

Land-use Framework

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and
2019

Alberta  Government
Land Use Secretariat

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Land-use Framework South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and 2019

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Progress	5
South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Strategies	8
Provincial Outcome: Healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources	8
Provincial Outcome: Healthy ecosystems and environment	9
Provincial Outcome: People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities	15
Cross Reference Table	22

Introduction

The Land-use Framework, introduced in 2008, provides a blueprint for land-use management and decision-making to address mounting pressures on Alberta's land and resources. It also establishes a vision of Albertans working together to respect and care for the land as a foundation for our environmental, economic and social well-being.

Since that time, many advances have been made including the establishment of the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the adoption of an integrated and coordinated approach to resource management. This approach encourages cumulative effects management of natural assets, taking into account the growing impacts of development on the land over several years. It relies on legislation, regulations and on Land-use Framework regional plans developed for each of seven regions within the province to provide direction. To date, two regional plans – the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan for northeastern Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for southern Alberta – have become regulations.

Regional plans are developed with input and feedback from Albertans. They establish a long-term vision for the region, set the desired economic, environmental and social outcomes and objectives for the region using a cumulative effects management approach, and align provincial policy at the regional level to balance Alberta's outcomes. Further, regional plans specifically describe the strategies, actions, approaches and tools required to achieve these desired ends and they contain regulatory provisions to enable achievement of these strategies and actions for the region over the next few years. They are enforceable by law and binding on everyone as identified in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. This provides guidance and clarity for land users and land-use decision-makers.

This Land-use Framework South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and 2019 meets the legislative requirements described in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the regulatory requirements embedded in the plan. It also fulfills a public commitment to regularly monitor and answer the question “was progress made toward achieving desired regional objectives expressed within the approved regional plans?” This report is dedicated to offering information regarding the work accomplished or the barriers encountered from 2017 to 2019 for the plan. Progress reports generated since the plan was approved will be used to inform 5-year evaluations and 10-year reviews. Copies of this and earlier reports are available on-line at www.landuse.alberta.ca, on the Open Government portal at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications> or by contacting the Land Use Secretariat at LUF@gov.ab.ca or 780.644.7972.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Progress

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, named after the South Saskatchewan River watershed encompassing the southern portion of the province and home to about 44 per cent of Alberta's population, came into effect on September 1, 2014. The plan was amended in May 2018 to reflect the creation of the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones, regulation of motorized access limits through approval of the Livingstone – Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan, and approval of the Livingstone – Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan provides for eight new or expanded conservation areas, eight new or expanded recreation areas, and twelve new areas for “no service” camping and trail access. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan sets environmental management triggers and limits for surface water quality and air quality, and commits to developing a biodiversity management framework, a comprehensive approach to groundwater management, and a regional parks plan and trail system. Finally, the plan continues to manage watersheds and protect headwaters in the eastern slopes, promote efficient use of land to reduce human footprint on the landscape, protect against native grassland conversion, and commits to continued work on climate variability issues within the region including flood risk and drought management.

This report highlights the status of all the strategic commitments made in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The latest amendment to the plan included many changes to Table 1: Regional Outcomes and Supporting Indicators, and Table 2: Regional Outcomes and Action Items. The total number of strategies was reduced from 27 to 25, and references to specific government ministries was removed to accommodate future name changes. Although timelines for some strategies in the regional plan were delayed, they continue to be important to government.

At the end of 2019, most of the 25 strategies outlined in Table 2 of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan were completed, remained on track, or are ongoing; however, the following five strategies have completion dates that are extended:

- complete the South Saskatchewan Region Biodiversity Management Framework;
- establish the Pekisko Special Management Area and complete a management plan;
- develop a comprehensive approach for groundwater management;
- complete recreation management planning and updates to existing plans for other areas including McLean Creek, Sibbald and Ghost-Waiparous; and
- develop a regional parks plan for the South Saskatchewan region.

This report presents summary tables followed by a detailed look at the strategies for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Progress Summary

STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES	LEAD MINISTRY	STATUS		
		2017	2018	2019
Provincial Outcome: Healthy economy supported by our land and resources				
SSRP Outcome 1: The region's economy is growing and diversified				
1. Tourism destination areas: Develop and implement destination management strategies and destination management plans	Ministry responsible for tourism	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
Provincial Outcome: Healthy ecosystems and environment				
SSRP Outcome 2: Air quality is managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship				
2. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework	Ministry responsible for environment	Completed; Implementation ongoing	Completed; Implementation ongoing	Completed; Implementation ongoing
SSRP Outcome 3: Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship				
3. Complete the South Saskatchewan Region Biodiversity Management Framework	Ministry responsible for environment	Due 2015; Extended to 2020	Due 2015; Extended to 2021	Due 2015; Extended to 2022
4. Implement the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan	Ministry responsible for environment	Added in 2018 Amendment	Ongoing	Ongoing
5. Complete landscape management plans for Green and White Area public lands for remaining areas	Ministry responsible for environment	Added in 2018 Amendment	Due 2021, on track	Due 2021, on track
6. Review integrated resource plans in the region for their relevance and incorporate under this regional plan	Ministry responsible for environment	Ongoing	Due 2013, review is ongoing	Due 2015; review is ongoing
7. Complete the Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management	Ministry responsible for environment	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
8. Establish new or expand existing conservation areas on Crown land	Ministry responsible for parks	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
9. Establish the Pekisko Special Management Area and complete a management plan	Ministry responsible for parks	Due 2015; Extended to 2020	Due 2015; Extended to 2021	Due 2015; Extended to 2021
10. Complete the development and evaluation of the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot	Ministry responsible for agriculture	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
SSRP Outcome 4: Watersheds are managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship				
11. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework	Ministry responsible for environment	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
12. Develop a comprehensive approach for groundwater management	Ministry responsible for environment	Due 2017; Extended to 2021	Due 2017; Extended to 2021	Due 2017; Extended to 2022
13. Develop a water storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin	Ministries responsible for agriculture and environment	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
SSRP Outcome 5: Land is used efficiently to reduce the amount of area that is taken up by permanent or long-term developments associated with the built environment				
14. Strategies are ongoing	Ministry responsible for municipalities and local government	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Provincial Outcome: People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities

SSRP Outcome 6: The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and the preservation and promotion of the region's unique cultural and natural heritage

15. Develop the South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan	Ministry responsible for environment and parks	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
16. Address flood (2013) damaged recreation areas	Ministry responsible for environment	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	Completed in 2019
17. Complete recreation management planning and updates to existing plans for other areas including McLean Creek, Sibbald and Ghost-Waiparous	Ministry responsible for environment	Due 2015; Extended to 2018	Due 2016; Extended to 2021	Due 2016; Extended to 2021
18. Create Public Lands Recreation Areas in the eastern slopes areas	Ministry responsible for environment	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
19. Invest in existing parks facilities and designate new Provincial Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas	Ministry responsible for parks	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
20. Develop a regional parks plan for the South Saskatchewan region	Ministry responsible for parks	Due in 2016; Extended to 2019	Due in 2016; Extended to 2022	Due in 2016; Extended to 2022

SSRP Outcome 7: Aboriginal peoples are included in land-use planning

21. Establish a South Saskatchewan Region Land Sub-table with interested First Nations in the region	Ministries responsible for environment, parks and indigenous relationships	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
22. Continue First Nation involvement in watershed management planning initiatives	Ministries responsible for environment and indigenous relationships	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
23. Engage aboriginal peoples on initiatives to support tourism development	Ministries responsible for tourism and indigenous relationships	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
24. Encourage and facilitate information sharing and education opportunities between First Nations with an interest in the region and the Government of Alberta	Ministry responsible for indigenous relationships	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

SSRP Outcome 8: Community development needs are anticipated and accommodated

25. Build awareness and work with municipalities to implement land-use strategies	Ministry responsible for municipalities and local government	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
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South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Strategies

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Economy Supported by Our Land and Natural Resources

SSRP Outcome 1: The region's economy is growing and diversified

1. Tourism destination areas: Develop and implement destination management strategies and destination management plans

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – as soon as practicable

Description:

Economic Development Trade and Tourism is enhancing tourism destination areas within the South Saskatchewan region by engaging Indigenous communities, municipalities, industries and local stakeholders. Destination management strategies further enhance tourism in the Canadian Badlands, Southwest Alberta and Kananaskis areas.

Progress:

In 2017, Culture and Tourism undertook public and indigenous engagement to help inform the drafting of a tourism strategy for the Castle region. Indigenous engagement was conducted through the South Saskatchewan Region First Nations Table. Public engagement included targeted stakeholder meetings with municipal governments, tourism operators and organizations, open houses in Crowsnest Pass and Pincher Creek, as well as an online survey. Through engagement, support was expressed for increased nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation experiences in the region in a well-planned and managed manner that does not negatively impact current industries or the quality of life of people in the region. The final tourism strategy for the Castle region was completed and publicly released in February 2019.

As a result of the new Lethbridge Area Destination Management Plan, a new Lethbridge Destination Management Organization was formed. The Organization will work to champion the implementation of the vision, outcomes and priorities identified from the completed Destination Management Plan.

The development of a Community Tourism Strategic Plan for Tourism Canmore/Kananaskis began in 2018 with the purpose of identifying short and long-term objectives to grow and diversify the tourism economy for the region. This plan was completed in April 2019, and focuses on developing and promoting outstanding visitor experiences to position Canmore Kananaskis as a premier mountain sports playground and internationally recognized four-season destination located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains.

In late Fall of 2018, a group of business owners developed a vision and all-encompassing initiative to better represent the Foothills region as a destination area. In February 2019, the Foothills Tourism Association was created to drive economic growth, job creation, and develop the visitor economy across the rolling foothills representing over 3,600 square kilometers of rural diversity that provide panoramic gateways to the Rocky Mountains.

Work began in 2019 on the development of a 10-Year Tourism Strategy which will consider how best to support the development of new destinations in Alberta.

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Ecosystem and Environment

SSRP Outcome 2: Air quality is managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship

2. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – completed in 2014, implementation is ongoing

Description:

The South Saskatchewan Region Air Quality Management Framework is designed to proactively manage the cumulative effects of human activity on ambient air quality within the region by setting triggers and limits for nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter and ozone.

Progress:

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on air quality within the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions, and the progress of management responses. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government website at: open.alberta.ca/publications.

The management response is focused on improving knowledge and understanding of what is contributing to air quality conditions, including the influence of the year-to-year variation in meteorology. Investigation findings suggest that urban non-point source emissions are a major influence on the air quality surrounding the monitoring stations. Evaluation of the temporal variation in air quality pollutants was undertaken, further confirming this finding. Regional management actions being considered range from policy and regulatory initiatives to reduce emissions, to voluntary actions and raising awareness and education surrounding air quality.

SSRP Outcome 3: Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship

3. Complete the South Saskatchewan Region Biodiversity Management Framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2015; Extended to 2022

Description:

Biodiversity management frameworks seek to maintain terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity while achieving environmental, social and economic objectives for the region. Frameworks offer a systematic approach for biodiversity management.

Progress:

Work continued on developing a South Saskatchewan region biodiversity management framework. Engagement took place throughout 2017 and 2018 with First Nations through the South Saskatchewan Region First Nations Sub-Table and with specific local governments that were interested in further review of the draft Biodiversity Management Framework. The framework proposes monitoring a suite of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity indicators that would be evaluated against triggers and reported on to help assess whether biodiversity objectives are being achieved. Ongoing work continues to address input and advice received on development of the framework. Engagement with First Nations, stakeholders and the public will continue.

A separate management action plan for managing fine particulate matter in the South Saskatchewan region Air Quality Management Zone was developed and released in 2017 as part of the response to Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards outcomes for 2011-2013.

4. Implement the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan

Alberta Environment and Parks – completed in 2018, implementation is ongoing

Description:

Land footprint management plans help direct decision-making and management of human land disturbance, such as roadways, motorized trails, transmission lines, pipelines, industrial sites or forest harvest areas on public lands in the South Saskatchewan region. Opportunities for the responsible development of natural resources, tourism and recreational activities are maintained.

Progress:

The draft Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Linear Footprint Management Plan was completed in 2017. Consultation with First Nations, stakeholder and the public occurred and resulted in updates and the final plan being approved in spring 2018.

Previous progress reporting for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan referred to this strategy as “Develop a linear footprint management plan for Green Area and White Area public lands with priority planning for the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone areas.” The focus of the strategy and progress reporting was on the development of a linear footprint management plan for the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone areas. With the amendments to the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* coming into effect in May 2018, the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan came into effect and the focus of this strategy has shifted to implementation.

The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan is a subregional plan under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and is enabled by the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (Section 13(5)).

Many elements of plan implementation will require a period of transition to ensure current activities and land management practices can be aligned with the outcomes identified in the plan. Maintaining motorized access compliance is being coordinated by Alberta Environment and Parks involving land managers, disposition holders and regulators to ensure levels are held below the disturbance limits identified in the plan.

Several actions identified in the plan have been completed and continue to be maintained. This includes: spatial tracking and accounting of motorized access to support land management decision-making and the development of seasonal Public Land Use Zone motorized trail maps; maintaining motorized access in compliance with the disturbance limits; establishment of governance structures for implementation and communication across government ministries; and ongoing restoration efforts of critical aquatic habitat.

Other implementation actions are progressing. This includes the development of thresholds to manage spatial human footprint and the development of an overarching restoration strategy. Review of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plan is nearly complete in preparation for plan rescindment.

5. Complete landscape management plans for Green and White Area public lands for remaining areas

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2021, on track

Description:

Landscape management plans direct management of human disturbance to support healthy, functioning ecosystems. For Green Area (primarily forested) public lands along the Rocky Mountains, landscape management plans consider

the recent, rapid growth and expanding human development and manage the impacts of competing land-use demands. Plans for the White Area (primarily settled) public lands could consider approaches for public land human footprint to be voluntarily offset through agreements with landowners for conservation of intact grasslands on private land.

Progress:

Previous progress reporting for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan referred to this strategy as “Complete a linear footprint management plan for Green Area and White Area public lands for remaining areas.” The focus of the strategy and progress reporting was on the development of linear footprint management plans for public lands outside the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone areas.

With the amendment to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan coming into effect in May 2018, the focus of this strategy has shifted to the development of landscape management plans. The term “land footprint management” was updated to “landscape management” to better reflect the integrated approach to planning.

Background work and information gathering was initiated for landscape management on public lands in the Kananaskis and Ghost planning areas. This work is ongoing. For the White Area, issues and pressures on public lands, focused on grasslands in southeast Alberta will determine next steps for landscape planning.

6. Review Integrated Resource Plans in the region for their relevance and incorporate under this regional plan

Alberta Environment and Parks – due in 2015, review is ongoing

Description:

Integrated resource plans reflect government’s resource management policy for public lands and resources within a well- defined area and have guided decision-makers for over 30 years. The following plans remain in effect until they have been reviewed for their relevance and incorporated, where required, into the regional plan, sub-regional or management plans, or through other policy direction: Kananaskis Country Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Ghost River Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Castle River Subregional Integrated Resource Plan, Poll Haven Integrated Resource Plan, Bow Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan, Eden Valley Integrated Resource Plan, Crowsnest Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan, and Eastern Irrigation District Integrated Resource Management Strategy.

Progress:

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to review the region’s integrated resource plans to determine the relevance of each plan and assess the opportunity to incorporate it within updated land use plans. Results from the review will be assessed by sub-regional and issue-specific planning teams to ensure the recommendations are fully addressed and plans are fully incorporated where appropriate.

The content of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), the Castle River Subregional IRP and the Crowsnest Corridor Local IRP have been assessed for inclusion in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan, the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan, the Castle Management Plan, and other plans, policies and operational guidance. Work continues to rescind these Integrated Resource Plans, which is anticipated in 2021.

7. Complete the Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management

Alberta Environment and Parks – completed in 2015, implementation is ongoing

Description:

Majorville Guidelines for Land and Resource Management is an operational policy that recognizes the Majorville planning area for its heritage values, First Nations traditional use and unique native prairie biodiversity within existing agricultural and industrial developments. Guidelines provide direction for managing public land and natural resources at Majorville. They encourage resource development in a way that reduces footprint and avoids or minimizes impacts on sensitive environmental and cultural areas, including impacts on lands important to Indigenous peoples.

Progress:

The Majorville Guidelines were completed and approved in 2015. Implementation of the guidelines continues. An Access Management Plan was completed and approved and is being applied to the site.

8. Establish new or expand existing conservation areas on provincial Crown land

Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

Work is underway to complete the designation of new and expanded conservation areas on provincial Crown land, to manage conserved lands in order to achieve long-term conservation of biological diversity and ecosystem processes, and to explore further opportunities for collaborative conservation management approaches in the grasslands area.

Progress:

On January 20, 2017 the amended Castle Wildland Provincial Park and the Castle Provincial Park were designated under the *Provincial Parks Act*. The Castle Management Plan was released in May 2018, and in August 2018, a draft Castle Development Strategy and Trail Plan were taken to targeted stakeholders and First Nations for input as part of the management plan. The Castle Management Plan is designed to provide a long-term and comprehensive framework to guide both park operations and park developments.

The surface disposition review is being completed and the new and expanded conservation areas of Don Getty, Bow Valley, Bluerock, High Rock, Bob Creek and Livingstone Range Wildland Provincial Parks will be designated under the *Provincial Parks Act*; and the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland will be designated under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* as soon as practicable.

The compensation and cancellation process for the 35 Crown mineral agreements fully or partially impacted by the creation of the new and expanded South Saskatchewan Region parks was completed in November 2019 at a cost of \$972,232.

In August 2018, consultation with the public and First Nations commenced on the proposal to reclassify and expand the Twin River Heritage Rangeland.

9. Establish the Pekisko Special Management Area and complete a management plan

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2015; Extended to 2021

Description:

To conserve important grassland habitat and support maintenance of healthy ecosystems in the Foothills Parkland sub-region, the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland was established in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The plan recognizes the importance of managing the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and Special Management Area to ensure quality outdoor recreation and appropriate nature-based tourism experiences while minimizing environmental impacts. Heritage rangelands preserve and protect natural features that are representative of Alberta's prairies. Grazing is used to maintain the grassland ecology.

Progress:

The draft management plan for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland and Special Management Area was completed and taken to targeted stakeholders for input in 2018 and 2019. The draft plan identifies management objectives and strategies for lands within the Special Management Area as well as the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. The next step in the planning process is to engage with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and the public.

10. Complete the development and evaluation of the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – completed in 2015, implementation is ongoing

Description:

Offsets are enabled under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and are identified as one of the important market-based tools identified through the South Saskatchewan regional planning process to help meet conservation and stewardship values on private agricultural land. Key components for an offset system will need to be considered at a local scale before being tested more broadly in Alberta. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry led a multi-stakeholder conservation offset pilot project in southeastern Alberta with the help of the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot Team and the collaborative efforts of industrial and agricultural stakeholders.

Progress:

In 2015, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry completed the Southeast Alberta Conservation Offset Pilot project and evaluation. The pilot was developed to test voluntary conservation offsets of new industrial impacts on native prairie. The pilot included the development of a workable approach to quantify new industrial site offset requirements, targeting offset habitat project development on privately owned agricultural lands with the greatest benefit for biodiversity and species at risk, endeavored to determine agricultural landowner costs and barriers to participation, and describe the role of a third party to facilitate habitat development and associated conservation offset obligations. The final report is available at <https://www.alberta.ca/southeast-alberta-conservation-offset-pilot.aspx>.

SSRP Outcome 4: Watersheds are managed to support healthy ecosystems and human needs through shared stewardship.

11. Implement the South Saskatchewan Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The South Saskatchewan Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework - For the Mainstem Bow, Milk, Oldman and South Saskatchewan Rivers supports monitoring and management of cumulative changes in water quality within the main stem rivers of the region. It was developed as part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan to complement, but not replace, existing provincial environmental policy, legislation and regulation, and to help achieve desired regional objectives. Also, it complements, but does not replace existing management systems such as those involving spill reporting or drinking water surveillance.

Progress:

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on surface water quality within the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions, and the progress of management responses. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

Alberta Environment and Parks has advanced investigations to better understand winter limit exceedances on the Milk River in order to determine if additional management response is needed. These investigations have identified groundwater contributions to the river with high salinity values, combined with salt exclusion processes during river ice formation as the main source of the high total dissolved solids and specific conductance levels. Risk is considered low in this case because the limit applied is based on irrigation guidelines, and exceedances occurred in winter, when irrigation does not occur. A more thorough risk assessment for aquatic life and other water uses is planned.

Investigations will also be initiated for salinity-related trigger exceedances on the Bow River. Further analysis, including trend assessment work, is underway to assess whether any other trigger crossings will be investigated.

12. Develop a comprehensive approach for groundwater management

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2017; Extended to 2022

Description:

The development of a comprehensive approach for groundwater management is intended to: confirm priority issues and areas of concern and accelerate monitoring at existing wells in the areas of concern; enable development and implementation of an enhanced regional monitoring program to focus on priority issues; support continued groundwater mapping in southern Alberta under the Provincial Groundwater Inventory Program; and develop policy direction related to the connectivity of groundwater to nearby surface water sources.

Progress:

In 2017, the Alberta Geological Survey released a final report on geological and hydrogeological characterization in the Calgary-Lethbridge Corridor (Report 91).

A review of the methodology required to support the development of Groundwater Management Frameworks across the province is underway and is anticipated to be complete in 2021. These results will guide the development of a groundwater management approach in the South Saskatchewan region.

13. Develop a water storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – completed in 2015

Description:

Water supply in the South Saskatchewan River Basin is naturally subject to highly variable flows. Capture and controlled release of surface water runoff is critical in the management of the available water supply. Examining the management of existing reservoirs and developing additional water storage sites are potential solutions.

Progress:

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry contracted a consultant to lead a water storage opportunities study for the South Saskatchewan River Basin in 2014. The study assessed previously identified potential storage sites and concluded that there was limited opportunity for additional storage to improve future water security in southern Alberta. The Water Storage Opportunities in the South Saskatchewan River Basin in Alberta (2014) results continue to inform planning and decision-making regarding possible development of additional water storage sites as well as the assessment of both on-stream and off-stream storage sites. Water storage is key to water management in the South Saskatchewan River Basin and optimizing water management will continue to be a priority in this region. The final report is available here: [www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/irr15015/\\$file/ssrb-water-storage-main-report.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/irr15015/$file/ssrb-water-storage-main-report.pdf)

SSRP Outcome 5: Land is used efficiently to reduce the amount of area that is taken up by permanent or long-term developments associated with the built environment.

14. Strategies are ongoing (and include building awareness and understanding of efficient use of land principles)

Alberta Municipal Affairs – implementation is ongoing

Description:

A set of efficient use of land principles was developed to provide guidance for land use planners and decision-makers on public and private lands in order to promote efficient use of land in a manner that reduces the footprint of human activities on Alberta's landscape.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta continues to build awareness and educate land managers and decision-makers so that efficient use of land becomes a standard way of making land use decisions.

Provincial Outcome: People-friendly Communities with Ample Recreational and Cultural Opportunities

SSRP Outcome 6: Quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and the preservation and promotion of the region's unique cultural and natural heritage.

15. Develop the South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan

Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

Developing a South Saskatchewan Regional Trail System Plan entails evaluation of recreational trail demands, existing trails inventory, trail system design options and scenarios, the class and desired experience and management objective for each trail, and existing legislative options as well as drafting, assessing, implementing and enforcing the entire plan, which could include the support of local trail groups, municipalities and recreation organizations.

Progress:

Trail inventory work, including collection of information about recreation features such as staging and camping areas, continued throughout 2017 and 2018.

Detailed inventories were completed in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills, Castle Provincial Park, Castle Provincial Wildland Park, Ghost-Waiparous, as well as within the Kananaskis area public lands.

Development and approval of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan included a designated motorized trail system. To support on-going operational management of the trail system and implementation of the Recreation Management Plan, a multi-stakeholder group was established to support department efforts. Towards the end of 2019, a newly created recreation advisory group was established to provide recommendations on a regional

trail system for the Castle-Livingstone-Porcupine Hills region. This group will provide advice in support of both motorized and non-motorized recreation in the area.

Both motorized and non-motorized trails continue to be developed and integrated across public lands and parks. Extensive hiking, biking and equestrian trails systems have been developed in Kananaskis Country and continue to expand in West Bragg Creek and the Elbow Valley. Designated motorized trail systems exist in the Ghost-Waiparous, and McLean Creek. Many of the trails systems are developed and maintained in partnership with local recreation groups.

All information collected will be helpful in the eventual development of a Regional Trail System Plan, as will the development of other sub-regional footprint and recreation management plans. Work will continue to identify opportunities for connections to adjacent lands to support a larger integrated trail system.

16. Address flood (2013) damaged recreation areas

Alberta Environment and Parks – Completed in 2019

Description:

Flooding in 2013 severely damaged park trails, campgrounds, day-use areas and facilities from the eastern slopes of the Rockies near Rocky Mountain House south to the Crowsnest Pass and east of Calgary along the Bow River. Provincial funds are now helping to rehabilitate these areas and facilities (including the Kananaskis Golf Course) and restoring infrastructure in provincial parks to pre-flood conditions. About 90 per cent of the costs associated with this rehabilitation are expected to be recovered through the Federal Disaster Recovery Program.

Progress:

The flood recovery and repair program works in Alberta Parks were completed in 2019 with a total of 267 projects being completed.

Highlights include redevelopment of the Mount Romulus Campground, Elbow Valley campground and day use areas, Gray Jay Group Camp, Kananaskis Golf Course, Three Sisters Campground, Cat Creek Day Use Area, Sentinel Day Use Area and Big Elbow Bridge. Repair work was conducted for several sites including: Ribbon Creek, McLean Creek Water Treatment Plant, Fish Creek Provincial Park, Elbow Valley Interpretive Signage and decommissioning of the Mount Kidd Interpretive Trail Bridge. There was also a significant effort made by volunteers to remove flood debris in Fish Creek Provincial Park.

17. Complete recreation management planning and updates to existing plans for other areas including McLean Creek, Sibbald and Ghost-Waiparous

Alberta Environment and Parks – due in 2016; Extended to 2021

Description:

Recreation management plans provide the framework for the management of motorized and non-motorized recreation activities on public lands to ensure there are opportunities for a diversity of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism experiences while minimizing environmental impacts.

Progress:

Previous progress reporting for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan referred to this strategy as “Complete recreation management planning for the Porcupine Hills”, “Complete recreation management planning for Livingstone, Willow Creek, Allison/Chinook, McLean Creek and Sibbald areas” and “Complete recreation management planning and/or update existing plans for other areas (including Castle and Ghost-Waiparous).”

The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan and the Castle Management Plan were approved at the time the May 2018 amendment to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. These management plans encompass the Porcupine Hills, Livingstone, Willow Creek, Allison/Chinook and Castle areas. With approval of these plans, the focus of the updated strategy and progress reporting will continue to include other public lands, with a priority placed on the McLean Creek, Sibbald and Ghost-Waiparous areas.

Background work, issues identification and information gathering for recreation management planning was initiated in 2018 for public lands within the Kananaskis and Ghost region. Recreation management planning will be integrated and aligned with landscape management planning for the area to enable and optimize outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Castle Management Plan continues to be implemented for the Castle Provincial Park and the Castle Wildland Provincial Park including providing direction supporting recreation activities. The Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan continues to be implemented. This plan directs management of the public land use zones for the area including the designated motorized trail system.

18. Create Public Lands Recreation Areas in the eastern slopes areas

Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

This strategy will create new public land recreation areas in the eastern slopes to provide defined “no service” camping areas, improve access to trails, and ensure all regional sites within the provincial parks system are appropriately classed and consolidated and potential land transfers between ministries are reviewed to gain efficiencies in management approach.

Progress:

Public land recreation areas are being assessed within the recreation management planning processes. They will be based on existing access, use and natural features and will be small in size. Initial suitable locations for consideration are popular random camping sites and will be confirmed through the recreation planning process. New public land recreation areas are not being considered as part of implementation of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan at this time due to conflict with other land uses, such as grazing. Further engagement on these proposed public land recreation areas will be required.

19. Invest in existing parks facilities and designate new Provincial Parks and Provincial Recreation Areas

Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

To optimize the recreation and tourism potential for both residents and visitors, the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* provides for three new provincial recreation areas and five new provincial parks.

Progress:

The surface disposition review for new or expanded provincial parks and provincial recreation areas is being completed and once addressed, the new and expanded areas of Elbow Valley, Sheep River, Chinook, Syncline and Cypress Hills Provincial Parks and the Sibbald Lake, Crowsnest Lake and Coleman provincial recreation areas will be designated under the *Provincial Parks Act* as soon as practicable.

Numerous investments were completed including a significant redevelopment of West Bragg Creek Provincial Recreation Area, Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park trails refurbishment, and densification of Bow River Campground. Noteworthy was the completion of upgrades to the Ha Ling Trail, re-opening of this popular site to visitor, and

construction projects on the Tombstone Backcountry Campground and the Boulton Loop E expansion in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park.

In addition, detailed designs and planning was initiated for several projects including William Watson Lodge, the multi-site Lower Kananaskis River-Barrier Lake Redevelopment Plan, Bighill Springs Provincial Park revitalization, High Rockies Trails Hiker-Biker Sites, Yamnuska Trails Solutions, Turbine Backcountry Campground, expansion of Boulton Creek Campground, Sikome Aquatic Facility redevelopment, refurbishment of Glennfield Group Day Use Areas in Fish Creek Provincial Park, Mount Shark Day Use Area trails, Troll Falls trails, Yamnuska Trail, Ghost PRAs and Elbow Valley plans, Bighill Springs and the Sikome Water Treatment Plant.

20. Develop a regional parks plan for the South Saskatchewan region

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2016; Extended to 2022

Description:

Regional parks plans provide broad management direction required to achieve the integrated recreation and conservation mandate of the Alberta Provincial Parks Program. They are roadmaps for planning and managing parks within specific Land-use Framework regions of Alberta. They provide a summary of recreation and conservation values on a site-by-site basis, an overview of existing recreational facilities, a detailed accounting of current commitments to pre-existing activities such as grazing and industrial activities, and specific instructions on how these will be managed. These plans also identify where further site-specific planning or management is needed as well as future opportunities for public engagement. As such, the plan is a starting point intended to provide Albertans with a clear picture and better understanding on the values of each park and the issues faced in retaining these values for present and future generations.

Progress:

Regional parks planning was initiated but put on hold in 2015 in order to focus other Departmental priorities. The South Saskatchewan Regional Parks Plan is anticipated to be re-initiated in 2022.

SSRP Outcome 7: Aboriginal peoples are included in land use planning.

21. Establish a South Saskatchewan Region Land Sub-table with interested First Nations in the region

Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Indigenous Relations – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Engage with First Nations and the Cross-Ministry Indigenous Task Team to establish the South Saskatchewan Region First Nation Sub-table.

Progress:

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation First Nations Sub-Table had been meeting regularly to provide the opportunity for information exchange, collaboration, and direction on key implementation activities, including the Ghost Provincial Recreation Area, Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, and Pekisko Heritage Rangeland. While the work of the sub-table has been paused since early 2019, the Government of Alberta remains committed to working with First Nations in this region.

Traditional knowledge and incorporation of traditional land use continues to be the prevalent focus of the Sub-Table participants.

The Watching the Land Working Group continues to make progress on finalizing the draft “Watching the Land” report. The working group collaboratively gathered information and co-developed a report about historic, current and planned culture based environmental monitoring initiatives within the region. The report will outline recommendations to support community based monitoring.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation First Nations Sub-Table contributed to engagement and consultation for the approved Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Land Footprint and Recreation Management Plans.

The first annual South Saskatchewan region Elders and Youth World Café was held in March 2017. Over 80 representatives from 11 First Nations, and cross-ministry staff attended to discuss Indigenous inclusion in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. An amazing visual recording was created capturing the day and the five key themes associated with Indigenous inclusion:

- Indigenous stewardship practices
- understanding of treaty rights
- education and awareness
- incorporation of traditional land use and ecological knowledge in land and resource management, and
- cultural and community-based monitoring.

The second annual South Saskatchewan Regional Plan Implementation First Nations Sub-Table Elders and Youth World Café was held May 2018. Over 100 delegates from 11 First Nations (technicians, leaders, Elders and youth) and Government of Alberta department representatives were in attendance in Treaty 7 traditional territory, to discuss important land, water and biodiversity aspects of plan implementation. Delegates also had the honour to hear from Leroy Littlebear on his perspective on “The Meaning of Treaty”. Delegates also participated in discussion on a draft South Saskatchewan region Traditional Ecological Knowledge principles.

22. Continue First Nation involvement in watershed management planning initiatives

Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Indigenous Relations – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Engagement of First Nations in water management planning activities will continue as part of ongoing delivery of the Water for Life Strategy and work of Alberta Environment and Parks. Currently led by Alberta Indigenous Relations, the Treaty 7 First Nations Water Sub-table consists of First Nations peoples and provincial and federal government members. The purpose of this table is to better understand current and future water needs of Treaty 7 First Nations and work toward water agreements. This forum provides an opportunity for all parties to discuss areas of alignment, best practices, water policy and implementation.

Progress:

The Treaty 7 First Nations Water Sub-table was established to work with Government on the following projects:

- **First Nation Water Needs Assessments:** The water needs assessment is an inventory of existing and future water needs on-reserve and assists both the First Nations and Alberta Environment and Parks to improve future water management and planning. Water Needs Assessments have now been completed for all Treaty 7 First Nations communities.
- **Water Agreements:** Water Agreements are in place for three Treaty 7 First Nations communities, while work continues on others.
- **On-reserve source water protection plans:** On-reserve source water protection plan work is ongoing. Blood Tribe and Stoney Nakoda Nations continued to develop and/or implement on-reserve source water protection plans.

2019 marked the final year for the Treaty 7 Water Sub-Table. Moving the discussions to a regional planning forum is being considered. First Nations engagement in water management planning activities will continue as part of ongoing work of Alberta Environment and Parks and other government departments. This would include matters such as installation of regional water lines.

23. Engage aboriginal peoples on initiatives to support tourism development

Alberta Economic Development Trade and Tourism and Alberta Indigenous Relations – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Tourism development provides opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate in the regional economy. Economic Development Trade and Tourism will help Indigenous communities identify tourism and cultural experiences that may provide economic opportunities, while maintaining and seeking opportunities for traditional land use.

Progress:

An Elders' advisory panel made up of First Nations representatives was set up to provide Government with input to site management and programs offered by Head-Smashed-In Buffalo-Jump, and advice on cultural issues.

Economic Development Trade and Tourism supported the establishment of a new provincial Indigenous tourism association, Indigenous Tourism Alberta, and offers ongoing one-on-one business coaching services with communities, organizations and entrepreneurs to develop their tourism ideas and projects.

Economic Development Trade and Tourism continues to work closely with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and Indigenous Tourism Alberta to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Alberta, including the delivery of Alberta Indigenous Tourism Summit in April 2019, the pilot delivery of regional Indigenous Tourism Start-up Workshops, and the Indigenous Community Tourism Readiness Toolkit.

24. Encourage and facilitate information sharing and education opportunities between First Nations with an interest in the region and the Government of Alberta

Alberta Indigenous Relations – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Information sharing helps guide and inform communities of the opportunities to practice traditional uses, including the exercise of treaty rights.

Progress:

Continued research and knowledge sharing takes place through Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Land Use fieldwork in the Castle, Livingstone-Porcupine Hills and East Kananaskis-Ghost planning areas. These activities provided an opportunity for Elders, technicians, youth and government staff to further cultivate respectful relationships, explore Indigenous knowledge systems and identify areas of traditional and cultural significance.

Educational experiences are also occurring in the Kananaskis area, focusing on improving relationships with local Indigenous communities, providing gathering and meeting space for community teachings and opportunities to inform the public about cultural heritage.

Development of an Indigenous awareness education program for staff in the Castle Region was initiated with Piikani Nation, delivering on commitments made in the Castle Management Plan and the Cooperative Management Terms of Reference, including cooperative management of the Castle Parks. Topics include Indigenous employment, harvesting, research, Indigenous ways of knowing and systemic structures and processes related to Government of

Alberta and Piikani cooperation. These efforts continue to address issues, adapt and refine cooperative management approaches, and break down barriers and misunderstandings.

Regular meetings at Writing-on-Stone with the Blackfoot Confederacy continue to build relationships and trust and provide the venue to share information and address issues. Alberta Environment and Parks staff at Writing-on-Stone have attended training on Blackfoot culture and protocols. Recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff members in Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park also provides a bridge to increased awareness and appreciation of Indigenous culture.

SSRP Outcome 8: Community development needs are anticipated and accommodated

25. Build awareness and work with municipalities to implement land-use strategies

Alberta Municipal Affairs – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The land-use policies in the *Municipal Government Act* were repealed when the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan was adopted by the Government of Alberta in 2014, and pre-existing land-use policy statements were updated and incorporated into the regional plan to guide future planning and decision-making by municipalities in the South Saskatchewan region. Municipal planning efforts must continue to complement provincial policies and initiatives, especially as municipalities adjust to the changing planning structure and their new responsibilities with respect to the new planning legislation and regulation.

Progress:

Municipalities continued to implement land-use policies in the course of carrying out their planning responsibilities and day-to-day land use decision-making processes. Municipalities are required to review and align their regulatory instruments with regional plans. For the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, a statutory compliance declaration was required by September 1, 2019.

Under the new Municipal Government Act, changes were made that will help, and in some cases require, municipalities to implement a number of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan strategies in the areas of planning, cooperation, integration and building sustainable communities.

Cross Reference Table

Over time, responsibility for leading a particular strategy or developing a particular supporting indicator may have changed as Government of Alberta ministry mandates evolved. The table below lists the titles of lead ministries in effect today and their titles when the regional plan came into force.

2014	2019
Aboriginal Relations	Indigenous Relations
Agriculture and Rural Development	Agriculture and Forestry
Culture	Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Energy	Energy
Innovation and Advanced Education	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development	Environment and Parks
Human Services	Seniors and Housing
Infrastructure	Infrastructure
Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour	Labour
Municipal Affairs	Municipal Affairs
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism (Tourism) Environment and Parks (Parks and Recreation)
Transportation	Transportation
Treasury Board and Finance	Treasury Board and Finance