

# Alberta's Proposed Land-use Framework *needs your input* by **June 20<sup>th</sup>**!

On May 21, 2008 the Government of Alberta released the Draft Land-use Framework. The proposed framework is to “*manage growth, not stop it and to sustain our growing economy, but balance this with Albertans’ social and environmental goals.*”<sup>1</sup> To read the draft, go to: <http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/>.

**This important new provincial policy will profoundly affect how we decide to use land and water in the future.** Now is the time for you to have a say in it.

## **Alberta is at a turning point**

Land use in Alberta affects the environment, our social fabric, and the economy. “*Today’s rapid growth in population and economic activity is placing unprecedented pressure on Alberta landscapes.*”

*Oil and gas, forestry and mining, agriculture and recreation, housing and infrastructure are all in competition to use the land...we have reached a tipping point where sticking with the old rules will not produce the quality of life we have come to expect.” – Draft Land-use Framework, Government of Alberta 2008, p. 1.*



Edmonton and the North Saskatchewan River. J. Webb.

## **Time for change: ‘Business as usual’ is no longer an option**

There is now a broad consensus among Albertans that the current system of land-use planning is broken. A survey of over 3,000 concerned Albertans indicated their top three concerns were:

1. The failure to consider the combined (or cumulative) effects of land-use activities;
2. Loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat;
3. Failure to consider the impacts on water supply during land-use planning.

In this same survey, 95 percent of respondents said the government must establish new approaches to land use; 80 percent said they would be willing to set limits for growth and resource development.<sup>2</sup>

## **Your input will shape Alberta’s future**

Until **JUNE 20** the government will be accepting your comments on the desired outcomes, principles, process, and roles outlined in the Draft Land-use Framework.

## **About the draft Framework**

The Draft Land-use Framework (LUF) proposes principles and a process for making land use decisions in the future. It recognizes that there are ecological and social limits which should guide our development. It proposes the development of 6 regional land-use plans based on 6 new land-use regions. A Cabinet Committee, supported by a Land-Use Secretariat, will be responsible for the development of the regional plans with input from other government departments and appointed Regional Advisory Councils. The regional plans will set land-use objectives to manage the impacts of development on land, water and air. Local officials will retain decision-making authority over local land-

use management; however, their decisions have to be consistent with the regional land-use plan and the overall objectives of the framework.<sup>3</sup>

## A step in the right direction

- ✓ The **draft Framework acknowledges that bold action is needed** to provide solutions to the pressing problems arising from the existing system for land and resource management.
- ✓ The draft Land Use Framework recognizes that **land use planning and decisions must occur within the limits of ecological conditions**
- ✓ The **draft Framework commits to ‘outcome-based management’** and consideration of cumulative effects reflecting the full spectrum of economic, environmental and social values held by Albertans.
- ✓ While not specified in the draft document, **the Government of Alberta acknowledges the need for new land-use planning legislation** to implement these changes.

## A new system of land-use planning requires fundamental change.

We cannot simply tinker with the status quo. Alberta’s current system for land and resource management is incapable of meeting current and future challenges. 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 Government of Alberta lacks the capacity to manage cumulative impacts.

**Fundamental changes to law, policy and ‘on the ground’ decision-making are needed to correct these deficiencies:**

### **1) Implementation strategy, secured funding and integration plan**

While the draft Framework proposes some broad desired principles and outcomes and describes a process for developing regional plans, it contains few details concerning implementation. There is a real risk that the positive policy directions will not be carried forward to achieve meaningful changes to Alberta’s ‘business as usual’ approach to land and resource management. The draft Framework should therefore be strengthened to include the following:

- A detailed implementation strategy including timetables for introducing new legislation
- Funding to ensure satisfactory policy development, public involvement and government capacity
- A plan to integrate other provincial initiatives such as Water for Life, the Parks Strategy, the Clean Air Strategy and the forthcoming Comprehensive Energy Strategy with the LUF.
- An outline of how local communities and concerned Albertans will have meaningful input into setting land-use and landscape objectives.

### **2) New legislation**

Improving the way land-use decisions are made in the future will require fixing the problems in the current system. The Framework must explicitly commit to the adoption of new land-use legislation that establishes an effective, transparent and inclusive process, and ensures that regional land-use plans are legally binding on other land-use decisions.

### **3) Interim measures**

The Government of Alberta must establish interim measures in order to maintain planning options and avoid a development rush while

*“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.”*

- The Honourable Ted Morton,  
Minister of Sustainable Resource  
Development

regional plans are developed 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:

- Adjustments to land and resource tenures to alter the timing of development
- Incentives and requirements to minimize new disturbance and other impacts
- Restrictions on land re-zoning during the planning process
- Temporary moratoria on new land and resource dispositions and on project approvals.

#### **4) Accountability for monitoring, enforcement and revisions to plans**

The Government of Alberta must establish effective mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and reporting to ensure that land-use decisions comply with regional plans and the LUF vision and desired outcomes. This accountability is necessary to fulfill the goals of the LUF. Defined actions for revising land-use plans should be required if desired outcomes are not being achieved.

#### **5) Setting thresholds that drive permit decisions and local planning**

An important part of the LUF is the commitment to using quantitative limits that will drive land-use decisions and reflect the finite carry capacity of the landscape. This process should allow for setting limits to growth for a particular land use. These limits should be informed by the values of local communities and by independent science. Land-use zoning (including protected areas) and other regulatory and market-based instruments will also be needed to manage cumulative impacts and to ensure that land-use plans meet the specific environmental, social and economic objectives that are identified in land-use plans.



### **Additional information**

For information from the Government of Alberta about the Land-use Framework, go to:  
<http://www.landuse.alberta.ca>.

Other resources:

- *Short Window For Public Comment on Draft Land-Use*. Opinion-editorial. **Environmental Law Centre available at** <http://www.elc.ab.ca/Search/DetailsPage.cfm?ID=1128>.
- *Alberta by Design: Checklist* (**Pembina Institute** and the **Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society**) endorsed by 11 organizations in Alberta presenting a core principles and a list of the key elements that can be used to objectively assess the Alberta government's Land-Use Framework.  
<http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/LUF-checklist-04-07.pdf>.
- *Alberta by Design: Blueprint for an Effective Land-Use Framework* (**Pembina Institute** and **Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society**, available at [www.pembina.org](http://www.pembina.org) and [www.cpawsnab.org](http://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](http://www.pembina.org) and [www.water-matters.org](http://www.water-matters.org))
- The Alberta Wilderness Association has written several articles on land use planning in Alberta. See, for example, <http://issues.albertawilderness.ca/PL/archive/AR0706PL1.pdf>.

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, *Draft Land Use Framework* (May 2007) (available at <http://www.landuse.alberta.ca/docs/LUF%20Draft%20Document%20may%2016%20FINAL.pdf>), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Land-use Framework Workbook Summary Report*, (October 2007) p. 2 (available at: <http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca/docs/LUF%20Summary%20Report.pdf>). A comprehensive survey was conducted between May 1 through June 15, 2007 to gather Albertans' comments and views on land-use issues. A total of 3,128 surveys were completed by self-selecting Albertans concerned about land use and therefore may not be representative of the entire Alberta population.

<sup>3</sup> *Draft Land Use Framework, Government of Alberta 2008*, p. 1-3.