

Media Backgrounder



Contacts:

Rick Schneider, CPAWS
ministik1@telus.net
(780) 662-4233

Steve Kennett, The Pembina Institute
stevek@pembina.org
(403) 269-3344 ext.115

Perspectives on Alberta's New Land-use Framework

The increasing pace, scale and intensity of resource development and other land uses are placing unprecedented pressure on Alberta's land, water and other natural resources. The Government of Alberta has identified the following land-use challenges facing the province:¹

- managing growth, mounting land-use pressures and cumulative effects
- reconciling competing demands for land
- ensuring sustainability of land use for ourselves and for future generations
- integrating land-use policies

Alberta's current system for land and resource management is incapable of meeting these challenges. The government lacks the tools to set objectives at the landscape scale, determine priorities among competing land uses, and make explicit trade-offs to maintain important environmental and social values. Decision-making about land and resource use occurs in a policy and planning vacuum. Decision-making is fragmented, rather than integrated, and it often focuses on individual projects or activities without considering cumulative impacts on a shared land base. All too often, decision makers within departmental silos pursue narrow mandates and mutually inconsistent policies. The dominant objective has been to maximize economic growth, despite evidence that many indicators of environmental quality and quality of life are moving in the wrong direction.

The deficiencies of Alberta's current system for managing land and resources have been summarized in two recent reports. These reports include case studies that illustrate the consequences of those deficiencies on environmental health and quality of life.

- *Alberta by Design: Blueprint for an Effective Land-Use Framework* (**Pembina Institute** and **Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society**, available at www.pembina.org and www.cpawsnab.org)

- *Curing Environmental Dis-Integration: A Prescription for Integrating the Government of Alberta's Strategic Initiatives* (Pembina Institute and Water Matters Society of Alberta, available at www.pembina.org and www.water-matters.org)

The Government of Alberta has stated that its new Land-Use Framework (LUF) will address the aforementioned deficiencies and “will provide a vision for land use in Alberta and the overall direction needed to manage growth and activities on Alberta’s landscape.”² The LUF is therefore intended to bring about fundamental changes to the way that the Government of Alberta makes decisions about land and resource use.

Components of an Effective Land-use Framework

Bold action is needed if the LUF is to meet the expectations of Albertans and provide solutions to the pressing problems that the government itself has identified. In their summary report *Alberta by Design Checklist: Evaluating Alberta's Land-Use Framework* (available at www.pembina.org and www.cpawnsab.org) the Pembina Institute and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society provide a checklist of elements required for the LUF to be effective. The checklist includes the following key elements:

1. Clear acknowledgement that Alberta’s existing system for land and resource management is inadequate to address current and future land-use challenges, and a commitment to implement significant changes to the structure of decision-making (i.e., policy, legislation, decision-making processes, departmental mandates, etc.).
2. A new land-use planning act that provides the legal foundation for integrated regional planning by defining planning regions, establishing an effective, transparent and inclusive planning process, and ensuring that regional land-use plans are legally binding on other land-use decisions.
3. A commitment to outcome-based management, with outcomes reflecting the full spectrum of economic, environmental and social values held by Albertans.
4. A commitment to using quantitative limits, land-use zoning (including protected areas) and other regulatory and market-based instruments to manage cumulative impacts and ensure that the environmental, social and economic objectives specified in land-use plans are met.
5. Interim measures to maintain land-use values and options and to avoid a development rush during the planning process in areas of the province where important environmental and social values are at imminent risk (e.g., northeastern Alberta, southern east slopes). These measures could include:
 - a. adjustments to land and resource tenures to alter the timing of development
 - b. incentives and requirements to minimize new disturbance and other impacts
 - c. restrictions on land re-zoning during the planning process
 - d. temporary moratoria on new land and resource dispositions and on project approvals.
6. Effective and publicly accessible mechanisms for monitoring compliance by decision-makers with land-use plans, ensuring accountability, and taking enforcement action to address non-conforming decisions and land uses. Also, a system for monitoring

indicators of land-use outcomes, with defined actions for revising land-use plans if desired outcomes are not being achieved.

7. A detailed implementation plan for the LUF, including timetables for introducing new legislation and for completing integrated planning throughout the province, and a well-funded process for policy development, public involvement and increasing the government's capacity for land-use planning.

What the Government of Alberta Says About Land-use Issues and Solutions

The Government of Alberta has acknowledged many of the deficiencies with the current system. The Honourable Ted Morton has said that “Alberta’s hyper-growth in population and economic activities is putting unprecedented pressure on Alberta’s landscapes. There are competing demands for oil, gas, forestry, agriculture, industrial development, housing, recreation and conservation — often on the same lands. ... These new realities call for new approaches to managing land, resources and our natural environment.”³ Speaking to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Minister Morton said Alberta has reached “a tipping point,” and that “the old system of allowing anyone to do almost anything, anywhere, anytime may have worked when there were only a million of us ... it won’t work any longer.”⁴

Alberta Environment also identified deficiencies in Alberta’s system for land and resource management in a policy paper that described its proposed regulatory framework for cumulative environmental effects. The report says that Albertans “recognize that there are environmental limits and pushing those limits can result in significant impacts to our environment, our way of life, and our quality of life.”⁵ Given evidence that these limits are being reached in certain parts of the province, the report comments that the current management framework may not enable Albertans to achieve an appropriate balance of environmental, social, human health and economic values. The report also acknowledges that Alberta’s current regulatory system “is limited in its ability to address the cumulative effects of a number of individually regulated projects and unregulated activities, or to consider impacts across air, land, water and biodiversity in an integrated manner.”⁶ Alberta Environment therefore recognized the need for new legislation “to establish an environmental management system that sets desired objectives for environmental quality for defined parts of the province and ensures human activity is managed to achieve those objectives.”⁷

What Albertans Expect From the Land-use Framework

The Government of Alberta has undertaken extensive public and stakeholder consultation as part of the LUF initiative. There is remarkable consistency in the recommendations that it has received from a broad cross-section of interested Albertans. The summary of Albertans’ responses to questions in the LUF Workbook reported that: “Repeatedly, respondents called for greater provincial leadership in the area of land-use planning; they stressed that managing growth in Alberta requires a comprehensive provincial land-use planning and shared decision-making model.”⁸ Many respondents “emphasized that land-use planning decisions should seek to ensure the long-term sustainability of Alberta’s land base and water resources” and that “the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, wildlife habitats, and watersheds must play a more central role in all land-use management decision-making.”⁹

Similar recommendations emerged from a cross-sector forum that brought together a broad range of stakeholder organizations. The report on the LUF cross-sector forum stated that “Virtually all

participants ... envisioned a strong leadership role for the [Government of Alberta] in land-use planning, far beyond that which it currently exercises.”¹⁰ In particular, participants called for “a more decisive, coordinated, and long-term approach to ensure that land, along with all other natural resources, is maintained for future generations.”¹¹

Albertans also recognize the need for improved integration in decision-making across resource sectors. The Alberta Water Council has released recommendations for the renewal of the Water for Life Strategy that focus particularly on the need for integrated management and improved governance.¹² It states that, in order to adopt a “source-to-use” conservation ethic, “we must recognize and accept that water quality and quantity objectives are inextricably linked to land use decisions in watersheds and vice versa.”¹³ The Alberta Water Council therefore concludes that “we need to integrate the Water for Life strategy with the province’s Land-Use Framework and other strategies, to enable a comprehensive and holistic approach.”¹⁴

Similar recommendations have come from other sectors. A report by the Agriculture and Food Council of Alberta recommends the establishment of an integrated provincial land-use planning agency.¹⁵ A report by the Alberta Forest Products Association states that “clearly articulated provincial objectives, indicators and targets to measure progress are needed to address cumulative effects of human activities on our forest lands” and recommends integrated regional planning as a key component of the LUF.¹⁶ Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier has welcomed the prospect of a new approach to land-use in Alberta, stating that “We need to enshrine regional planning in legislation.”¹⁷

¹ *Understanding Land Use in Alberta*, (April 2007) p. 5 (available at: <http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca/docs/LUF%20101%20Final%20Document.pdf>).

² *Understanding Land Use in Alberta*, p. 6.

³ *Understanding Land Use in Alberta*, p. i.

⁴ Jason Fekete, “Morton sees backlash over land-use revamp” *Calgary Herald* (Jan. 12, 2008) p. A4.

⁵ Alberta Environment, *Towards Environmental Sustainability: Proposed Regulatory Framework for Managing Environmental Cumulative Effects*, p. 4 (available at: http://www.environment.alberta.ca/documents/CEM_Framework.pdf).

⁶ *Towards Environmental Sustainability*, p. 6.

⁷ *Towards Environmental Sustainability*, p. 10.

⁸ *Land-use Framework Workbook Summary Report*, (October 2007) p. 2 (available at: <http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca/docs/LUF%20Summary%20Report.pdf>).

⁹ *Land-use Framework Workbook Summary Report*, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Provincial Land-use Framework Initiative Cross-sector Forum, Summary Report*, (December 2006) p. 9 (available at: http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca/docs/RD%20Summary_screen.pdf).

¹¹ *Provincial Land-use Framework Initiative Cross-sector Forum, Summary Report*, p. 9.

¹² Alberta Water Council, *Water for Life: Recommendations for Renewal* (January 2008) (available at: [http://www.waterforlife.ca/docs/WFLR_Recommendations_for_Renewal.pdf](#)).

<http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/Portals/0/pdfs/WFL%20Renewal%20Report%20-%20For%20Web.pdf>).

¹³ *Water for Life: Recommendations for Renewal*, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Water for Life: Recommendations for Renewal*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Agriculture and Food Council, *Reviewing Land Use and Environmental Stewardship in Agriculture* (January 2008) p. 2 (available at: <http://www.agfoodcouncil.com/media/12462/environmental%20policies%20report.pdf>).

¹⁶ Alberta Forest Products Association, *A Land Use Framework for Alberta's Forest Lands* (July 2007) p. 7 (available at: <http://www.albertaforestproducts.ca>).

¹⁷ Renata D'Aliesio, "Mayor welcomes regional planning" *Calgary Herald* (April 16, 2008) p. A5.