

Alberta's Commitment to

Sustainable Resource and

Environmental Management

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Foreword



Our government is committed to the wise management of Alberta's natural resources and environment for the benefit of Albertans now and in the future. As we complete this last decade of the 20th century and prepare for the 21st century, we must ensure that our natural resources and environment are managed for the greatest public benefit and in a fashion that supports Alberta's economic, social and environmental aspirations.

This document reconfirms our government's commitment to sustainable development and describes the Alberta government's approach to sustainable resource and environmental management. It reiterates our vision of a vibrant economy and a healthy environment for all Albertans. The document sets out our strategy to ensure that we are able to achieve our vision. It is consistent with our government's core business areas of People, Prosperity and Preservation... ensuring a high quality of life, a healthy economy and a healthy environment.

The document supports the Alberta Advantage, which recognizes the need to balance opportunities for growth with the need to preserve and maintain our rich environment for future generations. The high quality of our air, land and water resources is increasingly recognized as part of the Alberta Advantage. This document provides the umbrella direction that brings together various initiatives such as, Special Places, the Forest Legacy, and Water Management Policy and Legislation.

This document is also our commitment to continued dialogue with Albertans. Maintaining a sound and growing economy and a diverse, healthy environment is a challenge and a priority that must be shared by all that live in our province. Understanding the problems and achieving the solutions will require the collective resolve and action of individuals, communities, interest groups, industry and government.

Our success will depend on how well we work together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ralph Klein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "K".

Ralph Klein
Premier
Province of Alberta

A Clear Message

Alberta has abundant and diverse public land and natural resources, and a healthy environment. As custodian of much of the province's resources, the Government of Alberta is accountable to the people of the province for the sound management of these resources, as well as for the protection of the environment.

Alberta's natural resources include air, public land, water, timber, fish, wildlife, range, oil, gas and mineral resources. These resources are managed for a variety of purposes including, petroleum and natural gas production, agricultural production, forestry and outdoor recreation.

As the province moves forward into the next millennium, there will be increasing demands on natural resources and the environment. In recognition of this, the Government affirms and renews its commitment to sustainable resource and environmental management.

To meet this commitment, we must have: a shared vision; provincial direction; effective decision-making; and an up-to-date legislative/regulatory regime.

A Shared Vision

A shared vision that clearly sets out Albertans' expectations and goals for a sustainable future.

Provincial Direction

Clear and detailed messages or direction for the public, industry and government as to how Alberta's resources are to be managed and protected.

Effective Decision-Making

A clear and understandable decision-making process that ensures that decisions are fair, informed and made in a timely manner.

Up-to-Date Legislative/Regulatory Regime

Legislation and policy that reflects modern approaches, including firm but fair enforcement mechanisms, and that are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure that they are effective and efficient.

A Shared Vision

A vision should endure. Its implementation may change and vary depending on the demands of a particular time or situation, but the vision should remain constant. This is the case in Alberta.

A vision of Alberta's sustainable development future was first articulated by Alberta's Round Table on the Economy and the Environment. Presented to the legislature by the Minister of Environment, the statement was debated and then adopted by a unanimous resolution of the Legislature in 1992. The Vision of Sustainable Development for Alberta is set out below.

Alberta, a member of the global community, is a leader in sustainable development, ensuring a healthy environment, a healthy economy, and a high quality of life in the present and future.

Relationship to Alberta's Business Plan

Since this statement was adopted, much has occurred. Alberta has grown and prospered. The economy has strengthened and diversified. The quality of life and the pride and optimism of our people has remained as strong as ever. Alberta's vision remains strong, relevant, and is consistent with the government's current business plan and its emphasis on People, Prosperity and Preservation.

People

Albertans enjoy a high quality of life based on economic, social and environmental factors. Employment opportunities and access to educational, health and social programs, flow directly from the strength of our resource based economy. Alberta's high quality air and water help to ensure the health of Albertans.

Prosperity

Alberta's dynamic economy and the ability to maintain it in the long-term are the direct result of the sustainable management of our natural resources.

Petroleum and natural gas, agriculture, forestry and mining make strong contributions to our economy. Tourism and outdoor recreation are two other growing sectors that depend on the maintenance and enhancement of our diverse and abundant resources. From this base, the economy has been able to expand into other sectors, such as financial services, health services, telecommunications and manufacturing.

Alberta's strong resource-based economy allows us to maintain a high level of educational, health and social programs.

Preservation

Albertans are proud of our natural resources. Resource development in the province is managed and regulated to ensure that our high quality environment is maintained. Alberta's natural amenities are protected and enhanced through our parks and through the protection of wildlife and natural habitats. Preserving Alberta's natural heritage ensures that Albertans are provided with a wide range of outdoor recreational opportunities. Reducing the impact of natural hazards such as fire, drought, flood and problem wildlife on people, property and resources is one of the many ways in which sustainable development is supported.

Alberta's people, dynamic economy and abundant and diverse natural resources and protected environment are all part of the Alberta Advantage. The commitment to sustainable development and managing our resources on an integrated basis will maintain and enhance this advantage.

Provincial Direction

Management of resources and the environment is a complex task. It occurs at many levels, involves many different government departments, boards and agencies, and is governed by a number of acts, regulations, codes of practice, policies and guidelines.

Strong provincial direction is required to ensure consistency in approach when initiatives, programs or legislation are considered that affects, in some material way, the management of resources and the natural environment.

Therefore, government departments, boards and agencies, with responsibilities related to the economy, natural resources or the environment, are to acknowledge, pursue and reflect the sustainable development vision in their policies, legislation, programs and day to day activities. Deputy Ministers will be held accountable for this integration through the Sustainable Development Coordinating Council. More specifically they are to ensure that:

The use of Alberta's natural resources shall be sustainable.

This means:

- Renewable resources shall be managed to ensure their long-term viability and future use potential.
- Non-renewable resources shall be managed in a manner to maximize benefits to Albertans.

The management of Alberta's natural resources shall support and promote the Alberta economy.

This is to ensure:

- Natural resources shall be developed to ensure that the optimum value for the resource is obtained and there will be a fair return to Albertans.
- Natural resources will be managed to continue to support Alberta's ability to provide Albertans with health, education and other social and economic benefits, now and in the future.

Alberta's environment shall be protected.

This includes ensuring:

- Alberta's air, land and water shall be protected and maintained for the health and enjoyment of Albertans.
- Species diversity shall be protected and maintained.

Resources shall be managed on an integrated basis.

This means:

- Resources such as trees, minerals, wildlife, water, fish, range, public land and plants, shall be managed in a manner that addresses their interdependence and recognizes that the use of one resource can affect other users and other resources.
- Environmental decisions will take into account economic impacts and economic decisions will reflect environmental impacts.

Alberta's natural resources shall be managed for multiple benefits.

This includes:

- Ensuring that natural resources shall be managed to provide a range of products and values. For example: forests shall provide (but will not be limited to) timber, wildlife habitat, hunting, and grazing opportunities and related flow of revenue; minerals shall provide (but will not be limited to) nutrients for crop and fibre production, inputs to the manufacture of products, fuel to heat homes and generate electricity, and a flow of revenue to provide education, health care and social services; and water will be available for (but will not be limited to) drinking, recreation, irrigation, industry and fish habitat.
- Ensuring access to natural resources is provided. Access includes issuance of authorizations for use as well as physical access to the resource.

Effective Decision-Making

Sound resource and environmental management requires effective decisions. Interests must be balanced. Projects must be assessed. Disputes must be resolved.

Resource and environmental management decisions in Alberta are delivered through a variety of mechanisms, including policy statements, resource specific plans, coordination processes and integrated planning. These mechanisms play important roles and continue to be of benefit. Many of the existing decision-making and planning processes are working well. What we now need is to build on this solid foundation to ensure that decisions that affect the management of our resources are effective.

Effective decision making requires:

- Sound direction on the development of resource and environmental management policies at a provincial level.
- A clear and understandable process that ensures that decisions are fair, informed, taken at the right level, and in a timely way.

Decision-making must be responsive. This means that when decisions are required, they will be made. The decision will consider provincial direction, the need for integration, and be made on the basis of the best available information. The decisions will be responsive to changing circumstances and ensure that decisions are made in a timely way without delay. Decisions should be made after consultation with Albertans, giving particular attention to people and industry that are directly affected by the decision.

Building on the current system, the following directions will be pursued on a government wide basis.

Province wide initiatives shall be integrated.

This means:

- All provincial initiatives with significant implications for resource and environmental management must take into account the direction provided above to ensure consistency with other programs and the adoption of integrated management.
- To ensure integration, all such initiatives must be reviewed by the Sustainable Development Coordinating Council and where there are conflicts or unresolved concerns, these should be dealt with by Cabinet.

Natural resource and environmental management decisions shall be carried out on an integrated basis.

This means that:

- There will be comprehensive forest and water planning, (e.g. forest management plans and water management plans).
- These two planning programs will be integrated through the development of comprehensive integrated plans for major river basins in Alberta. These regional plans will provide a level of detail between provincial policy and operational decision-making. They will also provide a context and process for stakeholder and government decisions.
- In addition to forest and water plans, there will be plans which provide specific direction and resolve resource conflicts or issues (e.g., integrated resource plans, park plans, etc.).
- The sustainable development vision and direction and integrated planning, including existing plans such as Integrated Resource Plans and other approved resource plans, will provide the context for all operational management decisions.

Decisions shall be timely, responsive and provide for the early resolution of conflicts.

This means:

- Ensuring that decision-making is responsive to changing circumstances.
- When issues arise that require a decision, it will be taken on the basis of the best information available and on the basis of a process that ensures input, integrated resource management, and review.
- All decision-making procedures will provide for the review and the early resolution of conflicts.

Resource and environmental management decisions shall include consultation.

This includes:

- Ensuring decisions on resources and environmental management are taken in a provincial context, considering broad public interest, and involve input from those communities and industries that will be most directly affected by them. A role for provincial and national interests through consultation must also be provided.
- Ensuring integrated interdepartmental review and decision-making at the regional and provincial level.
- Ensuring resource and environmental management plans are reviewed at the regional level, provide for conflict resolution and, to the extent possible, resolve all issues.
- Ensuring timely resolution of unresolved issues by the Sustainable Development Coordinating Council, or if necessary, by Cabinet.

Effective and Up-to-Date Legislative/ Regulatory Regime

Sustainable development is best achieved when the rules, roles and resolve of the key parties are clear and understood. Resource managers in industry and government need unambiguous direction and well understood procedures to ensure that the environment is protected and that the needs of the economy are met.

When requirements are not met, measures will be taken to ensure compliance. The role of government is to clearly articulate what is required (i.e., goals and objectives). Industry should be given greater responsibility in how to achieve the goals.

Over the last several years, Alberta has been a leader in regulatory reform. Laws and regulations have been simplified, clarified and consolidated. This process is ongoing and has resulted in a clearer, better understanding of the legal requirements by those most affected. The world is changing and we must continuously improve our approaches to respond to these changes.

We need now to ensure that our policies, laws and regulations reflect the principles of sustainable development and integrated resource management and that we forge a body of policy and legislation that rigorously supports economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. Accordingly, the following directions will be pursued on a government wide basis.

The policy and legislative programs of Environmental Protection, Energy, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Economic Development are consistent with the principles of sustainable development and the practice of integrated resource management.

Alberta's policy and legislation shall continue to incorporate new and innovative approaches.

This means:

- Placing more responsibility on the resource users for the consultation, planning and monitoring of the management and use of the resource.
- Rewarding positive conduct of those companies and organizations that have a history of sound environmental compliance, while focusing penalties for non-compliance on those who do not meet the environmental requirements.
- More use of proactive analysis, environmental assessment and audits to identify and remedy problems at the earliest stages.

The types of resource and environmental regulation will be streamlined and simplified, and the amount will be reduced without reducing the levels of protection.

This means that:

- The current regulatory reform programs of Environmental Protection, Energy, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Economic Development will be coordinated to ensure consistency and the elimination of overlaps and duplication.

The current policies, guidelines, standards, and other guidance documents of Environmental Protection, Energy, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Economic Development shall be reviewed.

This will ensure that:

- Unnecessary, out-of-date and redundant policies and other guidance documents are eliminated.
- The language and approach taken in these documents is consistent within and among departments.

The legislation and policies that govern resources and the environment shall be made readily accessible to industry, communities and the public.

This requires that:

- The departments of Environmental Protection, Energy, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Economic Development will work together to develop a consolidated inventory of all of the regulatory requirements that affect the management of our natural resources and the environment.
- All of the key legislation and policies will be made available electronically through government Internet sites.
- The four lead departments (Environmental Protection, Energy, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Economic Development) will complete an inventory of all requirements and approvals.

Compliance with Alberta's resource and environmental management requirements shall be assured.

This means:

- Encouraging adherence to standards through the use of compliance inspections, periodic reviews and audits.
- Making greater use of clearer and stronger penalties and sanctions.
- Ensuring that compliance standards are clearly set out and understood.