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Wetland Policy



In 2005, the Alberta Water Council established the Wetland Policy Project Team to develop a new wetland policy and corresponding implementation plan for the Government of Alberta. The new wetland policy and implementation plan was identified as a key action in the Alberta Water Council's Strategic Plan to achieve the goal of healthy aquatic ecosystems. A complete description of the project is available in the [Terms of Reference](#).

The Wetland Policy Project Team's work was supported by extensive consultation with government, non-government organizations and industry. A [Wetland Workbook](#) was developed to engage interested stakeholders, and resulted in a [What we Heard](#) report that informed the team. The team submitted their [final documents](#) to the Board of Directors for approval. The Board of Directors made a decision on the documents until September 2008 to allow members time to discuss the documents with the sector.

At the end of the allotted time period, [two sectors indicated](#) that while they supported the plan, they could not fully support all of the ideas and actions recommended.

When issues of non-consensus arise, the [Council's process](#) is to have the parties that cannot support and propose alternative solutions that would make them acceptable. The alternatives are then distributed to Council members for review and, if desired, response. There is an opportunity to state their thoughts on the alternatives being presented and in this case, a single [response letter](#) was received by the board. At that point, the alternatives were put into a package that is [transmitted](#) to the Minister of Environment with a request for feedback and information and decide how to best proceed.

The wetland package was approved by the board and [released](#) to the public.

Wetland Documents:

- [Wetland Policy Project Team Terms of Reference](#)
- [Wetland Workbook](#)
- [What We Heard Report - Wetland Policy Consultation Summary](#)
- [Letter of Transmittal](#)
- [Recommendations for a new Wetland Policy](#)
- [Recommendations for a Policy Implementation Plan](#)
- [Alberta Water Council Executive Director's Letter](#)
- [Non-Consensus Letters](#)
- [Response Letter](#)

WETLANDS – POLICY INTENT

DRAFT

DRAFT

Note -- This document (*Wetlands – Policy Intent*) is draft. Wetland management in Alberta continues to be guided by existing policy and shall not be influenced by this document or the concepts contained therein until such time as an official provincial policy is approved.

WETLANDS – POLICY INTENT

Introduction - The Need for a New Wetland Policy

Wetland loss and degradation have been occurring in Alberta since the late 1800's. This loss can be largely attributed to land conversion for agriculture, resource development, infrastructure, and urban and rural expansion. It is estimated that Alberta has lost two thirds of its wetlands in the White Area (settled area) of the province and wetlands are still being lost today. Wetland losses and impacts in the Green Area are occurring but are not fully understood. In light of this, a provincial wetland policy is required to support informed management decisions in the long-term interest of the Alberta public.

Policy Purpose

The purpose of the policy would be to provide a strategic framework for conserving, restoring, and protecting Alberta's wetlands.

Legislative Basis

The primary legislative basis for implementing this Policy would be the *Water Act*. The policy would replace *Wetland Management in the Settled Areas of Alberta: An Interim Policy (1993)*.

Policy Scope

This policy would be provincial in scope and cover:

1. Natural wetlands in Alberta, including bogs, fens, swamps, marshes and shallow open water.
2. All restored natural wetlands, as well as wetlands constructed for the purposes of wetland compensation.

Ephemeral water bodies would not be subject to compensation; however, activities that impact these water bodies would remain subject to the *Water Act*.

Go-forward Policy

The policy would be a go-forward policy and would be effective from the date of approval. It would not apply retroactively to *Water Act* approvals issued prior to the policy approval date.

Policy Goal

The policy goal would be to conserve, restore, protect, and manage Alberta's wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society, and the economy.

Policy Outcomes

1. Wetlands of the highest value are protected for the long-term benefit of all Albertans.
2. Wetlands and their benefits are conserved and restored in areas where losses have been high.
3. Wetlands are managed by avoiding, minimizing, and if necessary, compensating for impacts.
4. Wetland management considers regional context.

Strategic Directions

Enable flexible wetland management

Flexibility in the policy would enable the Government of Alberta to ensure that place-based environmental, social, and economic values are reflected in wetland management.

Build effective tools, knowledge and capacity

The Government of Alberta would work with partners to undertake research, fill information gaps, and develop the tools and capacity required to ensure a sustainable wetland resource is available to Albertans, now and in the future.

Encourage conservation of wetlands and voluntary stewardship

All Albertans would be encouraged to conserve and protect wetlands through active stewardship.

Wetland Value in Alberta

Alberta's wetlands are highly diverse in form, function, use, and distribution across the province and are not all of equal value. Relative wetland value – comprising physical area and function – would be used to inform wetland management.

Relative wetland value would be assessed based on:

- Abundance on the landscape
- Supported biodiversity
- Ability to improve water quality
- Importance to flood reduction
- Human uses

Wetland Management in Alberta

Mitigation refers to management activities undertaken to avoid, minimize, and/or compensate for negative impacts on wetlands. The policy would promote the following courses of action:

1. Avoidance – The primary and preferred response is avoiding impacts to wetlands.
2. Minimization – *Where avoidance is not possible*, proponents are expected to minimize impacts to wetlands.
3. Compensation – As a last resort, and *where avoidance and minimization efforts are not feasible or prove ineffective*, compensation is required.

Wetlands would be replaced type-for-type; where this is not possible, compensation would seek to replace wetland value. Additionally, it would be preferred that compensation occur in the area where the original wetland value was lost.

Compensation activities under the policy would include both wetland replacement and non-replacement measures. Replacement measures may include wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement. Non-replacement measures may include those activities that indirectly advance the goal of conserving wetlands and their value, such as research, securement, or education programs.

Wetland Stewardship in Alberta

The Government of Alberta would encourage all Albertans to enable wetland conservation and protection through voluntary stewardship activities.

A wide range of initiatives would be developed to encourage wetland conservation, restoration, and protection activities:

- education and awareness programming
- voluntary programs
- incentives

Performance Measurement, Monitoring, and Reporting

The policy, its administration, and its effectiveness would be evaluated and reported on periodically to ensure the goal and outcomes are being met. The policy and its implementation would be reviewed regularly to reflect the status of the province's wetlands, and to ensure that advances in wetland science were incorporated.

Definitions

Avoid

To prevent impacts to a wetland by identifying an alternate project, activity, design, or site, or abandoning the project or activity altogether or by denial of an application by the regulator.

Compensation

Restitution for wetland value that has been permanently lost due to human activity on the landscape. Compensation activities under the policy would include both wetland replacement and non-replacement measures. Replacement measures may include wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement. Non-replacement measures may include those activities that indirectly advance the goal of conserving wetlands and their value, such as research, securement, or education programs.

Conservation

The management of wetlands to ensure they are sustained for future generations.

Degradation

Negatively impacting the services and value of a wetland through human activities, resulting in long term damage to one or more wetland values.

Ephemeral Water body

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. Ephemerals can be important in the life cycle of amphibians and other small aquatic organisms.

Loss

The permanent elimination of wetland value resulting from a reduction/removal of wetland area.

Minimize

Reducing negative impacts on wetlands to the smallest practicable degree during the planning, design, construction, and operational stages of development, and when conducting activities that may harm wetlands.

Mitigation

Management activities taken to avoid, minimize, and/or compensate for impacts on wetlands caused by human activities on the landscape.

Wetland

Land saturated with water long enough to promote wetland or aquatic processes as indicated by the poorly drained soils, hydrophytic vegetation, and various kinds of biological activity that are adapted to a wet environment.

Wetland Value

The importance of a wetland from an ecological and human perspective. For the purposes of the policy, wetland value would be assessed based on relative abundance on the landscape and other key criteria such as biodiversity, water quality improvement, flood reduction, and human values, such as recreation, education, and cultural significance.



Are we there yet? Closing the gap on Canada's climate commitments

P.J. Partington — Aug. 9, 2012

The federal government's just-released 2012 update to *Canada's Emissions Trends* is an important report from Environment Canada that explores the trends expected to shape Canada's greenhouse gas emissions this decade. The release of the first edition last July, along with this week's updated version, are welcome because emissions projections like these are crucial to assessing the impact of Canada's policies against the commitments the government has made to Canadians and to the world.



The [spin from the federal government](#) on this year's report was that Canada is making "significant progress" towards its emissions targets, and this progress is the "result" of federal climate policies. While there is some good news in the report, this sort of messaging does little to help Canadians have a serious conversation about climate change and what Canada is going to do about it.

Instead, in releasing this update, the federal government is overstating its own efforts to tackle greenhouse gas pollution and understating the challenge facing federal and provincial governments in reaching our climate commitments.

The back story on Canada's climate commitments

To understand the gap between where we're headed and where the government wants to go, let's start with the latter: Canada's climate commitments.

Following the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Canada pledged to reduce its emissions to 17 per cent below the 2005 level by 2020. The federal government has reiterated this commitment many times since in the international negotiations and at home. (To its credit, the government continues to express this goal as reducing emissions to 607 megatonnes (Mt), despite a recent revision of 2005 emissions that would make the target slightly less stringent.) This is the flat black line in the bottom right of Figure 1 below, which illustrates the government's target.

While the gap between our climate intentions and actions now appears somewhat smaller, the challenge of closing it has not shrunk an inch.

The blue line in Figure 1 illustrates where Canada's emissions actually were headed, as of the 2011 edition of *Canada's Emissions Trends* based on implemented federal and provincial policies. The blue line projections are measured against a reference case (the red line) in which emissions grow rapidly without any government climate policies, rising to 850 Mt by 2020. The difference between the red and the blue lines in 2020 was 65 Mt, which would get Canada only a quarter of the way to the 607 Mt we had committed to achieving in 2020. It's a lot like a CEO promising investors she will cut costs by one million dollars but telling them she had only figured out a quarter of the plan to deliver.

Figure 1: Canada's Emissions Trends, as projected in 2011

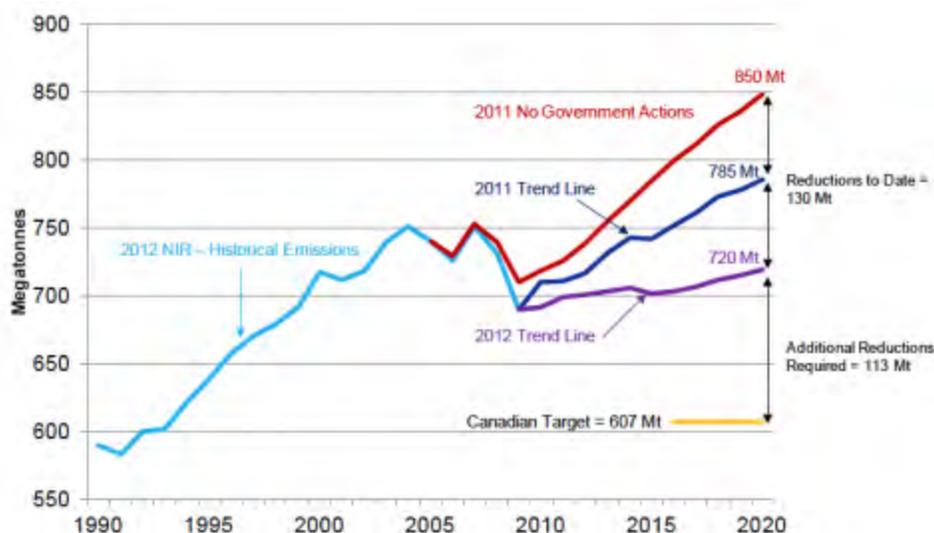


Source: Environment Canada (2011), *Canada's Emissions Trends*, Fig. 6. [Click to enlarge.](#)

How 25 per cent turned into "half way there"

The 2012 edition of *Canada's Emissions Trends* shows this gap has shrunk significantly in percentage terms. Rather than being a quarter of the way to our target (the blue line in Figure 2 below), we are now nearly half way (the purple line). Our CEO is delighted, but our investors might not see it the same way.

Figure 2: Canada's Emissions Trends, as projected in 2012



Source: Environment Canada (2012), *Canada's Emissions Trends*, Fig. ES.1. [Click to enlarge.](#)

It's certainly tempting to give ourselves a pat on the back and conclude we must be much cleverer than we thought because we seem well on our way to having this climate thing licked.

But to understand what this means for meeting our commitments, we must look at what *really* accounts for this change. Why is this year's emissions projection 65 Mt lower than last year's? Has our CEO really beefed up her cost cutting plan, or are there other forces at work?

There are three key factors that explain why this year's numbers appear to get us so much closer to our climate

goal, compared to last year. Unfortunately, none of them has much to do with new action from the federal government.

- **New accounting rules for forestry and land-use change:** The government has projected that new accounting rules agreed to at last year's UN climate talks in Durban, South Africa, will allow it to count a reduction of 25 Mt from expected changes in forest management. This is now included in its projection and accounts for more than a third of the difference between last year's and this year's number. (In the CEO's case, this might be similar to a change in accounting rules that let the company take some liabilities off its books.)
- **A lower starting point:** Actual emissions were 18 Mt lower than anticipated in 2010, meaning that this year's projection begins at a lower point than last year's. (In other words, costs turned out to be lower than expected in the first year our CEO's plan to cut a million dollars, so the same plan that took her a quarter of the way before now goes a little farther, without any new effort.)
- **Changes in Canada's economy:** The emissions intensity — the amount of greenhouse gas pollution per unit of economic growth — of the Canadian economy is dropping more quickly than expected. This is partly a consequence of changes wrought by the recession (heavy industry is recovering more slowly than anticipated, while our economy continues to shift away from traditional industrial sectors that produce a lot of emissions, toward more service-based industries with a lighter footprint), and partly due to consumers and industry making greener choices. For our CEO, the nature of her sector is changing to favour lower-cost activities, and her consumers are increasingly choosing products that cost less to produce. While both help to cut expenses, neither are evidence of her plan in action.

It's encouraging to see efficiency improvements making their way into the numbers as Canadians choose more efficient vehicles, industry upgrades its equipment, and both work to cut energy waste in buildings. While federal policy has some role here, it is the leadership from the provinces that is really driving this change, with Ontario's coal phase-out and B.C.'s carbon tax among the top examples.

Taking the credit without doing the work

While it's important to understand the factors behind this year's projections, it's just as important to understand what has *not* contributed much to shrinking the gap.

The reduction expected from federal efforts is not likely to have changed much since last year's report. The only new policies included here are regulations for heavy trucks (currently in their draft phase and projected to reduce emissions by three Mt in 2020) and passenger vehicle regulations for 2017–2025, which have not yet been drafted. In other words, the CEO's cost cutting plan has hardly changed at all.

So where does all this new information leave us? Is it time to roll out the "mission accomplished" banner and sign the bonus cheques? Unfortunately, not quite yet.

There are three key factors that explain why this year's numbers appear to get us so much closer to our climate goal, compared to last year. Unfortunately, none of them has much to do with new action from the federal government.

While the gap between our climate intentions and actions now appears somewhat smaller, the challenge of closing it has not shrunk an inch. Canada remains wildly off course for meeting its target and the federal government still has not shown how it will address this.

As recent reviews by both the [Environment Commissioner](#) and [National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy](#) have found, closing the gap will require an urgent and substantial increase in federal climate action. The government's plodding sector-by-sector approach simply will not deliver the necessary cuts to emissions within the time frame required. By the Roundtable's estimate, meeting the target will require taking advantage of any and all opportunities to reduce emissions, up to a cost of \$150 per tonne of emissions, by 2020. For context, BC's carbon tax is currently set at \$30 per tonne, Alberta charges \$15 per tonne for the portion of greenhouse gas pollution companies produce above their targets, and the yet-to-be-finalized federal coal

regulations are expected to imply an emissions reduction cost of \$25 per tonne or less.

While the latest emissions trends numbers make it easier for those embarrassed at our quarter-of-the-way status to deflect criticism, they offer little indication that the government is prepared to meet its climate commitments. If our CEO has a plan to close the gap and deliver the million-dollar cost-saving solution, now would be a good time to disclose it.

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