

March 25, 2011

Water, economic development, conservation key areas of advice for land-use plan

Government will ask for public input on council recommendations

Edmonton... The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council recommends that a regional plan for southern Alberta should focus on water supply, economic development and conservation needs.

The Alberta government will seek public input on the recommendations in the fall, before developing the draft regional plan. An online workbook will also be available at www.landuse.alberta.ca by the end of April. The province will consult again with Albertans before the final plan is developed.

“The advisory council’s recommendations bring into sharp focus the pressing need for land-use planning in the Province of Alberta,” said Sustainable Resource Development Minister Mel Knight. “The South Saskatchewan area’s economy is strong and diverse, but water supply may be a determining factor on future growth. Responsible, coordinated, long-term planning will help us manage the multiple pressures on the landscape.”

Government-supplied terms of reference asked the Regional Advisory Council to explore the relationship between population growth, water supply, economic growth and land conservation. There are four components to the recommendations:

- a regional vision statement;
- strategic land-use principles;
- regional outcomes, objectives and recommendations with associated resource maps; and,
- a regional land-use map and its associated management intents.

In its vision statement, the advisory council said, “The region prizes its natural and economic capital, and uses an integrated approach to effectively manage social, economic and environmental interaction. The principles of personal freedom, responsibility and property rights are respected”

Advice to the Government of Alberta for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan addresses the following areas:

- water - develop options for improving source water protection and other means to protect watershed integrity;
- economic development - examine how the region should develop, aiming for the

long-term success of the agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism industries and other economic opportunities;

- conservation - identify, conserve and restore landscapes valued for their water security, ecological function and biodiversity, considering development implications;
- recreation and tourism management - improve management of recreation use on public lands, identify locations of lands with high value for recreation and tourism; and,
- human development - examine development needs and healthy community objectives and consider the impacts to aboriginal communities.

To meet the unique needs of the South Saskatchewan area landscape, the advisory council proposed a land-use classification system that includes proposed management intents for each land-use type - agriculture (cultivated lands and native rangeland), conservation, mixed use (forest), population centres and recreation and tourism.

The 19-member advisory council held 13 meetings across the region, from Calgary to Medicine Hat to Strathmore. Council members also participated in public information, stakeholder and municipality sessions, received more than 100 stakeholder submissions and devoted countless hours to reviewing reports, policies and other sources of information. Landowners, municipal officials and business people sat on the council. Others brought expertise in energy, conservation and stewardship, agriculture, and irrigation to the table. All RAC members are connected to and have broad experience and knowledge of the region.

The advice document, advisory council meeting agendas and notes, along with other material concerning the development of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and the Land-use Framework are available at www.landuse.alberta.ca

Released in 2008, the Land-use Framework sets out a new approach for managing lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and community goals. A key strategy of the framework is the development of seven regional plans based on seven new land-use regions. The South Saskatchewan is the second plan to be developed under the framework. The government will soon release the draft Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

The Alberta government is working to build a better Alberta by fostering economic growth, strengthening our health and education systems, investing in infrastructure, supporting safe and strong communities and ensuring a clean and healthy environment.

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Backgrounders: Summary and highlights of advice, Regional Advisory Council members

[RAC Candidate Conservation Management Areas on Public Lands Document](#)

[RAC Recommended Land-use Classification Document](#)

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Summary of advice to government from the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council

The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council identified eight strategic land-use principles:

Plan for water - It is essential to determine the feasibility of all water conservation, supply and storage options. Because the supply and quality of water is so important, demand is likely to increase, and supply may be challenged in the region under any scenario. Headwater and source water protection and the need to manage land use to sustain water production and water quality are critically important.

Respecting private land ownership - The Government of Alberta must be guided by the principle of respecting private property rights. To acknowledge this, regional planning identifies common outcomes for private and public lands and offers implementation tools for both.

Developing conservation and stewardship tools - Conservation and stewardship tools are critical to the success of future land-use planning in the region. It is imperative that the Government of Alberta develop an enhanced suite of conservation and stewardship tools (e.g., economic and market-based incentives, conservation easements, transferable development credits, mitigation banking, etc.). New tools, when developed, must be easily accessible, well understood and applicable.

Accommodating multiple users - The South Saskatchewan region has a history of multiple users sharing the landscape. The focus for planning should not be primarily on “if” but on “how” and under “what” conditions an activity can be allowed on the land base. Conservation and sustainable development can co-exist, and land-use planning needs to be based on triple bottom line principles (refers to government intention to sustain economic growth in balance with Albertans’ environmental and social goals) and the use of market-based conservation tools.

Integrated planning - Land-use planning needs to progress to outcomes based on integrated local and regional planning that uses triple bottom line principles, incorporates multiple objectives and multiple stakeholders, and involves market-based conservation and stewardship tools. Consideration should be given to reducing planning overlaps and redundancies while respecting the rights of affected jurisdictions in a collaborative approach to land-use decisions.

Regulatory streamlining and efficiency - The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan should lead other government initiatives to promote regulatory streamlining, harmonization and reduce levels of bureaucracy. Policies need to be integrated between departments and ministries. Regulations should be made more efficient by providing clear policy direction on key issues. Clear policy is also necessary for empowering local and provincial decision-making to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

First Nations’ issues - First Nations’ land-use issues need to be dealt with in a clear, provincial government-led process.

Economic opportunity - The success of the region will be dependent on the economic

opportunities available in the region. This plan would provide more certainty and clarity regarding constraints to development.

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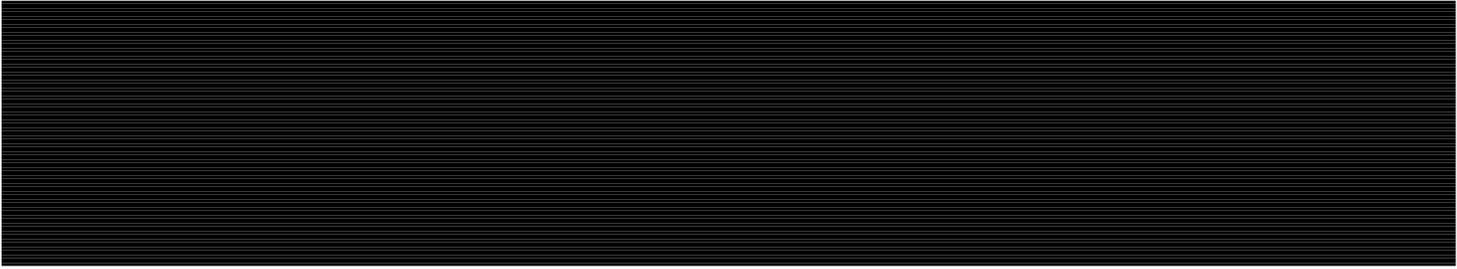
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Regional Advisory Council advice highlights

Government terms of reference asked the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council to develop advice under the three provincial outcomes in the Land-use Framework:

- A healthy economy supported by our land and resources
- Healthy ecosystems and environment
- People-friendly communities that offer ample recreational and cultural opportunities

Healthy Economy

The Regional Advisory Council made recommendations under agriculture, energy, forestry, recreation and tourism, value-added industries, and infrastructure. Some highlights are:

Agriculture

- An efficient and transparent agricultural regulatory environment.
- Irrigation expansion and infrastructure improvements.
- Municipal leadership to reduce fragmentation of agricultural land.

Energy

- Ensure regulatory processes for energy create a positive investment climate and consider cumulative effects.
- Advance renewable energy development to diversify energy production and stimulate rural economies.

Forestry

- Develop processes, systems and tools to manage the forest land base in a more holistic way.
- Use integrated planning to reduce redundancy and incorporate forestry planning with other considerations such as water, recreation and tourism, biodiversity and energy.
- Incorporate natural disturbance planning into regional land-use planning.

Recreation and Tourism

- Identify and develop areas capable of becoming iconic tourism destinations.
- Better understand tourism opportunities, challenges and barriers on private land.

Value-added

- Expand communications tools and infrastructure into rural areas so people can choose where to live and do business.
- Support economic growth by creating a positive investment climate and consider more

- investment in education, research and training.
- Support industry innovations that reduce water use, land disturbance and carbon footprint, and work towards a zero-waste goal.

Infrastructure

- Infrastructure planning considers changes in population, technology and transportation.
- Plan, design and build corridors and infrastructure to minimize land fragmentation.
- Identify and develop strategic water storage opportunities.

Healthy Ecosystems and Environment

Water

- Take measures to sustain source water quality and quantity.
- Help meet *Water for Life* targets with improvements in water efficiency and conservation.
- Help develop mechanisms that facilitate short- and long-term water transfers in water-stressed areas.

Biodiversity

- Develop a regional biodiversity management framework.
- Conserve critical habitats for species at risk.
- Avoid, minimize or mitigate the conversion of native grasslands on public lands.
- Establish a network of conservation management areas on public land.
- Apply integrated land management to minimize native vegetation loss.
- Coordinate land-use activities to reduce fragmentation by roads, access and facilities.

Air Quality

- Develop an air quality framework for airshed zones; establish management plans as needed.

Healthy Communities

Healthy Communities

- Help communities partner with the public and private sectors to meet social and active-living needs.
- Promote collaboration among municipalities to accommodate future populations.
- Provide accessible and affordable recreation facilities, parks and open spaces.

Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations Communities

- Work with aboriginal peoples to develop formal roles and responsibilities for aboriginal peoples in land-use planning and environmental assessment and monitoring.
- Effectively manage fish and wildlife resources to reflect aboriginal peoples' rights and interests.
- Use traditional knowledge to enhance the understanding of cumulative effects and develop appropriate mitigation/minimization strategies.

Recreation and Tourism

- Develop a better understanding of recreation and tourism preferences.
- Develop an all-season land-and-water-based recreational trail system.
- Develop and implement a user-pay system to help fund recreational development, management and infrastructure.
- Limit motorized recreation to designated areas and trails to protect wetlands and other habitats
- Maintain and enhance public access to recreational water bodies.
- Expand the supply of recreational opportunities, including destinations, attractions,

facilities and infrastructure, and serviced and un-serviced camping.

Advice to the Government of Alberta for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan is available online at www.landuse.alberta.ca

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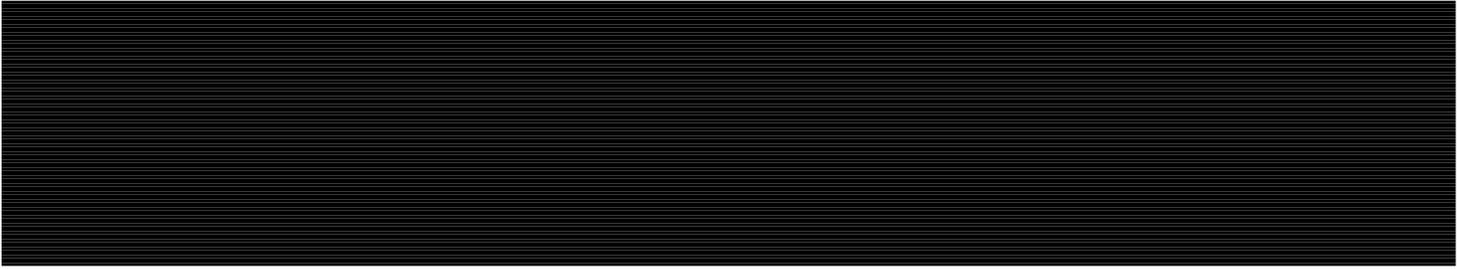
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South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council

The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council was established on May 13, 2009. A member from Treaty 7 was named on Sept. 28, 2010. The council has fulfilled its mandate.

Statement of Purpose (from Team Charter)

The Regional Advisory Council (RAC), established under the Land-use Framework, will provide strategic advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta on the development of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, operating within the draft terms of reference approved by the Government of Alberta.

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