

AEPA Consensus Feedback - Draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)

Agriculture is the number one renewable and sustainable resource in Alberta which will continue to generate substantial social, economic and environmental benefits into the future.

The Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) supports the draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)'s perspective on agriculture, including voluntary approaches and respect for property interests. The consultative and collaborative approach being taken in the development of the SSRP is strongly supported by the AEPA. Early and continued engagement and collaboration with agriculture in the implementation of the SSRP is essential to help prevent unintended consequences to the industry, and to ensure agriculture is able to expand and operate in an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable manner.

The AEPA Board wishes to provide the following feedback on the draft SSRP.

AEPA Supports:

Agriculture and a Healthy Economy

- Recognizing the agricultural industry as one of the main economic drivers in the region
- Having Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development monitor the loss of agricultural land, including fragmentation and conversion, for consideration in future policy development
- Maintaining the agricultural land base by encouraging municipalities to limit development on highly productive soil and areas that would constrain agricultural activities, and to minimize conflicts between agriculture and incompatible land uses
- Continuing development of conservation tools, such as Transfer of Development Credits (TDCs), to help municipalities manage agricultural land fragmentation while protecting and respecting agricultural landowner property interests
 - Government of Alberta moving quickly to release the draft TDC regulations for public review
 - Government of Alberta supporting municipalities during the implementation phase for TDCs to help identify priority agricultural lands and ensure that property interests are respected
- Specific Strategies Supported:
 - Supporting a diverse, innovative and value-added agriculture and agri-food sector in the region by implementing *Alberta's Irrigation: A Strategy for the Future*
 - Assisting agriculture and agri-food industry to maximize opportunities for value-added agricultural products by focusing on workforce development, investment, attraction, and domestic and international market development
 - Supporting a business climate, complementary production and marketing approach that recognizes local, domestic and international market opportunities for Alberta's agriculture, agri-food and agri-product sectors
 - Supporting and enhancing of the next generation of agriculture, food and rural entrepreneurs

Irrigation Agriculture

- Specific Strategies Supported:
 - Implementing *Alberta's Irrigation: A Strategy for the Future*
 - Continue developing an optimized water management infrastructure system
 - Continue working towards the Water for Life outcome with all sectors demonstrating beneficial management practices

Stewardship and Conservation on Private Lands (Ecosystem Services)

- Recognizing:
 - contributions of landowners for their stewardship and conservation efforts on private lands (strong tradition)
 - contributions and value of private land in supplying ecosystem services for Albertans, and identifying opportunities to support ecosystem services on private land
 - value of ecosystem services supplied by economic sectors reliant on private lands
- Government of Alberta moving quickly to explore and facilitate economic tools, such as financial incentives, and developing market-based instruments for ecosystem services that are voluntary and provide business opportunities for private landowners
- Engaging the agriculture industry early in developing market-based approaches to better understand how the market works, and to identify any potential unintended consequences for the industry
- Specific Strategies Supported:
 - Developing and facilitating continued adoption of beneficial management practices (BMPs) that demonstrate the agriculture and agri-food sector's commitment to environmental stewardship
 - Encouraging and supporting continued stewardship of Alberta's private lands by developing and piloting regionally-appropriate conservation tools

Environmental Management Frameworks

- Engaging the agriculture industry in determining potential impacts to the industry's sustainability relating to:
 - development of management actions for the air quality and surface water quality management frameworks
 - development of the biodiversity management framework and management actions – there is currently a lack of clarity around how the biodiversity management framework will look and therefore the agriculture industry needs to be engaged in its development to help prevent unintended consequences to the industry
- Having a collaborative approach by the Government of Alberta in determining appropriate place-based triggers or limits established within the biodiversity management framework
- Developing and using beneficial management practices, and education and awareness programs, as a management response if a trigger or limit has been exceeded in a management framework (recognizing a stronger management action may be required when a limit has been reached)
- Continuing research, education and incentives to encourage beneficial management practice adoption relating to water quality, air quality, and biodiversity

Water Quality, Stewardship and Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)

- Specific Strategies Supported:
 - Developing and facilitating continued adoption of BMPs that demonstrate the agriculture and agri-food sector's commitment to environmental stewardship
 - Management actions arising from implementing the surface water quality management framework do not have unintended consequences for the agriculture industry
 - Developing a comprehensive approach for groundwater management Supporting Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) and other watershed planning activities
 - Improving wetland and riparian areas management:
 - establishing regional wetland management objectives under the Alberta Wetland Policy and facilitating improved wetland knowledge, data systems and science
 - building on Alberta Water Council's recommendations on riparian areas, encouraging the use of *Stepping Back from the Water*, encouraging landowners to maintain riparian areas, and continuing mapping and maintaining riparian area inventories
 - Encourage developing source water protection plans and using source water protection measures
 - Protecting headwaters by establishing conservation areas

Conservation of Valued Landscapes and Biodiversity

- Specific Strategies Supported:
 - Completing the biodiversity management framework, and encouraging voluntary actions on private lands through education, awareness, and incentives
 - Using the guidelines in the draft SSRP (Appendix H) to ensure there is an open and transparent process to minimize the conversion of intact public native grasslands
 - Working with stakeholders (including landowners) to manage risk associated with invasive species

Recreation and Park Areas

- Continued grazing in the majority of the recreation and park areas (grazing exclusion would only occur in portions of these new areas where there is infrastructure development)
- Where grazing exclusion occurs, working with impacted allotment holders to find appropriate solutions where required, such as fencing needs and/or liability issues