated, and what steps would be taken to achieve integration. Others were concerned about creating too much red tape.

Section 5 – Tools and Approaches for Achieving the Policy

#1 – The Wetland Mitigation Approach

“The proposed Wetland Mitigation Approach will effectively contribute to wetland conservation in Alberta”

Overall, 89% of workbook and 90% of workshop participants felt the proposed mitigation approach would contribute to wetland conservation in Alberta. However, some community respondents felt the mitigation approach provided big business with the opportunity to write off wetland compensation as a cost of doing business without having to avoid or minimize losses. Industry respondents were concerned about how the approach would be employed efficiently throughout the province, particularly in the Green Area.

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Generally, participants from all categories indicated that they felt the proposed Mitigation Approach would be effective only if there were appropriate tools associated with it. Suggestions for improving the approach included:

- Ensure incentives are in place to encourage avoidance
- Prioritize protected wetland areas
- Develop a provincial wetland & water inventory
- Ensure alternatives are in place in regions with little upland, but lots of wetland area since avoidance is very difficult in these areas
- Improve research on the effectiveness of various mitigation techniques
- Improve our ability to assess impacts of proposed activities
- Improve collaboration
- Ensure a watershed management approach is undertaken
- Improve our ability to measure wetland function
- Provide a watchdog and/or broker for compensation

“The proposed Wetland Mitigation Approach should be applied throughout the province”

This question was not asked at the workshops. Most workbook respondents (90%) indicated they supported (either strongly or somewhat) applying the Wetland Mitigation Approach across the entire province. Seventy percent strongly supported this approach. Independent submissions that discussed this topic were generally focused on how the Wetland Mitigation Approach would be applied in the Green Area. In particular, the issue of how peatlands could be restored using compensation funds when they take thousands of years to develop was of concern. The need for flexibility in the tools to handle the wide variety of situations in the province was raised by many respondents.

“The proposed Wetland Mitigation Approach should be applied to all proponents”

Overall, 90% of workbook respondents agreed that the approach should be applied to all proponents. Seventy-one percent strongly agreed. This question was not asked of workshop participants. Comments received on this topic were mainly focused on possible groups and projects to be excluded from the Wetland Mitigation Approach. Commonly suggested exclusions included projects involving the public good, projects with temporary or short-term impacts, small operators, and private landowners.

“Until we know how to measure and restore wetland function, using a science-based ratio of wetland area restored to wetland area lost is appropriate”

This question was not asked of workshop participants. Eighty percent of workbook respondents agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that it was appropriate to use a science-based ratio; 46% strongly agreed. The most frequent comment provided by respondents was that the area or size of restoration is less important than restoring wetland function and quality. Those who disagreed with the statement indicated that the ratio is too high, or that it was not supported by science and a ratio of 1:1 was more appropriate. Those who supported the statement occasionally indicated the compensation ratio was not high enough and that enough emphasis had not been placed on avoidance. They felt a higher ratio would act as an effective deterrent.

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“Waterbodies constructed primarily for stormwater management and wastewater treatment should be considered as one option for compensation for wetland loss if they can mimic at least some natural wetland function”

Support for this approach was divided. Overall, 49% of workbook respondents felt that constructed waterbodies should be considered as a compensation option if they had some wetland function. Thirty-four percent strongly agreed. This question was not asked of workshop participants. Seven independent submissions addressed this particular topic – two agreed that constructed wetlands should be considered, while five disagreed.

Some of those who disagreed with the statement either strongly opposed the practice altogether or were highly skeptical of the ability of stormwater management waterbodies to take on wetland functions in any fashion. More moderate comments indicated this practice might be acceptable for some constructed wetlands if science could prove they were providing some wetland functions.

For those who supported the statement, there was general agreement that constructed wetlands with a greater degree of wetland functionality should account for a greater portion of compensation than those with little or no functionality. Moderate supporters indicated using constructed wetlands as compensation should be restricted (for example, as a temporary measure, on a trial basis, or with increased monitoring requirements).

#2 – Recognizing the Role of Ephemeral Waterbodies

“Ephemeral waterbodies should be recognized as wetlands in Alberta”

Overall, 77% of workbook respondents who answered this question agreed that ephemeral waterbodies should be recognized as wetlands. Of those who agreed with the workbook statement, 53% strongly agreed. This question was also asked at the workshops where 62% of participants agreed with the statement, and 32% strongly agreed. Both the workshop results and workbooks indicated that support for this statement is strongest in community respondents. Independent submissions were also notably split, with slightly more (8 vs. 6) suggesting ephemerals should not be recognized as wetlands in Alberta.

Those who agreed with recognizing ephemerals as wetlands often cited the need for a way to protect the ecological functions ephemerals provide and were concerned that excluding them would leave them without any mechanism for protection. As well, supporters of recognizing ephemerals as wetlands sometimes suggested that their importance is increasing as an effect of climate change, and thus they should be recognized so they can be considered in planning and decision-making. Some who supported recognizing ephemerals felt they should have a different protection mechanism such as education, incentives, beneficial management practices or other tools.

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Those who disagreed with recognizing ephemerals as wetlands cited problems with administering the policy or trying to adhere to it, since ephemerals are transitory by nature and can be difficult to recognize on the landscape. This concern was often greater for Green Areas of the province, where there is generally more water on the landscape. They often suggested including ephemerals would result in a great deal of uncertainty regarding the administration of the policy on the parts of government and proponents. Others suggested it was “premature” to be considering this question, and that it ought to be considered after the policy is implemented to determine if it could be effectively applied. Finally, some of those who disagreed said they felt the definition of an ephemeral was unclear and that a decision should not be made until the difference between a waterbody, wetland, and different classes of wetlands, was clearly understood.

“Ephemeral waterbodies should be included in the Wetland Mitigation Approach proposed in the new Wetland Policy for Alberta. This would require compensation for loss of area”

This question was not asked at the workshops. Overall, 69% of workbook respondents who answered this question agreed that ephemerals should be included in the mitigation approach. Of those who agreed, 45% strongly agreed. Comments relating to this question were very similar to responses to the previous question. Those who did not support including ephemerals were concerned about the practicalities of including them, since identifying them is difficult on the ground. Those who supported including ephemerals were concerned about the lack of a mechanism to protect them and ensure they are considered in decision-making processes. Some of those who supported including ephemerals felt the Mitigation Approach should have some flexibility when it came to the tools for protecting them. Some who did not support including ephemerals felt other tools would be better suited for protecting ephemerals than the Mitigation Approach.

“Education and awareness programs and initiatives should be developed to encourage the conservation of ephemeral waterbodies”

Overall, 90% of workbook respondents who answered this question agreed with developing education and awareness programs on ephemerals; 70% strongly agreed. This question was not asked at the workshops. Those who agreed with the statement often cited a lack of existing knowledge about ephemerals and difficulties encountered by officials in accurately identifying them on the landscape. Many comments suggested to whom the education and awareness programs should be directed. Common education targets included government officials, agricultural producers, developers, municipal planners, field staff, students and the public. Others suggested the focus of educational messages should be explaining their functional contributions to watershed health and identify management practices that can protect them. Those who disagreed often suggested the definition of an ephemeral should be clarified before any education is undertaken.

3 – Wetland Restoration

“Wetland restoration is an important and effective tool for ensuring the new Wetland Policy Goal is achieved”

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Overall, 93% of workbook respondents felt that restoration is an effective tool for ensuring the new policy goal is achieved. The number of supportive participants was the same at the workshops (93%). Those in agreement generally indicated that the Mitigation Approach alone is not enough and emphasized the importance of an accompanying education component and other tools. Those in agreement also emphasized that effective restoration will take considerable time and planning, which may be difficult to accomplish in the short term. The need for wetland mapping and better information was often mentioned. Finally, some supporters felt that avoidance should be emphasized over restoration, generally, in the new policy. They were concerned that proponents would view financial compensation as the “easy way out.”

Many respondents who supported using wetland restoration as a way of achieving the new policy goal suggested characteristics that would be necessary for it to be effective. These included: having timelines, restoring the same wetland type, coordinating with watershed plans, recognizing regional differences, adapting as science improves, and ensuring restorations are located near the lost or degraded wetland. The need for wetland function, rather than area, to be emphasized was also noted in many supporters' comments.

Those who disagreed with wetland restoration suggested that scientific limitations for restoration would make the approach impractical in the Green Area of the province. Others felt a dearth of information and expertise in wetland restoration would render the approach ineffective. Some also questioned the use of particular ratios, since they felt there was not enough information to support using them.

First Nations and Métis Discussions

Discussions with First Nations and Métis groups saw many areas of similarity with other consultation input, particularly with the need for increased education and awareness; better knowledge around wetland management techniques; taking a shared governance and collaborative approach; and ensuring partners have the capacity to participate.

Some concerns not captured elsewhere included the need for congruent federal and provincial policies (provincial policies may impact downstream reserves and other lands under federal jurisdiction); protecting Treaty rights (i.e. access to wetlands for traditional activities like hunting, fishing, gathering); incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge; the duty to consult with First Nations; and ensuring aboriginal community views and interests are included in the development review and approval process.

Summary

In addition to the questions previously discussed, a number of key messages related to what is needed to make a wetland policy successful emerged from the consultation process including:

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1. Develop a better understanding of wetland function and benefits; the relationship between wetland area and function; the costs and benefits of maintaining or increasing wetlands on the landscape; and their value in comparison to other land uses and values.
2. Direct effort into looking at how we can better manage wetlands including ensuring we have shared definitions and classification tools; sound science to support the policy and its implementation; the tools and expertise required (e.g. inventories, health assessment techniques, education and awareness, best management practices/ codes of practice, reclamation techniques, etc.) for a long-term, adaptive management approach with built-in continuous improvement.
3. Make the policy flexible and sensitive to regional issues while still fair with a consistent regulatory approach. Clarify and understand the financial and legal implications of the policy and its implementation including the burden on proponents, municipalities and landowners.
4. Wetland conservation cannot occur in isolation of other land and water initiatives. Ensure integration with other federal, provincial and local policies, legislation and programs.
5. Support implementation and achievement of the policy by using a collaborative and coordinated approach and by adequately resourcing the infrastructure required to carry out implementation.