



May 15, 2003

Water Management Strategy

Our natural resources, including surface water and groundwater, are under increasing pressure. Natural resources are best managed through the mechanism of clear, long-term plans developed collaboratively by government and the community.

It is important that we apply all our currently available knowledge and skills to developing these plans. At the same time, we need to ensure that they balance long-term environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Water management plans, developed in partnership by the government and the community, should be publicly available documents that outline a transparent and equitable process of managing this strategic resource into the future. The plans should outline community aspirations for its natural resources and should contain the necessary rules relating to their management.

Water for Life, the Province's newly released draft for discussion on Alberta's strategy for water sustainability, largely reflects the principles set out in the Red Deer Chambers' 2002 water policy. The strategies outlined in the document are all critical to achieving:

- Safe, secure drinking water supply;
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems;
- Reliable quality water supplies for a sustainable economy;
- Knowledge to make effective water management decisions.

The eight strategies that have been identified are:

- *Watershed approach*: Adopt a watershed approach to management and decision-making.
- *Partnerships*: Involve all Albertans in managing provincial water supplies and resources.
- *Knowledge and research*: Increase our knowledge and understanding about Alberta's water resources.
- *Water conservation*: Increase water conservation activities.
- *Allocation & use*: Allocate water resources more effectively.
- *Aquatic ecosystems*: Protect Alberta's aquatic ecosystems.
- *Water quality*: Protect Alberta's surface and ground water quality.
- *Drinking water*: Ensure all Albertans have safe and secure drinking water.

The Chamber is supportive of the Government's proposed structure consisting of a Provincial Water Advisory Council, Watershed Advisory Councils, and Watershed Protection Groups and has provided recommendations on how these groups should work to build an effective, integrated province-wide strategy.



The Chamber understands that the province is planning to release its finalized *Water for Life* Strategy in the fall of 2003. It is to include a framework for accountability to define, monitor, measure, and evaluate the success based on:

- Clear roles and responsibilities for all Ministries and partners;
- Clear performance expectations for all strategies;
- Credible and timely reporting on progress by the government and its partners;
- Reasonable review of performance and adjustment of strategies as required.

We commend the province for undertaking the *Water for Life* planning and anticipate an outcome which will combine security and quality of supply with responsiveness to environmental impacts.

In order to achieve these ends, the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta

- 1) Create a long term integrated, province-wide water management strategy.
- 2) Provide a functional structure for effective long-term planning which includes:
 - Ensuring efficiencies in government water services and administration particularly as it pertains to manpower and expertise. This will reduce duplication of spending across the regions of the province;
 - Providing appropriate and sustainable provincial funding of programs and water management infrastructure;
 - Committing that costs for access to expertise and financial requirements for planning, implementing and measuring are not downloaded as primary responsibilities of municipalities;
 - Completing the *Water for Life* strategy, and upon completion, move as rapidly as possible into plan implementation.
- 3) Introduce a measurement system pertaining to plan implementation at both the province-wide, basin-wide, and watershed management levels
 - Measurement of *Water for Life* implementation should
 - Focus on those outcomes which reflect the highest priorities and / or are good indicators of overall improvement;
 - Encourage significant but practical steps in the process of continuous improvement in water management.
 - Measurement of improvements in each watershed should include a recognition that:
 - Compliance requires monitoring of watershed management plans, benchmarking, and assessing changes in the state of our water eco-systems and in the economic and social factors influenced by water management action. It is therefore required that water management provides for the collection of information which will allow:
 - Assessment of performance against the local and provincial targets;
 - Assessment of social and economic impacts;



- Benchmarking of current conditions and evaluation of future trends in respect to the long-term outcomes.
 - Assessing the adequacy of each watershed management plan prior to Government endorsement should take into account the degree to which the watershed management plan has addressed and contributes to the Province's desired outcomes and targets.
- 4) Ensure decisions around water-apportionment agreements include a commitment that:
- Agreements will not prejudice the future development in the watershed providing the water;
 - Quality of water in the water source in the area will be preserved and / or enhanced;
 - Monitoring and reporting requirements are imposed as conditions of water-apportionment agreements.
- 5) Develop a framework for Provincial Water Advisory Council that will encourage:
- Guiding implementation of the provincial water strategy by taking a province-wide review of the progress and challenges emerging from the implementation of each watershed management plan;
 - Investigating and reporting on emerging issues, needs and priorities.
 - Identifying research priorities.
 - Providing policy advice to government.
 - Representing all stakeholder groups, with equal representation from each river basin.
 - Adopting a “consensus” approach to decision-making, rather than “majority voting”.
- 6) Develop a framework for each Watershed Advisory Council (basin-wide) to support and enable it to develop a watershed management plan that is strategic in nature in that it will not contain rules, but will provide direction and investment guidance including:
- Setting out the direction for how to manage each watershed and emerging demands within each region.
 - Providing a framework for municipalities, land owners, existing and potential business investors, and community members who want to know what actions are necessary to meet future water supply and quality needs;
 - Introducing best management practices for watershed management.
 - Reporting to the Provincial Water Advisory Council regarding improvements challenges, and go-forward plans.
 - Introducing education and stewardship programs.
 - Mentoring, assisting, and facilitating coordination, as necessary, of Local Watershed Groups (i.e. community based watershed groups);
 - Structuring the watershed management plan to achieve the optimal balance of environmental, social and economic outcomes.
 - Adopting a “consensus” approach to decision-making, rather than “majority voting”.
- 7) Create a supportive and cooperative environment where Community-based Watershed Protection Groups can assist in developing and implementing local water management solutions including:



- Creating local solutions and volunteer stewardship using local watershed groups which consider and assess the socio-economic impact of the water reforms, and monitoring environmental conditions.
- Developing practical expressions of each local watershed's desired condition for the management of the watershed, including a list of priorities for each.
- Adopting a "consensus" approach to decision-making, rather than "majority voting".