

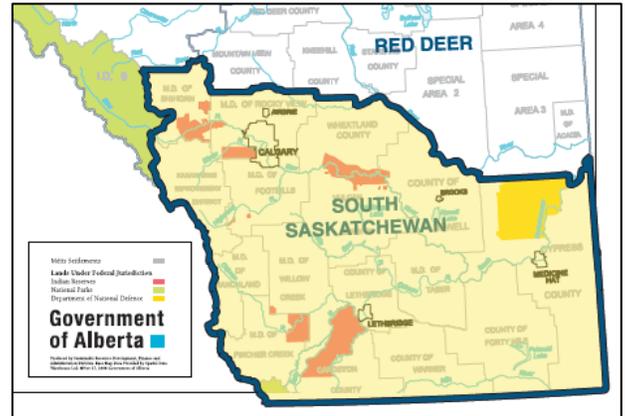
South Saskatchewan Regional Plan - RAC Advice

General Comments

Alberta's **land use framework** was introduced in 2008 as an effort by the Alberta Government to manage growth and to sustain our growing economy in balance with Albertans' social and environmental goals. The province was divided into seven regions based on main watersheds, and the **South Saskatchewan Region** was prioritized as one of the *first* to undergo the planning process.

A **Regional Advisory Council (RAC)** of multiple stakeholders was appointed to start the planning process. The RAC spent many months pouring over maps and learning about various issues before submitting their recommendations to Cabinet in June of 2011. Those recommendations are currently **open for public input** before a **draft plan** is created.

Attempting to *truly* balance environmental, economic, and cultural well-being across a diverse landscape is an unprecedented challenge for planners. The advice from the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC) to government is comprehensive and has attempted to address this balance based on its cabinet-approved terms of reference. While there are several positive recommendations, *overall the recommendations fall short*. The RAC advice over-emphasizes economic growth and does not identify trade-offs that will balance environmental and cultural concerns.



FEEDBACK REGARDING RAC ADVICE:

Vagueness

Throughout the document, several terms lack definition (e.g., conservation management area), which means that several recommendations are open to interpretation. Management intents of areas are also poorly defined.



No thresholds identified

The draft plan needs to include criteria, indicators, and thresholds that are science-based, defined, and justified for each major section. If information to define criteria, indicators, and thresholds is not available, then the draft plan should identify what research needs to be contracted to accurately define these details.

Diverse Objectives will require a diversity of tools

The RAC advice puts too much emphasis on new stewardship tools and market-based instruments. These new tools are good additions to land use planning, but we should not neglect existing tools that have been tested and proven effective on the landscape to achieve conservation related objectives (e.g., Parks and Protected Areas legislation).

Economic Diversification

The RAC talks about the need for economic diversification, but largely focuses on traditional resource extraction economic drivers. The draft plan should detail how various economic contributors, e.g., tourism, local business, will contribute to the overall economic prosperity of the region. The draft should recommend how decisions will be made when a

potential resource extraction development (i.e., forestry or oil and gas) will potentially impact the economic viability of other businesses that contribute to overall economic diversity of the region. How will these trade-offs between economic contributors be balanced and decided?



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DRAFT PLAN:

General Principles of the Plan

Include a planning principle for land-use planning centering on the conservation of biodiversity, sensitive habitats, and species at risk. This principle should focus on the conservation of these ecological resources for their intrinsic values and the ecological goods and services they provide.

Conservation Management Areas and other areas of environmental significance

What is a **Conservation Management Area**? This term is poorly defined and suggests that it is an area where development will be subject to greater standards. These

standards should be established in the draft plan. Standards should include:

- No net increase in surface disturbance or disturbance to wetlands;
- All developments should be subject to a full environmental assessment;
- Impacts should be avoided before they are mitigated;
- All developments should require a rare species and habitat assessment.

Areas in urgent need of protection should be protected immediately. A moratorium on all developments in these areas should be put in place while management plans are created, and management plans should involve robust public consultation. Planning options that benefit both the ecological and economic resources of an area need to be applied; this will mean creating more parks and protected areas to protect ecological attributes and boost rural economies.

Managing for Climate Change

The RAC Terms of Reference acknowledge that changing climatic conditions will impact water availability through an increase in average temperatures. Climate change, however, will impact the entire South Saskatchewan Region and all of its natural processes. Ways to address climate change in this region include:

- Increasing the extent of protected areas, especially in the headwaters;
- Minimize habitat fragmentation and maintain connectivity;
- Restore impacted sites;
- Incorporate climate change modeling in planning and management.

