

A CPAWS Guide to the “Nature Strategy” Survey



The Government of Alberta has released a survey soliciting public feedback on the creation of an Alberta Nature Strategy. CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta welcome the opportunity for folks to provide feedback on how nature is conserved and managed in Alberta for current and future generations.

A Nature Strategy for Alberta must address the key issues of biodiversity loss, ecosystem function and water security and must outline measurable provincial goals and targets with accompanying specific actions that will be implemented over the next decade to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the province.

If you are unsure on what to emphasize in your survey responses, or what to pay special attention to in the survey, we prepared this summary with our take on the survey’s questions as a starting point for you.

**Your personal responses and contributions to the survey are highly encouraged!
The survey is open until Thursday, November 7 2024.**

Introduction

Share your input and perspectives to help shape Alberta's nature strategy. The Government of Alberta is developing this strategy to recognize and communicate the value of nature in our province and the positive impact it has on our economy, and to increase investment in activities to conserve, manage, and restore nature to support our health and wellness and the stability of our communities.

1. I am completing this survey *

- As an individual
- On behalf of an Indigenous community or organization representing First Nations or Metis peoples in Alberta
- On behalf of an organization (such as industry, municipality, a non-profit or community organization)

Our take

Select the option that applies to you.

Benefits of nature

Nature encompasses all components of the natural world, including 'biodiversity' or the variety of life on earth. Nature includes the plants, animals, and landscapes, their interactions and ecological processes, and the benefits, or 'ecosystem services' that people receive from nature. Alberta recognizes that our environment, economy and well-being depend on nature.

2. The list below identifies some direct benefits people receive from nature. How do you, personally, benefit from nature? Select all that apply. *

- Spending time in nature improves my mental health (e.g., I feel calmer and less stressed, it improves my mood or my ability to focus).
- Spending time in nature improves my physical health (e.g., I feel stronger or sleep better after spending time outside).
- Nature provides clean air and water.
- Nature has value in and of itself.
- Nature provides connection to traditional ways of life and customs.
- Nature provides connection to spiritual values.
- Nature provides important resources that support my quality of life (e.g., paper, clothing, wood products, nutritious food, etc.).
- My employment is associated with a natural resource.
- I do not personally benefit from nature.
- Other (please specify)

Our take

Select those that apply to you.

Nature has intrinsic value, and we all benefit from it. We recommend checking the statements that reflect this.

Topic 1: Healthy landscapes

A diverse and connected natural landscape is important for supporting traditional land uses of Indigenous peoples, including the exercise of treaty rights, sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem services including fresh water, productive soils for agriculture, and supporting the ability of ecosystems to respond to changing conditions (e.g., changing climate, natural disasters). As a province we implement many systems to manage the environment. It is important to support adaptive management and build resilience in the face of future change. Healthy, functioning ecosystems are important to all of us and should be supported across Alberta. Alberta has opportunities to invest in nature through conservation, sustainable management and restoration.

3. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No opinion
It is important to manage our landscape to maintain healthy ecosystems.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Protected areas have an important role in conserving nature.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to recognize that our working landscapes contribute to maintaining biodiversity, and the health of our ecosystems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Our take

We would select agree for statements 1 and 2 and disagree with 3.

Statements 1 and 2 speak to the importance of nature protection and conservation management actions. We strongly agree that protected areas improve biodiversity and nature conservation outcomes.

We recognize that lands outside of protected areas contribute to maintaining biodiversity and the health of ecosystems. However, we selected disagree for point 3, as currently managed activities on many "working landscapes" (an industry term for public lands where industrial development occurs) contribute to biodiversity loss and diminished ecosystem health due to high levels of disturbance and their cumulative impacts.

4. Share any comments you have on the above statements.

Please add your comment here...

Our take

Maintaining ecosystem health should be a priority in all planning and management decisions. Protected areas should be increased to reflect their importance in improving biodiversity and nature conservation.

Many activities on unprotected lands or public landscapes where extractive industries are prevalent (“working landscapes”) contribute to biodiversity loss and diminished ecosystem health across Alberta, as a result of high levels of cumulative disturbance. The way Alberta’s public lands are currently managed is not sufficient to halt and reverse loss of biodiversity and promote ecosystem health. Only areas with meaningful and measurable management tools - where current levels of disturbance have been decreased, enforceable limits on future disturbance are in place and conservation benefits - ought to be recognized.

Topic 2: Collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations

Across our province, Indigenous peoples' cultural identity is strongly linked to healthy landscapes. Creating space for a variety of voices and reflecting multiple world views in how we understand, manage and maintain the health of our landscapes not only supports us in achieving this goal, but also supports needed steps towards reconciliation. Alberta has opportunities to support Indigenous leadership in environmental stewardship and to learn from their knowledge.

5. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No opinion
I am interested in learning more about Indigenous ways of knowing and practices related to environmental stewardship.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to consider Indigenous knowledge and science in forward planning for Alberta's land.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Our take

Answer the first question in a way that is appropriate to you.

We checked 'Agree' for both these statements.

6. Share any comments you have on the above statements.

Please add your comment here...

Our take

A Nature Strategy for Alberta must go far beyond learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and “considering” Indigenous knowledge and science in planning. Meaningful, respectful engagement with Indigenous Peoples - such as involvement in the development and implementation of a strategy to conserve and sustainably management nature in the province, support for Indigenous-led conservation and management, and genuine co-management of natural resources - should be at the forefront.

Alberta's Nature Strategy should include a plan to call for proposals for conservation initiatives, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, from Indigenous communities, as was done in Alberta with the general public during the Special Places program.

Topic 3: Connection to nature

Access to nature is critical for human health as well as individual and community well-being. Time spent outdoors increases people's connection with nature and provides well documented benefits to physical and mental health. Alberta is committed to enabling opportunities for everyone to access nature to support health and well-being. This includes providing and increasing opportunities to connect with nature within our urban and rural environments, supporting a variety of experiences in nature, exercising traditional land uses and cultural practices, and a wide range of recreational uses. It is important to support inclusive and equitable access to nature for those who have traditionally faced constraints to access.

7. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No opinion
Spending time in nature is important to me.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connection to nature and spending time outdoors is important to support my physical and mental well-being.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can easily access nature and outdoor opportunities.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Share any comments you have on the above statements.

Please add your comment here...

Our take

Answer in a way that is appropriate for you.

We checked 'Agree' for all statements.

Our take

Equity in accessing public lands within their ecological capacity needs to be thoroughly assessed to avoid cumulative impacts. Some areas may be more environmentally sensitive than others and not all areas need to be accessed for all types of use. Expanding and increasing parks and protected areas would enable more space for conservation and accessible, sustainable recreation.

An ecologically diverse and representative parks and public lands system would ensure that everyone has access to nature in a way that does not unduly harm biodiversity or ecosystem health, ensuring quality experiences now and in the future.

Topic 4: Nature and the economy

Our economy relies on natural systems and depends on the flow of ecosystem services. Alberta's nature is an asset, similar to the various types of capital that form the foundation of our economy. With growing populations and resource demands, we face increasing constraints on our resources and landscapes. There are opportunities to create market-based systems that recognize nature has economic value, is limited in supply, and requires investment to sustain benefits to humans. Using market-based approaches provides a means to leverage the economic interests of communities, landowners, and corporations and to generate economic value and incentivize stewardship of nature and biodiversity.

9. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

Alberta's economy depends on nature.

Agree Neutral Disagree No opinion

Integrating the value of nature more fully into Alberta's economy will help us be more competitive, productive and resilient.

Agree Neutral Disagree No opinion

It is important to quantify the ecosystem services we receive from nature.

Agree Neutral Disagree No opinion

Our take

We would select agree for statement 1 and neutral for statements 2 and 3.

Alberta's economy and health are closely tied to nature, emphasizing the importance of conservation and sustainability. Nature holds value beyond economics, which cannot always be accurately measured in monetary terms—nor should be. While market solutions are worth exploring, tools that attach a monetary value to nature should be explored with extreme caution, recognizing that certain benefits—such as biodiversity and cultural significance—are difficult to monetize. There must be an understanding of the challenges to fully describing and quantifying all benefits of functioning ecosystems.

10. Share any comments you have on the above statements.

Please add your comment here...

Our take

Placing economic value on nature, as a mental exercise may help planning efforts, but significantly risks undervaluing critical parts of ecosystems and comparing irreplaceable natural systems with replaceable aspects of the free market. Placing economic value on nature should be done with utmost caution.

Market-based approaches should be used to create incentives for restoration beyond the legal obligations of land users, and/or provide clear disincentive for destroying nature, rather than creating a fee system that allows the continuation of destructive practices and land uses. Any market-based system should have clear measures of success and not replace the need for strong binding legislation and policy to prevent damage to ecosystems.

Strong, up to date, cross jurisdictionally collaborative, and comprehensive regulatory and non-regulatory efforts to avoid irreversible damage from industrial activities, such as oil and gas, forestry and coal mining need to be developed and enforced. If done correctly, these efforts can support economic benefits for Albertans, with long-term mutually positive outcomes for wildlife and future generations.

Topic 5: Support stewardship and partners

We have a shared responsibility to ensure we can continue to enjoy the benefits of nature and that nature can continue to support future generations. All Albertans, levels of government, Indigenous communities and organizations, non-government organizations, industry, businesses and academia have important roles to play in maintaining nature. The work done by individuals and groups with a shared commitment to conservation across the province contributes significantly to achieving biodiversity outcomes in Alberta. Stewardship actions are vital and provide benefits for all Albertans.

11. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No opinion
Stewardship, collaboration, and partnerships are essential for conserving, managing and restoring nature.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to support the landowners that contribute to providing ecosystem services through stewardship of their land.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of actions I can take to support the environment.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Share any comments you have on the above statements.

Please add your comment here...

Our take

Answer in a way that is appropriate to you.

We would select agree for all, but have some caveats (see below).

Our take

Nature stewardship through individual actions, partnerships, and support for landowners and private land conservation is essential. However, the biggest threats to nature are some of the systems and management tools enacted by government. Government has a responsibility to improve environmental policy, implementation of land management, and increase protection.

Alberta's Nature Strategy should reflect the importance of having strong legislation, completed land use plans, and effective management and enforcement measures to enable meaningful collaborative stewardship.

Taking action

We want to understand what areas you believe are priority areas or topics for action to help inform the development of Alberta's nature strategy and action plan.

13. Which of the following actions are important to pursue to improve conservation, management and restoration of nature in Alberta? Select all that apply. *

- Recognizing the contributions of all lands to maintaining the health of our ecosystems and the province's biodiversity.
- Recovering species at risk.
- Reducing the introduction and spread of invasive species.
- Restoring disturbed ecosystems.
- Maintaining threatened ecosystems (e.g., grasslands, wetlands) across our landscapes.
- Supporting Indigenous leadership and initiatives in conservation.
- Improving access to nature to support health and well-being.
- Continuing to advance land use planning initiatives (e.g., regional and subregional planning).
- Mobilizing society through communication to raise awareness and knowledge and encourage action on nature.
- Cultivating a strong environmental stewardship ethic and shared commitment to nature.
- Recognizing stewardship actions by landowners, communities and organizations.

None of the above.

Other (please specify)

Our take

We would select all the options, except 'None of the above.' While many of these are great options, meaningful and measurable commitments are required for successful improvement.

For the 'Other' option, we would copy the following (from question 16):

- Committing to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and meet the target of protecting 30% of Alberta by 2030.
- Continuing to build and strengthen our network of parks and protected areas, including maintaining and increasing the size, number, and connectivity of intact ecosystems, protecting underrepresented ecoregions, and improving the sustainable management of existing designated areas.
- Advancing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, including supporting Indigenous-led conservation and formally designating protection for areas identified by Indigenous communities.
- Incorporating biodiversity into all management systems and reducing threats to biodiversity loss.
- Fulfill recovery requirements for at-risk species.
- Improving watershed health and connectivity.
- Significantly improving management of the use of natural resources and cumulative land use impacts.
- Ensuring access to nature and improving opportunities to sustainably pursue low-impact activities.
- Conserving high carbon and carbon sequestering landscapes and implementing nature-based solutions to address the increased risks of wildfire and flooding due to climate change.
- Ensuring adequate funding for parks, sustainable public land management, and conservation efforts.

14. Integrating nature into systems across our society will help us account for the value of nature to our communities and economy. Which of the following actions are important to pursue? Select all that apply. *

- Creating economic incentives to protect and manage natural resources and ecosystems.
- Developing systems to trade nature/biodiversity credits.
- Improving sustainability of natural resource-based industries.
- Quantifying the benefits received from nature.
- Increasing financial resources allocated to environmental stewardship.
- Progress towards systems that improve efficiency in resource use, such as improving recycling of material and reducing waste (circular economies).
- None of the above.
- Developing guidelines and objectives for nature across activities and sectors.
- Other (please specify)

Our take

We would select the following, advising the same cautions from question 9 regarding assigning an economic value on nature:

- Creating economic incentives to protect and manage natural resources and ecosystems.
- Improving sustainability of natural resource-based industries.
- Quantifying the benefits received from nature.
- Increasing financial resources allocated to environmental stewardship.
- Progress towards systems that improve efficiency in resource use, such as improving recycling of material and reducing waste (circular economies).
- Developing guidelines and objectives for nature across activities and sectors.
- Other (please specify)

For the 'Other' option, we would add:

- Develop and implement an updated economic framework prioritizing ecosystem integrity in managing and regulating industrial activities (e.g. nature positive economics).
- Prevent future cumulative ecological impacts from natural resource exploration and extraction in key watersheds, areas of high biodiversity, key connectivity areas, and habitats for species at risk.
- Reduce the ongoing harm of previous industrial activities on the landscape by investing in a restoration economy and allocating adequate resources to habitat restoration.
- Reduce, redirect, and reform coal, forestry, oil and gas subsidies to have either a neutral or positive impact on nature.

15. Are there other actions that will be important for a nature strategy?

Please add your comment here...

Our take

The nature strategy for Alberta must include commitments to halting and reversing biodiversity loss in the province and the delineation of measurable targets to track Alberta's progress towards nature protection goals. The strategy must commit to increasing the amount of protected land across Alberta and to addressing the impacts of all land uses.

16. Where do you think Alberta's government is currently making progress towards conserving, managing and restoring nature? Select all that apply. *

- Continuing to build our network of parks and protected areas.
- Advancing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Incorporating biodiversity into our management systems.
- Sustainable use of natural resources.
- Reducing threats to biodiversity loss.
- Ensuring access to nature and improving opportunities to pursue activities in nature (outdoor recreation, being in nature, tourism).
- Using nature-based solutions to address societal challenges such as natural hazards (flood, wildfire), food security and climate change.

None of the above.

Other (please specify)

Our take

We would select 'None of the above.' and 'Other (please specify)'.

For 'Other', we would add:

We do not believe that the Government of Alberta is making *meaningful* progress on any of the above. Current approaches and level of effort are not enough to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the province or protect ecosystem functions and services. These are, however, the exact initiatives that are needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and improve protection of nature for the longevity of the people and prosperity of this province.

17. What do you currently do and/or what would you be willing to do to support nature and conserving biodiversity? Select all that apply. *

- Learn about the natural landscapes and biodiversity in our province.
- Learn about current issues and threats to biodiversity.
- Understand the economic value of nature.
- Learn how to reduce my impact on nature.
- Consider sustainability when I purchase products.
- Consider sustainability when I dispose of waste.
- Raise awareness about the value of nature within my community.
- Implement practices that support biodiversity on my property.
- Implement practices within my business that support biodiversity.
- Support or get involved in conservation initiatives.
- Make an ecological donation.
- None of the above.
- Other (please specify)

Our take

Answer in a way that is appropriate to you. We would select all options, except 'None of the above.'

For 'Other', we would add:

Engage with decision-makers and participate in public consultation and other efforts to ensure collective actions are being taken to meet nature conservation targets and objectives. While individual action is so important in protecting nature, we need governmental commitments to better land use planning, conserve biodiversity, and maintain vital ecosystems through an improved parks and protected areas system.

18. Share any other feedback you have on the development of Alberta's nature strategy.

Our take

Alberta could be a leader in nature conservation, but must first make a commitment to take meaningful action by advancing protection of land through parks and protected areas, joining provinces, territories, and other countries in committing to protecting 30% of the province by 2030, committing to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, and completing land use planning for the province for all regions that prioritize protection of nature as the base of our economic and social systems.

A Nature Strategy for Alberta must address biodiversity loss, ecosystem function, and water security. It must outline measurable provincial goals and targets and be accompanied by specific actions that to be implemented over the next decade to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and the impacts of climate change, while increasing protected areas. We must take bold steps to meaningfully protect lands, waters, and communities in our province.