



ILM Success Story: Buffalo Lake Integrated Shoreland Management Plan

Buffalo Lake, located about 55 kilometres northeast of Red Deer, is important to Albertans because of its biodiversity, accessible shoreline and its ample recreational opportunities.

Like many lakes in Alberta, its popularity has grown in recent years. There are an increasing number of people building residences nearby and more people are using the lake and its shoreline for recreational activities.

What was the issue?

With increased recreational use and development on and around Buffalo Lake, it became clear that an integrated land management plan was needed to minimize the human footprint and to ensure the shorelands of Buffalo Lake will provide enjoyment for Albertans now and into the future.

How was the issue managed?

Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) is responsible for managing beds and shores of water bodies in Alberta. To help protect Buffalo Lake and its riparian area, SRD worked closely with landowners, municipalities and other agencies to develop a plan to manage the sensitive shorelines.

SRD began the planning process with research to find out what types of disturbances were occurring in the area. Department staff filmed the lake's shorelands from a helicopter and analyzed the videos to help develop a coarse riparian health assessment.

Staff noticed that many lake users were unaware that the shoreline—or the right-of-way—corresponds to the lake's flood zone and riparian area, a biologically rich and productive habitat. Many residents who built or modified the nearby shore were negatively impacting the shorelands.

Who were the partners/collaborators for this project?

Information gathered during the lakeshore assessment was shared with lake users at an open house. SRD staff asked for public input to manage the land around Buffalo Lake. Groups involved in this project included:

- members of the Buffalo Lake–Parlby Creek Water Management Project
- Buffalo Lake Inter-municipal Development Plan Steering Committee

The municipalities and counties that border the planning area were also kept informed of the planning and invited to comment on the draft management plan. This included:

- Lacombe County
- County of Stettler
- Camrose County
- Summer Village of Rochon Sands
- Summer Village of White Sands



ILM Integrated Land Management

Shared Responsibility - Shared Future



Together, these groups identified the sensitive and high-value habitats that needed some level of protection. The lake was then divided into distinct management areas. In some areas human use and activities would take priority, in other areas the protection of habitat would take precedence.

“I think we’ll end up with a healthier lake that’s good for both the environment and for us recreational lake users,” said Karl Grollmuss, a Buffalo Lake cottage owner involved in this planning process.

As the Buffalo Lake Integrated Shoreland Management Plan emerged, the idea of managing the lake, shoreline and surrounding area for immediate benefits changed to an understanding of the importance of reducing the footprint of activities for the wellbeing of the lake and enjoyment of its users.

What happens next?

As recreational and residential developments grow, the footprint on Buffalo Lake’s shoreline will continue to be managed through the direction provided in the plan. This plan can also be used as a template for integrated land management plans being developed for other lakes in Alberta.