

Stormwater Use Regulation Amendments

Removing Barriers to Stormwater Use

Current situation

In Alberta, stormwater is surface runoff, and a *Water Act* licence is required to use stormwater regardless of volume or purpose for using it. We have heard from Albertans this process can be onerous and unnecessarily expensive, and can prevent some stormwater use projects from moving forward even if the projects have clear environmental, social, and economic benefits.

To protect downstream areas from flooding, stormwater that accumulates in ponds must be released slowly and according to certain volume and timing limits. In some areas with significant development, stormwater can accumulate in ponds faster than it can be released, evaporate or be lost through seepage. In some cases, limited watering of parks and surrounding green spaces can occur, but some of this water might be able to be put to better uses. Under current rules, a licence is required. In the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan sub-basins, where applying for a new water licence is not an option, this poses a significant barrier.

What changes are being proposed?

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) is working to increase the ability for Albertans to use stormwater.

Alberta Environment and Parks is proposing to exempt a certain volume of stormwater from the *Water (Ministerial) Regulation* licensing requirement.

What is stormwater and how is it managed?

Stormwater usually runs off of streets and parking lots and is collected in stormwater management ponds where it is slowly released or it evaporates.

This process is all part of stormwater management and is managed through the *Environmental Enhancement and Protection Act* (EPEA) and approvals under the *Water Act*. No changes are proposed to the EPEA approval process for stormwater systems at this time.

Sustainable stormwater use

Any proposed changes must maintain environmental standards. AEP must ensure the environment, water users, and jurisdictions downstream of Alberta are not adversely impacted by an increasing reliance on stormwater use, especially in areas where water is already closely managed.

Stormwater is precipitation (rain or snowmelt) that flows over land and/or impervious (i.e., paved and landscaped) surfaces in developed areas, and is managed by a storm drainage system.

When land is developed and paved, some water that would have previously either gone into the ground, evaporated back into the air, or taken up by plants, instead becomes surface runoff that can be captured. Storm drainage systems collect, direct and store this water to control and limit negative downstream effects, including increased flood potential. Hydrological modeling work by AEP shows there is a certain volume of stormwater that can be used without negatively impacting the environment or other water users. This volume can be safely used while maintaining groundwater recharge and overland flow to rivers, streams, and lakes.

Benefits of stormwater use

Albertans want the ability to use stormwater for beneficial uses. For a long time stormwater was considered a nuisance or a risk to be managed but is now increasingly recognized as a potential alternative to local water sources.

Environmental benefits of using stormwater include:

- offsetting fresh water withdrawals from rivers and natural water bodies;
- improving water quality by reducing pollutant loadings to systems;
- increasing resilience of the water supply; and
- drought mitigation.

Common uses of stormwater include irrigation, vehicle washing, water features (e.g., fountains), dust control/street cleaning, recreation, and toilet and urinal flushing. Since stormwater quality varies, treatment may be required to mitigate risks to public health.