

May 21, 2008

## Draft Land-use Framework charts new direction for planning and decision-making in Alberta

*Edmonton...* The Alberta government has released a draft framework to improve land-use planning and decision-making in Alberta following 18 months of consultation with stakeholders and the public.

“Albertans have asked for a planning framework that better balances our environmental, social and economic needs and provides greater certainty for decision-makers,” said Ted Morton, Sustainable Resource Development Minister. “The *Draft Land-use Framework* does this. It provides a strategic blueprint for all levels of government and Albertans as we make decisions today about the province we want in the future.”

The *Draft Land-use Framework* proposes six key strategies to improve land-use decision-making in Alberta.

- Establish six new land-use regions with a requirement to develop regional plans for each.
- Establish a new Cabinet committee to oversee regional plan development, supported by a Land-use Secretariat. Regional Advisory Councils will be established for each region. The members of these councils will include provincial, municipal, industry, non-government, and aboriginal representatives, as well as other relevant planning bodies within the region.
- Use a cumulative effects approach at the regional level to manage the impacts of development on air, land, water and biodiversity.
- Develop new policy tools for conservation and stewardship on private and public lands.
- Establish an information, monitoring and reporting system to support planning and decision-making.
- Include Aboriginal Peoples in land-use planning.

“The *Draft Land-use Framework* is a significant step forward in the evolution of land-use planning in Alberta,” said Morton. “The purpose of the framework is to manage growth-not stop it. It promotes responsible growth, a future with plentiful opportunities and a healthy environment.”

“The draft framework proposes better tools, processes and resources to make the right decisions,” added Morton. “At the same time, it respects personal property rights and the decision-making authority of local governments.”

The government also identified four immediate planning priorities: the completion and implementation of metropolitan plans for the Capital and Calgary regions; and the completion of the Southern Alberta Regional Plan and the Northeast Alberta Regional Plan.

In addition, stakeholders have noted that clear provincial policy is important to address ongoing challenges. The Alberta government will:

- develop a transportation and utility corridors strategy;
- prepare a plan for parks to conserve and protect the diversity of Alberta’s land base;
- determine more effective approaches to reduce the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land;
- develop a comprehensive strategy to better manage growing recreational use pressures on public

- lands;
- develop policy to minimize exposure of developments and settlements to flood risk; and
- review the current process for identifying major surface concerns prior to public offering of Crown mineral rights.

With the release of the draft framework, the government will consult with stakeholders and discuss how to move forward with implementation. Work has already started on the immediate planning priorities, and government officials have begun to identify the legislation, regulations and policies needed to implement the framework.

Albertans can read the *Draft Land-use Framework* and provide feedback by completing the public survey. The survey and draft framework can be accessed online at [www.landuse.gov.ab.ca](http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca). Print versions of the survey and the draft framework can be obtained on the website or by calling 310-4455 to have a package mailed.

The development of the *Draft Land-use Framework* is a provincial cross-ministry initiative involving Sustainable Resource Development; Energy; Environment; Agriculture and Rural Development; Municipal Affairs; Infrastructure; Transportation; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; and Aboriginal Relations.

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**Attachments:**

News Release Backgrounders:

- Land-use Framework Six Key Strategies backgrounder
- Regional Land-use Plans backgrounder
- Cumulative Effects Management backgrounder
- Land-use Framework Goals backgrounder
- Public Questions & Answers

Other resource materials available at [www.landuse.gov.ab.ca](http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca).

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(780) 427-8636

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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## Land-use framework six key strategies

*Edmonton...* The *Draft Land-use Framework* proposes six key strategies to improve land-use planning and decision-making in Alberta.

### **Strategy 1: Develop six regional land-use plans based on six new land-use regions.**

- Proposed regions based on the major watersheds with boundaries aligned to best fit with existing municipal boundaries and the natural regions.
- Regional plans integrate provincial policies at the regional level; set out regional land-use objectives; provide context for land-use decision-making within the region; and reflect the uniqueness and priorities of each region.
- Regional plans define economic, environmental and social outcomes for regions, and a broad plan for land and natural resource use for public and private lands within the regions.
- Municipalities and provincial government departments must comply with each regional plan in their decision-making.

### **Strategy 2: Create a Cabinet Committee supported by a Land-use Secretariat and establish a Regional Advisory Council for each region.**

- A Cabinet Committee will oversee implementation of the Land-use Framework.
- The Cabinet Committee and Land-use Secretariat will be responsible for the development of regional plans in conjunction with government departments and the Regional Advisory Councils.
- Regional Advisory Councils, with members representing the range of interests within the region, will provide advice to the Secretariat on the development of regional plans.
- Once approved by Cabinet, regional plans will become provincial policy.
- Local decision-making authority remains with the same officials who currently exercise it.
- Local decisions need to be consistent with regional plans.

### **Strategy 3: Cumulative effects approach will be used at the regional level to manage the impacts of development on land, water and air.**

- Regional plans will adopt a cumulative effects approach that considers the total impact of development in a region, over time, in decision-making and imposes limits on impacts, rather than on development.
- The Alberta government will identify appropriate thresholds and targets for air, land, water and biodiversity at the regional levels and where appropriate, at sub-regional levels.
- Land-use planning and decision-making will operate within these defined thresholds.
- This approach will balance environmental objectives with our socio-economic values.

### **Strategy 4: Develop new policy tools for conservation and stewardship on private and public lands.**

- The Alberta government will work with the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment, and other provincial applied research institutes to develop a strategy for conservation and stewardship on public and private lands. The strategy will:
  - evaluate the effectiveness of programs and practices;
  - develop education and awareness programs;
  - identify and develop new best practices, tools, market-based approaches and incentives to provide

- ecological goods and services;
- develop action plans for the conservation and sustainable use of Alberta's biodiversity that can be used to support and inform the development of regional plans.

**Strategy 5: Establish an information, monitoring and knowledge system to contribute to the continuous improvement of land-use planning and decision-making.**

- The provincial government will create an improved Integrated Information Management System that monitors the state of the land and the status of land use in the province.
- It will build on existing information-sharing initiatives; review and improve protocols for information sharing, and incorporate scientific and traditional ecological knowledge.
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems will determine if land-use policies are achieving desired outcomes.
- The Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Program, which will be implemented through the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, will be a central component of this system.

**Strategy 6: Include Aboriginal Peoples in land-use planning**

The Aboriginal Peoples of Alberta have an historic connection to Alberta's land and environment. The Alberta government will:

- strive for a meaningful balance that respects the constitutionally protected rights of aboriginal communities and the interests of all Albertans.
- encourage Aboriginal communities to participate in the development of land-use plans;
- continue to support traditional use studies to document Aboriginal uses of public lands and share information on Aboriginal uses of public land to inform the decision-making process; and
- strive to protect and preserve identified sacred cultural sites for future generations.

**Priority actions**

*Metropolitan plans for the Capital and Calgary regions*

- The framework supports the development and implementation of the Capital Region Plan slated for completion by January 2009, and the completion of the metropolitan planning initiative being undertaken by the Calgary Regional Partnership.
- The Alberta government recognizes that metropolitan plans may be completed before regional plans are in place. Once completed, the regional plans will guide future updates of the metropolitan plans.

*Southern Alberta Regional Plan*

- Southern Alberta contains over half of Alberta's total population but has the least water.
- Most of Alberta's coal-bed methane, roads and rail lines are concentrated in Southern Alberta. The region grows most of Alberta's wheat, barley and canola, and contains the majority of feedlots.
- Southern Alberta depends on the ecological integrity of the eastern slopes for its water supply.

*Northeast Alberta Regional Plan*

- Alberta's oil sands and related activity are important drivers of the provincial economy.
- The pace of growth in the oil sands has created pressures on essential services, infrastructure, and the environment.

The framework also identifies that clear provincial policy is important to address ongoing challenges:

- develop a transportation and utility corridors strategy to reduce land fragmentation and environmental impact;
- develop a plan for parks to conserve and protect the diversity of Alberta's land base;
- determine more effective approaches to reduce the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land;
- develop a comprehensive strategy to better manage growing recreational use pressures on public

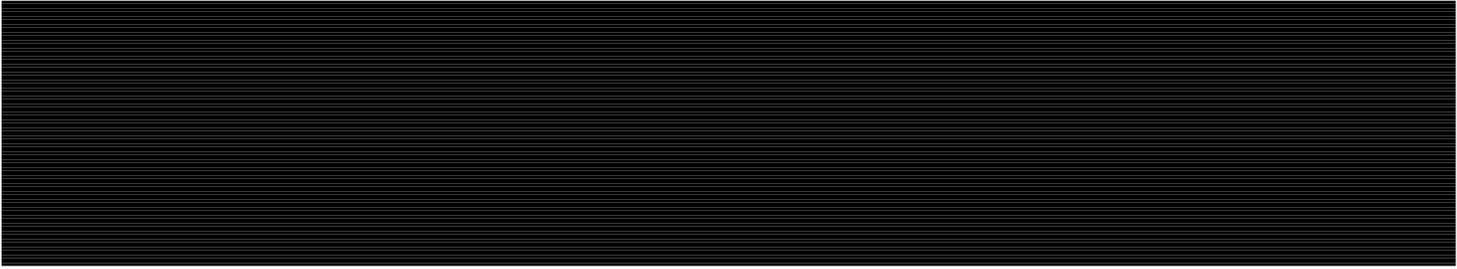
- lands;
- develop policy to minimize exposure of developments and settlements to flood risk; and
- review the current process for identifying major surface concerns prior to public offering of Crown mineral rights.

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## **Regional land-use plans**

*Edmonton...* Under the *Draft Land-use Framework*, Alberta is divided into six regions, for which land-use plans will be developed.

Alberta's six land-use regions are based on the province's major watersheds, adjusted to best fit with existing municipal boundaries and our natural regions. The six regions are North, North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-Central and South.

### **Development of Regional Land-use Plans**

The Cabinet Committee and Land-use Secretariat will be responsible for the development of regional plans in conjunction with government departments and Regional Advisory Councils. These advisory councils will:

- consist of members representing the range of interests within each region (e.g., provincial, municipal, industry, non-government groups, Aboriginal representatives, and other relevant planning bodies);
- provide advice on addressing trade-off decisions regarding land uses and on setting thresholds to address cumulative effects;
- be appointed by the provincial government and have a short-term mandate to provide advice on the regional plan over the course of its development;
- help ensure that the public are engaged in the regional planning process.

### **Regional Plans**

The land-use plan for each region will reflect the vision, principles and desired outcomes of the Land-use Framework. In addition, regional plans will:

- define regional outcomes (economic, environmental and social) and a broad plan for land and natural resource use for both public and private lands within the region;
- align provincial strategies and policies at the regional level (including air, land, water and biodiversity);
- reflect the uniqueness and priorities of each region;
- determine specific trade-offs and appropriate land and natural resource management for landscapes within the region;
- define the cumulative effects management approach for the region and identify targets and thresholds;
- provide direction and context for local plans within the region;
- recognize the authority and role of municipalities in local decision-making; and
- be subject to regular reviews and public reporting.

Regional plans will be approved by Cabinet and become provincial land-use policy for the region.

## **Municipal Planning**

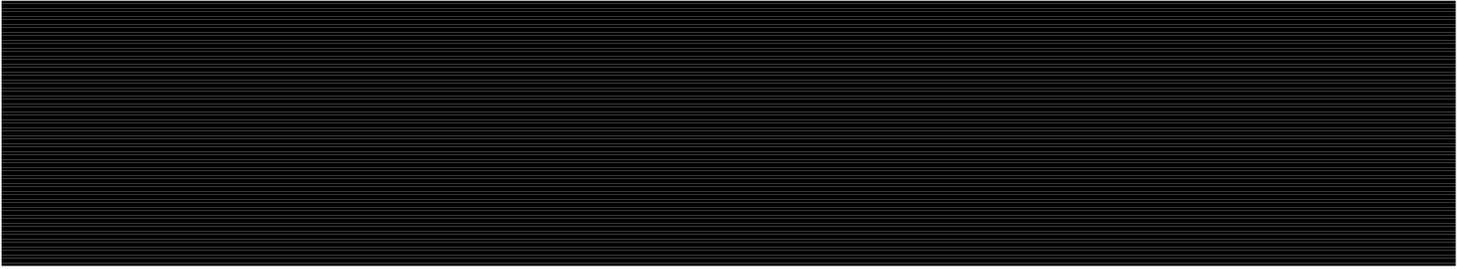
Municipalities will retain their current authority and role in land-use planning and decision-making but will need to ensure their plans and decisions are consistent with regional plans. They will outline how their municipal development plans will align with and address provincial directions stated in regional plans; and amend municipal planning documents to adopt and implement regional planning directions.

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## Cumulative effects management

*Edmonton...* The *Draft Land-use Framework* will use a cumulative effects management approach to manage the impacts of development on air, land, water and biodiversity at the regional level.

Every landscape is different and requires different outcomes to balance economic, social, and environmental needs. The *Draft Land-use Framework* calls for a cumulative effects management approach to address the combined impacts of existing and new activities within each of the six proposed regions.

### **What is cumulative effects management?**

In October 2007, the Alberta government announced a broad new approach to address cumulative effects. The cumulative effects management approach:

- considers the total impact of development in a region, over time, in decision-making;
- determines the capacity of the land and the environment to support the effects of all activities; and
- identifies thresholds for the air, land, water and biodiversity.

Using this approach, regional land-use plans will ensure that the impacts of development are kept within defined thresholds.

### **Has this approach been used before?**

A prototype project on cumulative effects management is under way in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, a 460-square kilometer area northeast of Edmonton. The plan for the Heartland:

- lays out clear targets for air quality;
- puts in place a water management framework to protect water quality and quantity; and
- establishes guidelines to protect the land in the region.

Targets, outcomes and actions apply to all major industrial users in the region.

### **What impact will this approach have on decisions about how the land is used?**

Use of cumulative effects management:

- focuses planning and decision-making on the impacts of activities, rather than the activities themselves;
- ensures that all the impacts of all activities, over time, are considered and included;
- encourages innovation to protect the environment as we continue to grow and develop; and
- considers implications of development on a regional basis because every landscape is different.

### **How is this a change from the current system?**

Alberta's system for assessing the environmental impacts of new developments has usually been done on a project-by-project basis. The cumulative effects management approach:

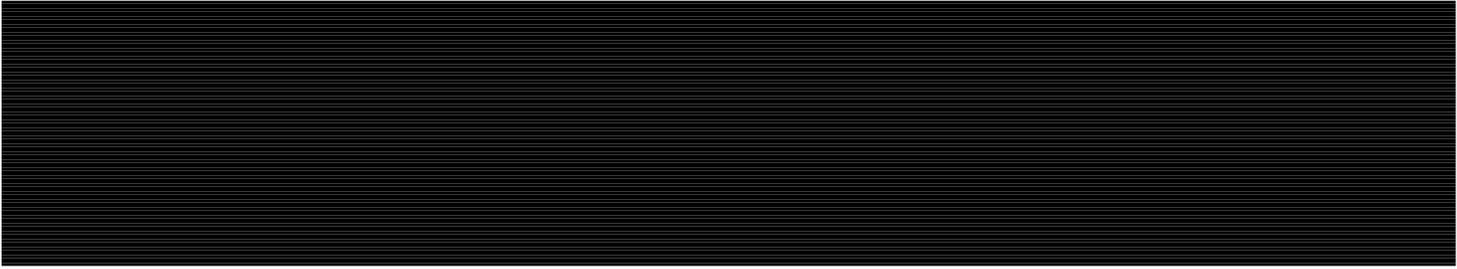
- assesses all potential impacts of all projects within a region, both existing and new; and
- creates a more comprehensive view of development and land-use activity.

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## **Land-use framework goals**

*Edmonton...* The *Draft Land-use Framework* identifies three desired outcomes that must be achieved to meet Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. For each outcome, the framework outlines provincial objectives that must be reflected in all regional land-use plans.

### **Outcome: Sustainable prosperity supported by our land and natural resources**

- Develop Alberta's natural resources in a way that optimizes value for the broadest number of Albertans and reduces waste.
- Ensure reasonable and timely access to these resources.
- Promote innovation, value-added diversification, global competitiveness and the balanced and responsible use of natural resources as crucial to sustaining the momentum of Alberta's economy.
- Effectively balance and manage the interests of surface users and surface and subsurface developments.
- Ensure that land and resource use promotes diverse industries, stimulates environmentally sound economic activity and leaves economic opportunities open for future Albertans.

### **Outcome: Healthy ecosystems and environment**

- Maintain or enhance the life-supporting capacity of air, water, land and biodiversity and sustain the natural resources that form part of the environment.
- Respect the intrinsic value of nature.
- Maintain and/or enhance soil and soil fertility.
- Protect the quality and quantity of ground and surface water.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, minimize waste and maintain the biodiversity and abundance of native species and their natural habitats.

### **Outcome: Livable communities and recreational opportunities**

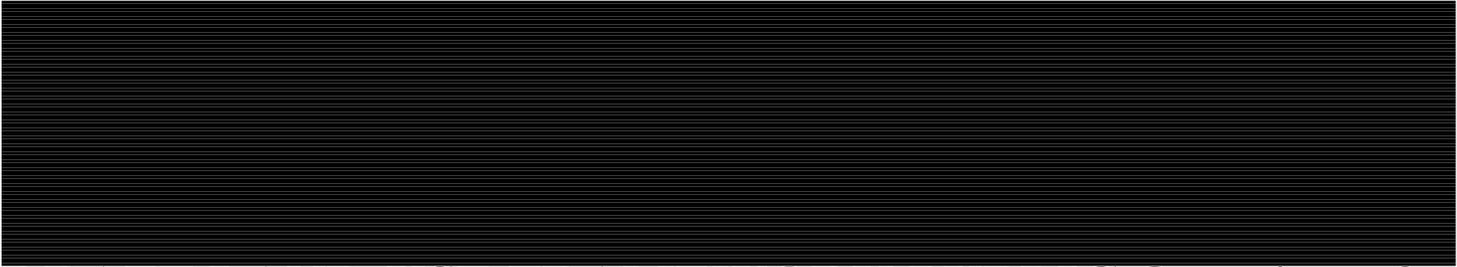
- Focus settlement development and land use on efficient use of land, infrastructure, public services and public facilities.
- Identify and protect significant historical resources and manage potential impacts effectively. Parks and protected areas are valued as natural landscapes that allow people to enjoy their connection to the natural world.
- Communities are prepared to respond to and adapt to a changing climate and environmental events (e.g., floods, drought).
- Engage stakeholders in planning processes to improve the quality of land-use decisions and build confidence in the decision-making processes.

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# **DRAFT LAND-USE FRAMEWORK PUBLIC Questions & Answers**

## **What is the Draft Land-use Framework?**

The *Draft Land-use Framework* sets out an approach to better manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. The framework provides a blueprint for land use management and decision-making that addresses Alberta's growth pressures.

## **Why does Alberta need a land-use framework?**

Alberta has enjoyed record prosperity. But this prosperity has brought new challenges and responsibilities. Today's rapid growth in population and economic activity is placing considerable pressure on Alberta's landscapes.

Oil and gas, forestry and mining, agriculture and recreation, housing and infrastructure - all compete to use the land. This not only increases the number of conflicts between competing user groups, it often stresses the environment too. Our land, air and water are not unlimited.

It's clear that we all need to work together to better manage growth on a provincial, regional and local basis, for the benefit of all Albertans. We need to ensure our land-and all the activities it sustains-is managed responsibly for those who come after us. Our current land management system, which served us well historically, is in danger of being overwhelmed by the scope and pace of activity.

The Draft Land-Use Framework is a significant step forward in the evolution of land-use planning and decision-making in Alberta.

## **What are the key strategies in the Draft Land-use Framework?**

The *Draft Land-use Framework* proposes six key strategies to improve land-use decision-making in Alberta:

- Establish six new land-use regions with a requirement to develop regional plans for each.
- Create a Cabinet Committee supported by a Land-use Secretariat and establish a Regional Advisory Council for each region. The members of the councils will represent provincial, municipal, industry, non-government groups; aboriginal communities, and other relevant planning bodies with the region.
- Use a cumulative effects approach at the regional level to manage the impacts of development on air, land and water.
- Develop new policy tools for conservation and stewardship on private and public lands.
- Establish an information-gathering, monitoring and reporting system to support planning and decision-making.
- Include Aboriginal Peoples in land-use planning.

## **How will the Draft Land-use Framework improve sustainability in the province?**

The purpose of the Land-use Framework is to manage growth, not stop it. It promotes responsible

growth, a future with plentiful opportunities and a health environment.

The framework will improve sustainability through:

- greater integration of provincial policies and ensuring provincial interests are reflected in land-use decisions;
- providing better tools, processes and resources for decision-makers;
- incorporating more scientific data into land-use decision-making; and
- seeking greater certainty for all stakeholders through the application of regional plans.

### **Will there be opportunities for stakeholder input on the development of regional plans?**

The Alberta government is committed to building regional plans with the participation of the people who live within the regions.

The proposed Regional Advisory Councils will consist of members representing the range of interests within each region; include provincial and municipal governments, industry, non-governmental groups, and Aboriginal communities. One of the responsibilities of the Regional Advisory Councils is to help ensure that the public is also engaged in the process.

The Alberta government will be developing terms of reference which will set out planning process requirements, including requirements for consultation and draft plan reviews.

### **How long will the Regional Advisory Councils be in place?**

The Regional Advisory Councils are temporary in nature and will only exist for the amount of time required to develop the regional plans. Once the regional plan has been developed and approved by the Cabinet Committee, there is no longer a need for the advisory councils to be in place. Subsequent issues relative to the implementation of the regional plans will be addressed by the Land-use Secretariat and the appropriate government agencies.

### **How long will the regional plans be in effect?**

Regional plans will be reviewed every five years - with plan updates and reports on implementation - and a complete review will occur every ten years. This approach allows the regional plans to be updated and reflect new policies and initiatives adopted by the province.

### **What are the six regions proposed in the Draft Land-Use Framework?**

The Draft Land-use Framework proposes six regions that align with the province's major watersheds because decisions made regarding land-use impacts our water resources - both water quality and water quantity.

The six proposed regions are:

- North
- North - East
- North - Central
- North - West
- South - Central
- South

### **What region am I in?**

The best way for you to understand which region you are in is for you to take a look at the regional map found on the website [www.landuse.gov.ab.ca](http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca), or in a copy of the Draft Land-use Framework document.

### **The Draft Land-use Framework will use a cumulative effects management approach, what is this?**

Our land-use policies and plans must be updated to reflect the changing and increasingly complex

dynamics in the region and our growing understanding of ecological processes.

The province is moving toward a cumulative effects approach that looks at the potential impacts of all projects within a region, rather than at the impact of development on a project-by-project basis. Cumulative effects management determines the capacity of the environment and ecosystem to support the effects of all activities, and identifies thresholds for the air, land, water and biodiversity. Furthermore, cumulative effects management involves integrating environmental, social and economic objectives to minimize risks and maximize benefits on a regional scale.

### **How will the Land-use Framework impact municipalities and their decision-making processes?**

An effective land-management system recognizes that planning and decision-making must take place at different levels of government and these decisions need to be aligned.

The Alberta government has primary responsibility for making decisions that meet the economic, environmental and social goals of all Albertans. However, in the face of increasing pressures and conflicts, the Alberta government needs to ensure these provincial interests are addressed at a local scale.

Alberta has a strong tradition of local government and local authority. The Draft Land-use Framework leaves local decision-making authority with the same officials who currently exercise it, but in the future, these decisions will have to be aligned with provincial policy set out in the regional plans.

### **How will the Land-use Framework impact private landowners?**

One of the guiding principles of the framework is that land-use decisions will respect the laws of property ownership and the positive role of free markets in making societal choices regarding the management of the land.

Municipalities already have the ability to control the subdivision of land under the MGA. Landowners can only subdivide with municipal approval. Regional plans will set the context for these decisions in the future and could identify areas where the fragmentation and the loss of agricultural land needs to be addressed.

The government will support the development of market-based instruments to encourage private landowners to help achieve conservation goals. Market-based incentives and tools can provide a way for private landowners to receive some monetary benefits for the ecological goods on their land.

### **How will this impact existing approvals and licences?**

Existing contractual commitments such as approvals and licences will be honoured. However, planning decisions on future development will need to be aligned with provincial policies and directions. Moving forward requires some hard decisions and some trade-offs.

### **How does the framework affect recreational activity on public land?**

The Draft Land-use Framework identifies the need to work extensively with members of the recreational communities and other key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive recreational strategy to better manage the growing recreational pressures and activities on public land. The goal of the recommended recreational strategy is to ensure Albertans continue to have a wide variety of recreation opportunities on public lands but at the same time ensure that the impact on our natural environment is minimized, reduce conflicts and increase cooperation.

### **How long will it take to implement the framework?**

The government has established a goal of completing the six regional plans described in the framework by 2012.

The province has identified four key priorities in the framework. These priorities are: the completion

and implementation of metropolitan plans for the Capital and Calgary regions, and the completion of the Southern Alberta Regional Plan as well as the Northeast Alberta Regional Plan.

**Work is already proceeding on metropolitan plans for Calgary and the Capital Region, how will they be integrated into the regional land-use plans?**

Given the immediate growth pressures in the Capital and Calgary regions, work had to commence with the development of their respective metropolitan plans. These communities are defining the type of future they want. The provincial government expects that the metropolitan plans will reflect provincial interests and priorities.

**How can I get a copy of the Draft Land-use Framework and Public Feedback Survey?**

The survey and draft framework can be accessed online at [www.landuse.gov.ab.ca](http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca). Print versions of the survey and the draft framework can be obtained on the website or by calling 310-4455 to have a package mailed. You can also pick up the draft framework and survey at your MLA constituency office.

**When do I have to have the Public Feedback Survey completed?**

The government is asking Albertans to provide their input on the Draft Land-use Framework before June 20.

**What's going to happen to the information I provide in the survey?**

The surveys will be compiled by an external company for the Government of Alberta. The information you provide in the survey is very important as it will be considered in the finalization of the Land-use Framework.

**Who do I talk to if I need more information?**

You can e-mail: [LUF@gov.ab.ca](mailto:LUF@gov.ab.ca), or call 310-4455.

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