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Wetland Management

The management of wetlands in Alberta is guided, in part, by an interim wetland management policy for slough/marsh wetlands in the settled area of Alberta (AWRC 1993). The interim policy was prepared in response to wetland loss and the need to guide provincial departments in a consistent manner. As stated in the interim policy (AWRC 1993), the goal of the Government of Alberta is "to sustain the social, economic and environmental benefits that functioning wetlands provide, now and in the future."

The intent of the interim policy in relation to sloughs and marshes is to conserve these wetlands in a natural state, to mitigate degradation or loss of wetlands, and to enhance, restore, or create wetlands in areas where natural sloughs and marshes have been depleted or degraded. While the interim policy does not provide specific direction for the management of peatlands, the policy goal of sustaining the social, economic, and environmental benefits of wetlands is also applicable to these ecosystems. The policy states that "a cautious approach to the use and development of peat resources will be adopted until a policy for peatlands is developed" (AWRC 1993).

In 2008, recommendations for a new wetland policy, developed over three years by the Provincial Wetland Policy Project Team, were submitted to the Alberta government by the Alberta Water Council. The goal of the proposed policy is to maintain wetland area and the ecological, social, and economic benefits that wetlands provide (AWC 2008). The proposed policy is comprehensive, applicable to both the White and Green areas of Alberta, with the provincial Water Act providing the legislative basis for policy implementation.

The Canadian federal government also has a national wetland policy, the objective of which is to "promote the conservation of Canada's wetlands to sustain their ecological and socio-economic functions, now and in the future" (Government of Canada 1991). Goals of the national policy include, among others, no net loss of wetland functions on federal lands and waters, maintaining the functions and values derived from wetlands throughout Canada, and recognition of wetland functions in planning, management, and decision-making related to federal programs, policies, and activities.



Boreal Forest Wetlands
Source: Hatfield Consultants
(click to enlarge)

Wetland Restoration

Wetland alteration must be approved by Alberta Environment under the [Water Act](#) (AENV 2007c). If it is likely that a project will impact a wetland, a Qualified Wetland Aquatic Environmental Specialist (QWAES) should be consulted about restoration options. As a rule of thumb, there is often a restoration ratio 3:1, meaning that for every one hectare of wetland destroyed, there must be three hectares of wetland restored. The ratio varies depending on several factors, including the type of wetland, the importance to flora and fauna, and the degree of permanency.

[Ducks Unlimited](#) is the only wetland restoration agency in Alberta and is responsible for determining if a restoration site will support a wetland and for submitting the restoration application to Alberta Environment. The application for restoration and the restoration itself are funded by the approval applicant.

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