

Wildlife Fact Sheet

Expedited Authorizations Process for Flood Recovery (EAPFR)

Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development - South Saskatchewan Region

To help Albertans rebuild after the June 2013 flood, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) developed an Expedited Approval Process for Flood Recovery (EAPFR) project. As part of this process, applications are referred to ESRD Wildlife Management staff for review to ensure the protection of wildlife and the negative impacts on wildlife and their habitat are properly mitigated.

How did the flood impact wildlife?

Large scale flood events are a part of the natural cycle of change and renewal for Alberta's unique ecosystems and wildlife. Human activities, including flood recovery work can negatively affect these natural processes, especially for wildlife that may already be stressed. For example, human made features, such as roads, have impacted local elk populations over time by changing their migration patterns. A change in river flow after the flood may also affect elk migration and therefore the combination of this natural process with human activities may have a compounding effect on elk. Additionally, it is probable that some species have experienced a direct loss of habitat from the flood (e.g. long-toed salamander, riparian bird species). It is therefore important to manage and mitigate the potentially negative impacts of recovery projects on wildlife to help populations recover after this flood event.

Why is wildlife important?

Wildlife is a valuable resource to Albertans, providing cultural and economic benefits through hunting, trapping, and tourism. Healthy wildlife populations also contribute to sustainable, functional ecosystems which enhance biodiversity. Further, some wildlife species are considered "at-risk" of disappearing from the province and require increased management efforts for future generations to enjoy. Our natural heritage is a source of pride for Albertans and is essential to preserve for future use and enjoyment.

Who manages wildlife?

ESRD is responsible for the protection and management of all wildlife in Alberta. ESRD manages impacts to wildlife from flood recovery projects under the provincial *Wildlife Act*, including species listed as *Endangered*, *Threatened* or *Species of Special Concern*. Where applicants for flood recovery projects are unsure of their responsibilities under these Acts, ESRD Wildlife Management staff may be able to assist by providing information related to planning and implementation of mitigation strategies to prevent significant negative effects to wildlife.

The overarching objective of ESRD Wildlife Management staff in relation to flood recovery activities is:

- to protect the Species-at-Risk wildlife populations from further decline;
- to protect wildlife dens, nests, and burrows for the purpose of safeguarding the young to support the success of future generations; and
- to minimize and manage impacts (e.g. habitat loss) with mitigation techniques (e.g. timing restrictions) and subsequent habitat restoration after work is completed.

Additionally, the Federal *Migratory Bird Convention Act* protects all migratory birds, their eggs and nests from destruction, and the Federal *Species at Risk Act* defends *Extirpated*, *Endangered*, *Threatened Species*, or *Species of Special Concern* from further decline as a result of human activities.

How could flood recovery projects impact wildlife?

Water bodies and the riparian habitat surrounding water are natural gathering spots for a diverse array of wildlife. Since flood recovery projects occur near or within water bodies, the likelihood that flood recovery projects will impact wildlife is increased. Noise and physical presence of people and equipment during recovery projects can deter wildlife from the area and inhibit their access to food, shelter, and breeding or nesting grounds. For example, conducting bridge repairs at sensitive times of the year could cause bank swallows that nest under bridges to abandon their young, or prevent them from nesting all together.

How does ESRD review applications for impacts to wildlife?

ESRD Wildlife Management staff review EAPFR applications to determine the species likely to be impacted and the expected degree of negative impact from proposed activities. The department assesses the spatial scale of the work and also considers the permanency of the work. Projects that require building infrastructure, projects that alter habitat conditions, or large-scale projects are considered higher risk to wildlife and will be more critically evaluated. The work schedule is also examined for timing overlap of sensitive events when wildlife species are most susceptible to disturbance (e.g. breeding season). The EAPFR needs to address all impacts to wildlife, but higher risk applications often require more detailed assessments and will be more rigorously reviewed by the department. For example, a low risk project may involve removal of vegetation outside of the breeding bird period, whereas if vegetation is removed during the nesting season this activity could be considered high risk to migratory flocks.

How can you plan to reduce impacts to wildlife?

Appropriate planning and implementation of mitigation strategies is critical in preventing significant negative effects to wildlife. A number of strategies can be employed to reduce negative impacts to wildlife:

- Reduce the removal of debris and vegetation around water bodies to limit disturbance and enhance the natural recovery of the ecosystem.
- Offset the timing of recovery projects to avoid the breeding and nesting season, when the young are most vulnerable (April 15 to August 15). For example, undertake bridge repairs before or after bank swallows occupy their nests. Where the period cannot be avoided, wildlife surveys and consultation with Canadian Wildlife Service will be required.
- Use materials that allow for natural function of the water body and bank (e.g. bioengineering).
- Avoid locations where sensitive species occur and observe setback distances if required.
- Replant flood mitigation projects with natural vegetation and soil to recover loss of habitat.
- Limit the access roads to the project area, ensure any new access points are temporary and closed to the public. Once work is completed temporary access should be removed and restored.

Projects that remove wildlife denning or nesting habitat during breeding season are considered a risk to wildlife and surveys will be required to determine the potential species effected. For efficient EAPFR application processing an appropriate wildlife survey may be required to determine the presence of species in the proposed work location. Once an accurate assessment is conducted by an experienced biologist and the species present are determined, mitigation strategies can be appropriately planned. For standardized survey protocols for select Species at Risk, please see: <http://esrd.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-management/sensitive-species-inventory-guidelines.aspx>.

Does ESRD refer my application to the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS)?

ESRD advises applicants in regards to the Provincial legislation of the *Wildlife Act*. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure referral to CWS for compliance with the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and *Species at Risk Act*.

Further Information:

ESRD Fish and Wildlife - <http://esrd.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/default.aspx>

Wildlife Act – <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/w10.pdf>

Migratory Birds Convention Act – <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-7.01/FullText.html>

Species at Risk Act – <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/S-15.3/page-1.html>

Contact Us:

Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

Wildlife Flood Biologist

Kristin Van Katwyk

Cell: 587-582-9713

Email: Kristin.Vankatwyk@gov.ab.ca

Call Toll Free Alberta: 310-ESRD (3773)

Toll Free: 1 877 944-0313

Fax: 780 427-4407

Email: ESRD.Info-Centre@gov.ab.ca

For more information on Federal legislation or to contact the CWS

Environment Canada – Alberta Office

Telephone: 780-951-8600

Email: enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca