

NEWS RELEASE

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Alberta Water Council finalizes recommendations for a New Wetlands Policy and Implementation Plan

Edmonton... Albertans indicated during the wetland consultation process (2006-07) that the indefinite loss of provincial wetlands is no longer acceptable. “It is critical to make certain that wetlands, like other natural resources, are sustained for future generations with initiatives that support the *Water for Life* strategy,” says Gord Edwards, Executive Director of the Alberta Water Council.

The scale of wetland loss across the province is only partially understood, but it is estimated to be significant, with more than 64 percent of wetlands lost to date in the “White Area” (crown land) and current annual loss estimated at between 0.3 percent and 0.5 percent of remaining wetland area. The scale of wetland loss or impacts in the “Green Area” (public land) is unknown, but has increased due to development.

The need for a new provincial wetland policy aimed at protecting, sustaining and restoring Alberta’s wetlands was identified in the Provincial Government’s *Water for Life* strategy. In 2005, the Alberta Water Council formed the Wetland Policy Project Team, composed of government, industry and environmental representatives. The team was tasked with developing a provincial wetland policy and implementation plan that the Council could recommend to the Government of Alberta.

Three years of collaboration and a significant investment of time, effort, and expertise from the Wetland Policy Project Team and participating sectors has resulted in the production of two key documents: *Alberta Water Council Recommendations for a New Alberta Wetland Policy* and *Alberta Water Council Recommendations for a New Alberta Wetland Policy Implementation Plan*.

These documents will be submitted the Minister of Environment in the next few weeks for his consideration. The Council expects it will take the Minister some time to complete a thorough review and respond.

“I look forward to reviewing the wetland policy and implementation recommendations provided by the Alberta Water Council. I am confident that the time invested by participating sectors has resulted in well-thought out, balanced options on managing wetlands,” says Rob Renner, Minister of Environment. He added that while the group did not reach consensus on all of the recommendations, he was certain that the implementation phase would alleviate concerns from any particular sector.

David Pryce, Vice President, Operations, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers comments, “This policy recommendation reflects a significant collaborative effort to provide guidance on how wetlands should be valued and managed in concert with other Provincial policy objectives. There are many areas of agreement amongst the stakeholders and industry supports the establishment of definitive policy to guide planning and decision-making. We believe this policy should enable a flexible and balanced approach to decision-making by the government. Work remains on how that policy will strike an appropriate balance and on defining appropriate implementation tools.”

Jonathan Thompson of Ducks Unlimited Canada and a member of the project team adds, “The work undertaken by the Alberta Water Council Wetland Policy Project Team over the past three years has been substantial. The discussion and successful resolution of many complex issues related to wetlands policy and implementation was commendable, especially considering the numerous stakeholder perspectives and priorities. The Council’s recommendations provide the strategic direction and tools to enable the Government of Alberta and other land managers to make wise choices about our wetlands now and into the future.”

“The development of a recommended wetland policy and implementation plan using a multi-stakeholder, consensus-based process is a significant achievement made possible only through the genuine commitment of those with a vested interest in the future of our wetlands,” says Edwards. *Alberta Water Council Recommendations for a New Wetland Policy* and *Alberta Water Council Recommendations for a Wetland Policy Implementation Plan*, and sector responses are available at www.AWChome.ca

Established in 2004, the Alberta Water Council is a multi-stakeholder partnership with 24 members from governments, industry, and non-government organizations. Its primary task is to monitor and steward implementation of the Alberta’s Water for Life strategy and to champion achievement of the strategy’s three outcomes of a safe, secure drinking water supply, healthy aquatic ecosystems and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.