

Check Against Delivery

Honourable Ted Morton, Minister, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

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The Land-use Framework: Growth and Stewardship in the Balance

Calgary Chamber Ballroom, Calgary

Thank you for that introduction. It is great to be back at the Chamber!

When Premier Stelmach appointed his Cabinet, I was pleased to be named Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and given responsibility for the Land-use Framework.

I did not underestimate the difficulty of this task. But I was more optimistic about our prospects for success than at least one Albertan. The day after I was appointed the Minister for Sustainable Resource Development, I got this e-mail:

“I have very low expectations of you, Minister Morton. Good news for you, since you won’t have to work too hard to exceed them—if you can at least slow the decline during your tenure, you will have achieved something.”

I’m planning on doing a little better than that!

At the other end of the spectrum, I was participating in a workshop of the Southern Foothills Study Group in March of 2007. One of the speakers was emphasizing the importance of leadership in striking a new balance between development and environmental conservation.

Suddenly, he turned to me and said: “Minister, in recent years, Alberta politicians have simply taken the path of least resistance. We are counting on your to lead us down the path of no return.”

I told him that I would not be hiring him as my Director of Communications.

In Alberta, the need for a Land-use Framework grew out of the challenges of our recent hyper-growth. You remember those days. From 2002 to 2007, Alberta’s economy grew an average of 4.5 per cent a year, compared to 2.7 per cent for all of Canada.

From 2001 to 2007, Calgary’s population grew by over 13 per cent—today it is the fourth-largest city in Canada. Provincially, we gained between 21,000 and 36,000 people a year—that’s 143,000 in six years, and over a million people in just one generation. In our lifetime—by 2026—Alberta’s population is projected to hit 5 million.

More people means more activities on the land. Just going to work, we have 2.6 million cars and trucks on the road, a million more than in 1980. When Albertans are not at work, they are out and about, hiking and backpacking, fishing and hunting, and cross-country skiing.

They also are enjoying newer forms of motorized recreation. The number of registered All-Terrain Vehicles, or ATVs, more than tripled – with 19,000 in 1995 and 67,000 in 2006. Add these to the more than 26,000 registered snowmobiles in Alberta, up from 19,000 in 1995.

The output of our oil sands has doubled in the past decade, from one-half to 1 million barrels a day. Expansions are on hold, but production continues. Ten years ago, we had no coal bed methane wells. Last year, there were over 12,500 CBM wells—and 11,000 of them were drilled just since 2004.

Alberta's farmers and ranches own and use about one-third of the province's land. The number of cattle in confined feeding operations doubled since 1960, to over 6 million head. The number of hogs increased by 50 per cent, to over 2 million. And, we are cultivating about 7 million more acres than we did in 1960.

The number of people has grown, but the size of our province has not. More people are doing more things on the same landscape. We have reached a tipping point. Allowing anyone to do anything, anywhere, any time, may have worked when we have fewer people, but when Alberta reaches 4 or 5 million, it won't work.

We have a paradox—if we want to keep what we value in Alberta, we have to change the way we make decisions about land use. Our goal is ensure that 20 years from now, we won't have to tell our grandchildren: "I wish you could have seen what Alberta looked like 20 years ago."

That is why we are brought in the Land-use Framework.

The Land-use Framework was developed in a time of growth. Today, we face different economic challenges. The signs are everywhere. Suncor posted its first quarterly loss in 16 years. Oil sands expansion projects are on hold. Pillars like Millar Western are laying off staff.

We have no doubt prosperity will return. Economies are cyclical. And we can expect to see some rebound in energy prices in the next year or two as reserves shrink. Alberta is one of the very few places in the world that can substantially increase energy production. Alberta still has the strongest economy in Canada. And we have the savings plans and policies in place to continue making the necessary investments in our future.

Earlier this month, right here at the Chamber, the Premier announced a three-year economic plan to protect Albertans from the worst effects of the downturn – and position our return to long-term prosperity.

First, we'll keep a close eye on spending, and make sure we get the best return on the taxpayers' dollars. Second, we'll draw down our emergency savings—to protect the programs and services Albertans rely on. Third, we'll continue building and investing in our province, drawing on the Sustainability Fund and Capital Account. Fourth, we'll maintain a strong international presence, promoting Alberta and its products to a global market.

The federal budget made a similar commitment to infrastructure support. So development will continue, while the economy rebounds. As we continue to build, we need to plan now to balance economic, social, and environmental land needs.

We saw the pressures of hyper-growth. We saw the impact of the past pace of development on land, water, habitat and other resources. How much number one farmland can we bury under asphalt? Once a new subdivision, highway or cement factory is built, it is almost impossible to undo.

The Land-use Framework will help to develop the economic and urban supports for our quality of life—without paying in lost habitat or lost farmland, and without exceeding the capacity of our environment to sustain us.

When I was here at the Chamber last year January, we were still working on the draft Land-use Framework. Thank you for your input into the draft and final framework. I am pleased to provide you with an update.

First, the final framework creates seven land-use regions, each based on and named for a major watershed. Regions based on watersheds will help to integrate land-use and water planning, and makes Alberta the first jurisdiction in Canada to do so.

Calgary is in the South Saskatchewan Region, dominated by the South Saskatchewan River basin, but also including the Bow and Oldman watersheds. The South Saskatchewan region stretches from Crossfield to the Montana border, and includes Banff, Canmore, Pincher Creek, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat.

The Red Deer watershed has its own region for land planning, which includes Red Deer, Ponoka, Lacombe, Stettler, and the special areas. However, watershed management will still take place in the context of the greater South Saskatchewan River basin.

The other five regions are:

- Upper Athabasca: Jasper, Hinton, Edson, Whitecourt, Slave Lake, Barrhead, Westlock, Athabasca
- Lower Athabasca: Fort Chipewyan, Wood Buffalo, Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche, Cold Lake, Bonnyville
- Upper Peace: Grande Prairie, Valleyview, Fairview, Grimshaw, Falher, McClennan
- Lower Peace: Peace River, Manning, High Level, Rainbow Lake
- North Saskatchewan: Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Camrose, Vegreville, Wainwright, Lloydminster

Cumulative effects takes a much more inclusive view of land, water, air, and resource

management. I call it smart growth. Smart growth considers the total impact of development on the capacity of the region's air, land, water and biodiversity.

Consider that the South Saskatchewan region has almost half (46 per cent) of Alberta's population, and the least water. Industrial, urban and population growth of the last decade put pressure on a finite landscape.

I was pleased to see your Chamber support the concept of cumulative effects management, so future development does not exceed the capacity of the environment to carry the load.

Regional plans will use a cumulative effects management approach to integrate environmental, social and economic objectives—and will identify capacity thresholds for environmental resources.

The final Land-use Framework also has a new strategy: to promote the efficient use of land, to reduce the footprint of human activities. This applies to all development—residential and industrial, transportation, utilities, and agriculture.

Just think of urban pressure on the land. Calgary's population grew over 13 per cent since 2001, but just half a per cent in area. There is pressure to expand. Airdrie responded to that pressure, growing 42 per cent in population, and 54 per cent in area.

Future development will have to consider the impact of that growing urban footprint. Options include higher densities, using "green" technology, or planning neighbourhoods to reduce the need for vehicle traffic.

The regional plan will address the efficient use of land as part of cumulative effects and environmental thresholds.

To start the regional planning process for this region, I expect to announce the 18-member South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council in the coming weeks. The council will have representation from communities and interests across the region. Like the Land-use Framework itself—we will aim for a balance of economic, social and environmental interests.

The advisory council will provide advice to government on a wide regional consultation process. It will then use that public input to provide advice on a regional plan. The Land-use Secretariat will use this advice to lead development of the regional plan, while government encourages Aboriginal communities to participate.

To integrate development—municipal, industrial and other land use plans will need to align with the regional plan. Wide representation of interests, communities and stakeholders on the advisory council should make that alignment easier.

The advisory council also will need to consider other government strategies to develop its recommendations on regional land use. For example, the renewed *Water for Life* strategy makes a commitment to integrate water and land use under the Land-use Framework.

We also have a new Provincial Energy Strategy. And our government just released a new 20-year Oil Sands Plan.

The Calgary Regional Partnership already is working on detailed municipal planning to meet urban pressures. Municipal planning should consider the area's pattern of development, transportation and utilities, regional infrastructure, and complementary policies to manage and eliminate conflicts.

Having the Calgary Regional Partnership represented on the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council will help integrate municipal planning with the recommendations for the regional land-use plan. Successfully integrating municipal, industrial, recreational and other land use plans with the regional plan will depend on sharing information.

The Land-use Framework makes a commitment to an information monitoring and knowledge system that can support land-use planning and decision-making. The system will include regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the overall state of the land, and on progress to provincial and regional land-use outcomes.

The system will have two key components. The Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Program, to monitor the status and trends in the province's biodiversity. The GeoDiscover Alberta Program will provide stakeholders, industry, and government with better online access to critical information to make informed decisions.

The South Saskatchewan region covers almost 84,000 square kilometres—about 60 per cent is privately held. The Land-use Framework encourages landowners' involvement in conservation and stewardship.

A range of incentives, tools and market-based resources will help share the cost and responsibility for conservation and stewardship on private land. Examples include land trusts, conservation easements, conservation offsets, and the transfer of development credits to redirect development to a more suitable site.

Relocating urban or industrial development could help protect prime agricultural land or wildlife habitat, while still accommodating growth.

Through conservation and stewardship, and more efficient use of land, will help address concerns over conserving more landscapes in their natural state.

We soon will have two Regional Advisory Councils in place. I expect to see recommendations for the Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regions before the end of the year, so the plans can be completed in 2010. Watch for the public consultations, and plan to participate. It is your chance to have a say in the future development of this region.

The other five regional advisory councils will be phased in over the next two years, with all regional plans expected to be completed by 2012.

A secretariat is in place, and I expect to introduce legislation to implement the Land-use Framework this spring session of the Legislature. We are well on the way to directing a new future for land-use in Alberta.

In many ways, Alberta early in the 21st century is where America was at the start of the last century. In 1901 when Theodore Roosevelt became President, the U.S. was moving from a rural to urban society—from an agricultural economy to industrial and commercial.

Roosevelt put conservation on the national agenda. A direct legacy for Alberta is the first international park—Glacier-Waterton Lakes—jointly created with Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier.

Roosevelt said: "Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us."

The Land-use Framework will help us develop and use our resources, and not waste them.

Roosevelt challenged his contemporaries: "Will we rise to the greatness of our opportunity?" We have the same opportunity in Alberta today.

I have no doubt we will rise to the greatness of our opportunity, and the Calgary Chamber of Commerce will help lead the way.

Thank you.