

Water Conservation Objectives

A water conservation objective (WCO) is an instrument used under Alberta's *Water Act*. It defines the quantity and quality of water to remain in a river or other body of water for:

- The protection of a natural water body or its aquatic environment, or any part of them;
- The protection of tourism, recreational, transportation or waste assimilation uses of water; or
- The management of fish or wildlife.

WCOs can maintain the status quo of a river or provide direction to restore flows or allocate water for consumption. They provide direction for the ecological and economic outcomes desired from a river. In most cases, the outcome is a balance between leaving water in the river for the environment and diverting it for use.

WCOs can be implemented in a number of ways:

- By specifying requirements to release water from a reservoir;
- By specifying when a water allocation licence holder can divert water from the river;
- By guiding Alberta Environment officials who must make decisions on applications for water allocation licences or transfers of allocations;
- By guiding the Minister of Environment in making a decision on a Crown Reservation of water.

WCOs can define a single value minimum rate of flow or a variable rate of flow that can change on a daily basis. The latter reflects the current biological view that flows that vary in a pattern that at least mimics natural flows are more desirable.

The establishment of a WCO does not guarantee the desired amount of water will flow in the river. The water in a river for a WCO can be licenced for that purpose just like any other water use, and the licence will have a priority for use just like any other licence.