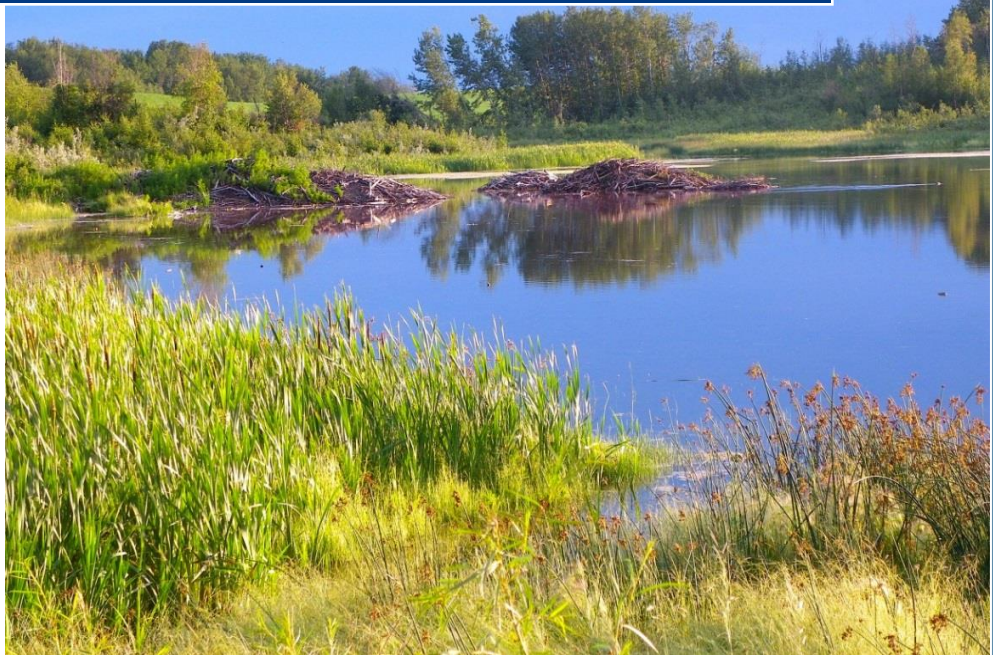




Wetlands Management: Policy Advice



Wetland near Ferintosh, AB

*Serving the Battle River and
Sounding Creek watersheds
in Alberta*

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About This Document

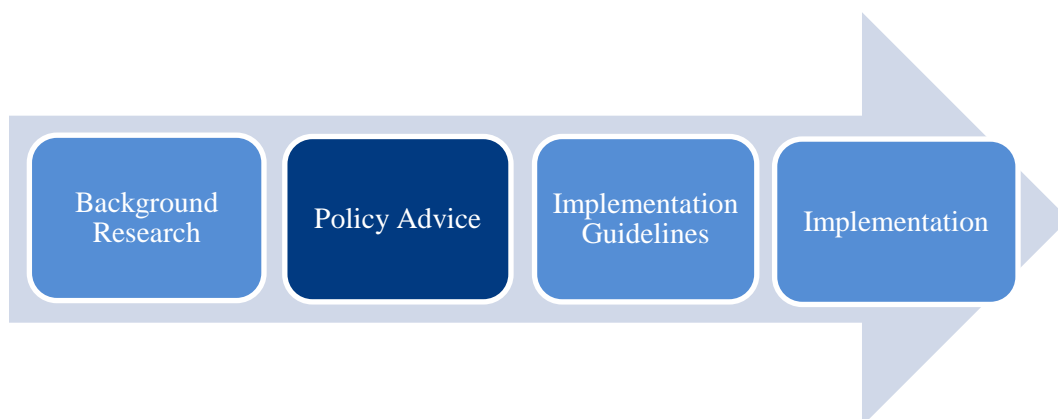
Ecosystem health and land use in the Battle River watershed plays a large role in watershed sustainability. Loss of wetlands poses a threat to water quality, water quantity, and the overall health of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in this watershed. Loss of healthy wetlands has implications for the quality of life in our communities and the stability of our economy. The current state of wetlands throughout the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds is generally unknown, but much loss and alteration has occurred historically. It is important to build a more complete inventory of wetlands in this watershed in order to manage them effectively.

The following document outlines the Battle River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) policy advice for the management of wetlands in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds in Alberta. Wetland management is one component of the BRWA's watershed management planning (WMP) process. For more information about this process, see page 8.

This advice was developed with broad input from watershed residents, stakeholders and decision-makers, and is supported by information compiled in the BRWA's *Wetland Management: A Review of Policies and Practices* report.

Accompanying Guidelines for Implementation

This policy advice document, as well as the policies and practices report, was used to is accompanied by corresponding implementation and management guidelines, *Wetland Management: Implementation Guidelines*. The policy advice outlined below puts forward overarching policy direction for wetland management, while the implementation guidelines document describes options for management strategies to support the implementation of this policy direction.



Policy research and development process

Policy Statement

The objective of this policy advice is to strategically restore wetlands we have lost, and maintain and improve the health of wetlands we have in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds in Alberta through alternative land use and land management techniques.

Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds are unique in their relatively flat topography. As a result, wetland restoration and conservation are critical to maintaining water quality and quantity, and other aspects of healthy landscape function.

Policy Advice Goals

- Increase knowledge and understanding of the status, functions, and values of wetlands in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds;
- Strategically restore altered and drained wetlands within the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds by addressing social, economic, and ecological spheres of influence; and
- Maintain existing wetland area and function within the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds by addressing social, economic, and ecological spheres of influence.

Policy Application

This policy advice applies to the Battle River and Sounding Creek (BRSC) watersheds within Alberta, and is intended for all residents, stakeholders and decision-makers within these watersheds. This includes all four orders of government (municipal, provincial, federal and First Nations), urban and rural residents, agricultural producers, business and industry, environmental and community organizations, academia and watershed stewardship groups.

The BRWA's WMP process is non-regulatory. Implementation of the policy advice and implementation guidelines developed for each of the BRWA's 12 watershed management priority areas is dependent on the voluntary actions of watershed residents, stakeholders and decision-makers. The BRWA will work to support the implementation of policies and management practices that align with the goals and objectives outlined in this document.

Policy Advice

1 Wetland Knowledge and Understanding

Increase knowledge and understanding of the status, functions, and values of wetlands in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds.

Policy Advice

- 1.1 People with land management decision-making authority are often unaware of their role in protection of wetlands, and may not recognize seasonal wetlands as a wetland. Education into the identification of all classes of wetlands and types is required.
- 1.2 People with land management decision making and planning authority must unambiguously recognize that management of wetlands is of primary importance, and manage land activities accordingly to avoid wetland areas.
- 1.3 People with land management decision making and planning authority must unambiguously recognize that management of wetlands is of primary importance to the mitigating effects of drought and floods. Strategies to conserve & improve the health of natural areas and manage land activates should be developed and implemented on a routine basis.
- 1.4 Full accounting of ecosystem services and values of wetlands must be considered by watershed stakeholders and society in general.
- 1.5 Climate literacy must be promoted and integrated into wetland policies to actualize the role of wetlands as net carbon sinks and climate modifiers.
- 1.6 With respect to aquatic invasive species, all users of the water resources must recognize the importance of a stable and native ecosystem. As a result, they must be mindful of what species they may intentionally or unintentionally release into the wetlands.
- 1.7 Ongoing development of technical expertise is needed to inform management options and decision making.
- 1.8 Increased levels of education and monitoring are required for all stakeholders. Education must include how to identify wetlands, the importance of wetlands, and the ownership of wetlands.

2 Wetland Restoration

Strategically restore altered and drained wetlands within the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds by addressing social, economic, and ecological spheres of influence.

Policy Advice

- 2.1 Integration and acceptance of beaver activity in wetland management to facilitate wetland restoration, and foster healthy wetlands and riparian areas.
- 2.2 Flood and drought mitigation plans, and watershed restoration programs, should include restoration of strategic wetlands.

3 Wetland Conservation

Maintain existing wetland area and function within the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds by addressing social, economic, and ecological spheres of influence.

Policy Advice

- 3.1 Apply beneficial management practices to avoid impacts to existing wetlands in the BRSC watersheds.
- 3.2 Flood and drought mitigation plans, and watershed restoration programs should include conservation of wetlands.
- 3.3 Land management practices which limit removal or damage of wetlands and other adverse ecological impacts should be promoted, while ensuring that the economic viability of operations is not impeded by these practices.
- 3.4 Land use and recreation policies should be developed or amended to facilitate protection of wetlands in regards to off-highway vehicles.
- 3.5 Develop and implement stronger policy tools to ensure retention of wetlands on the landscape.
- 3.6 Programs that provide incentives to maintain healthy wetlands and implement further marginal land management beneficial manage practices (BMPs) should be considered.

4 Wetland Planning and Management

Plan and manage wetlands for watershed sustainability within the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds by addressing social, economic, and ecological spheres of influence.

Policy Advice

- 4.1 With respect to anthropogenic climate disruption, local actions must be taken to manage wetland to mitigate and adapt to impacts of climate disruption.
- 4.2 Integration and acceptance of beaver activity in wetland management as an aspect of watershed resiliency, to facilitate wetland restoration and conservation, and foster healthy wetlands and riparian areas.
- 4.3 Organizations that act on a regional basis must develop a unified strategy to establish regional wetland management and restoration objectives to guide development and land use.
- 4.4 Development in and around wetlands must align with the provincial wetland policy mitigation framework: avoid, mitigate, replace.
- 4.5 Increased levels of monitoring and enforcement are required to facilitate effective wetland management.

About the Battle River Watershed Alliance

The Battle River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) was created in 2006 as a non-profit society. Shortly after its formation, the BRWA was selected by Alberta Environment, under *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*, as the designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC) for the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds within Alberta. See page 9 for a map of the Alberta portions of these watersheds.

Under Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy, WPACs have a role to report on the state of the watershed, lead in watershed planning, develop best management practices, educate users of the water resource and foster stewardship activities within the watershed.

The BRWA works in partnership with communities, individual watershed residents, watershed stewardship groups, all four orders of government, industry, academia, and environmental organizations to promote the health and sustainable management of the land and water resources of the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds using the best science and social science available.

We exist to have a watershed that sustains all life by using sound knowledge, wisdom, and wise actions to preserve our watershed for future generations.

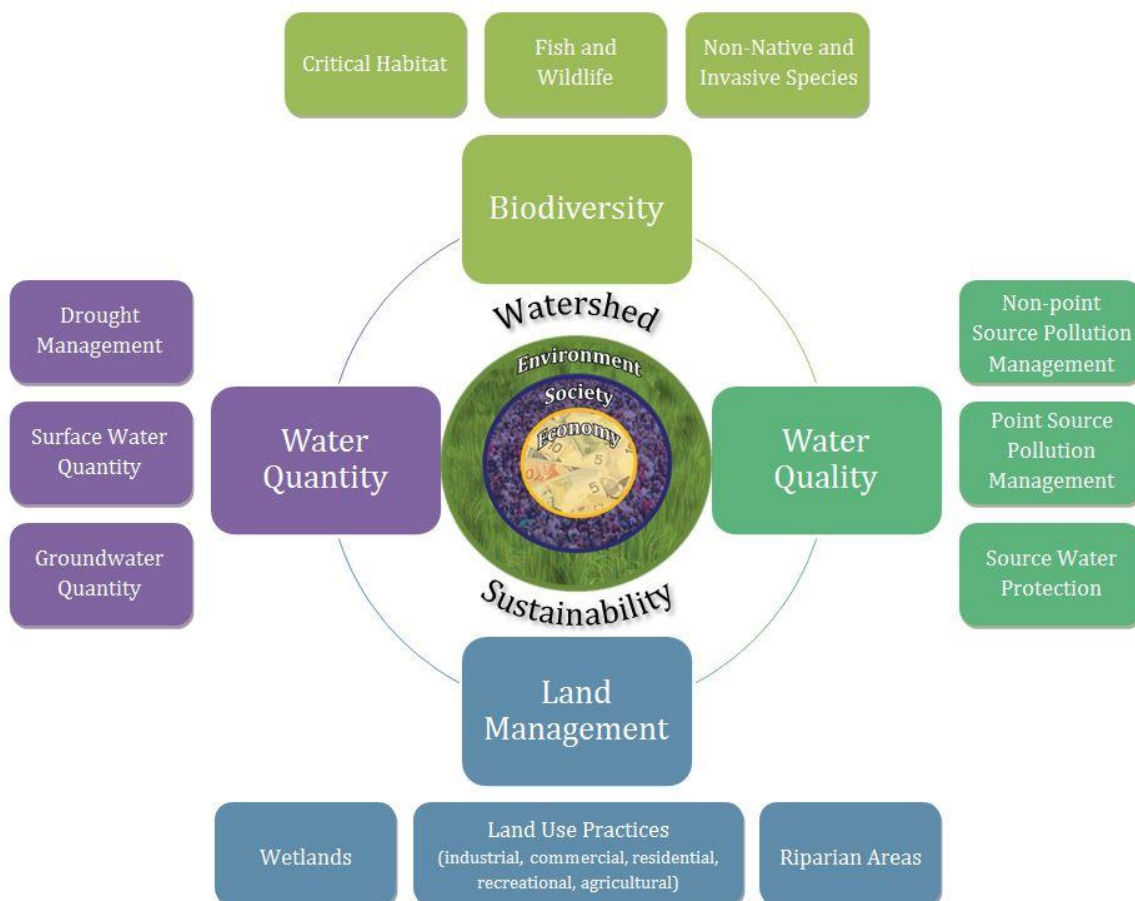
About BRWA's Watershed Management Planning Process

As the provincially designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC) for the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds within Alberta, the BRWA has a role to lead in watershed planning.

The BRWA's Watershed Management Planning Process was initiated in 2011. This planning process will ultimately result in a comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds in Alberta, and is guided by the *Battle River Watershed Management Planning Process Phase Two Terms of Reference*.

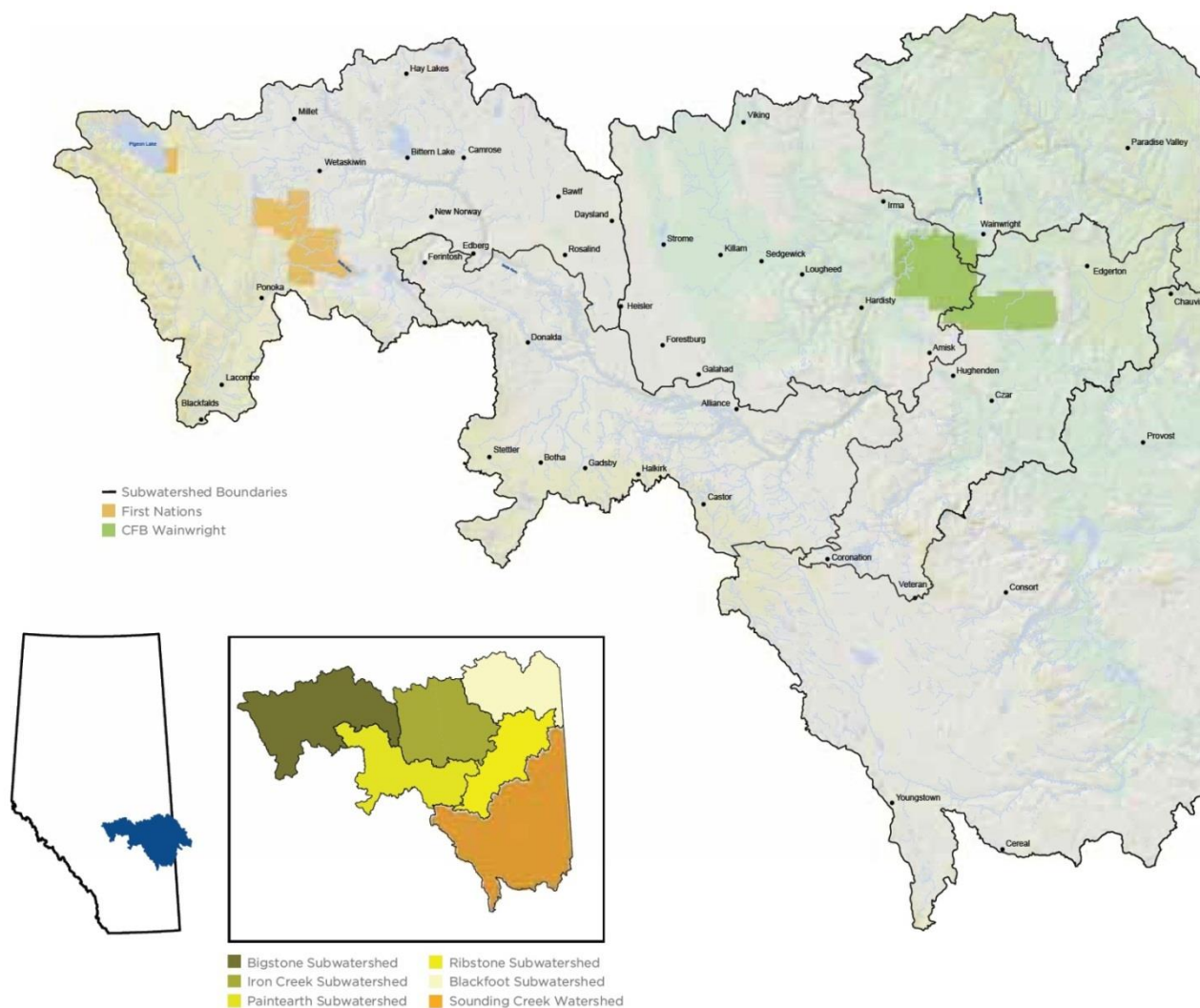
The Watershed Management Planning Process will address a number of watershed management priorities that have been identified through the BRWA's 2011 State of the Watershed Report and extensive public engagement. These priorities are outlined in the figure below.

Policy advice and implementation guidelines are developed for each of these priority areas. These documents will comprise the Watershed Management Plan for the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds in Alberta.



Key components of the BRWA's Watershed Management Planning Process

Battle River and Sounding Creek Watersheds within Alberta



This is our battle: the watershed we all share, and the fight to maintain a healthy environment, vibrant communities and a stable economy.

Battle River Watershed Alliance

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Connecting People to Place for Action



Wetland in the Battle River Watershed (Photovoice)