

# Wetland Offset Program Description

## Alberta Wetland Policy

### Conservation Offset: An Overview

Conservation offset is one of the acceptable mechanisms a Proponent can use to address the impact of their activity. The conservation offset must be measurable, designed to counteract adverse effects resulting from the activity and put in place after avoidance and minimization measures have been taken. The conservation offset is implemented through specific statutory authorizations (Figure 1) nesting within a larger environmental and resource management planning and decision context. Rules that define appropriate prevention measures, significant impact, and measurable actions are defined within a specific offset program. The Wetland Offset Program is the first offset program and meets the requirements for wetland replacement outlined in the Alberta Wetland Policy.

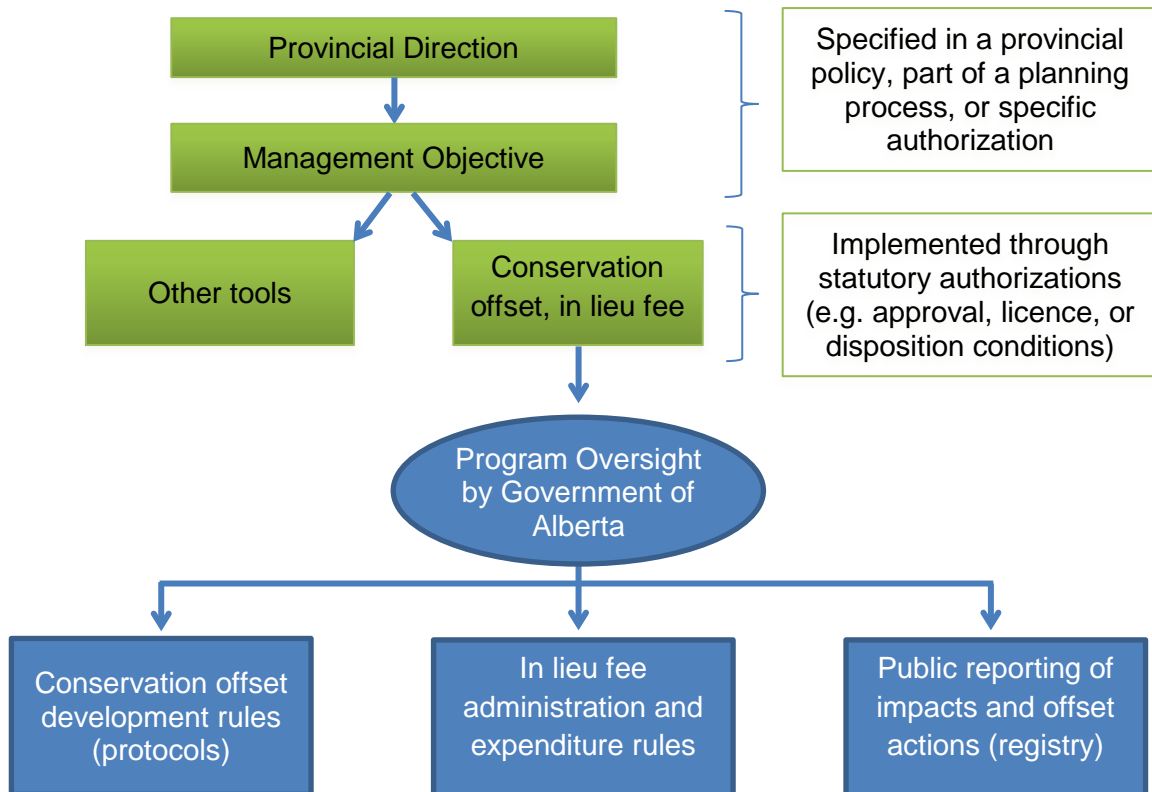


Figure 1. Conservation offset framework overview

### Wetland Offset Program

The Wetland Offset Program is under development. In the interim this description provides background information on the program.

The Wetland Offset Program builds on the requirements outlined in Wetland Management in the Settled Area of Alberta: An Interim Policy, (1993: “the interim policy”), the predecessor to the current Alberta Wetland Policy (AWP). The interim policy required a Proponent to follow the mitigation hierarchy; where a wetland impact was

approved. Compensation could take the form of either an in lieu fee to a mitigation agent or a Proponent developed wetland replacement project. Under the AWP, the mitigation hierarchy (outlined in the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive) and compensation requirement (now called replacement) continue. The AWP builds on the existing system by outlining specific criteria for the implementation of the mitigation hierarchy and rules regarding replacement actions. Replacement actions must be carried out in accordance with specific rules, called protocols, set out by the Department. To meet wetland replacement requirements, the protocols detail how to design, validate, and verify a wetland project as an offset. The decision process regarding wetland offset development and approval by a replacement agent<sup>1</sup> is shown in Figure 2.

A wetland offset project incorporates three associated protocols:

- Design protocol

The design protocol outlines the requirements and activities to be followed by the Proponent (e.g., a third party developing a project, including a replacement agent or an Applicant (permittee-responsible replacement) carrying out a wetland replacement project. The project development plan must be in adherence to design and validation protocols and the Proponent must be submitted to the Department, for review, prior to undertaking the project. Where Department review and decision is required, these will be provided within 21 days of the Proponent submitting complete information.

- Validation protocol

The validation protocol outlines the requirements for a Proponent to provide a conclusion about and rationale for predicted success of wetland establishment based on the proposed design. The Proponent must provide this validation statement as part of the project development plan. A Qualified Wetland Science Practitioner (QWSP), either as a first party or third party, should prepare this statement.

- Verification protocol

The verification protocol outlines the requirements for a Proponent to provide a conclusion about whether the wetland has been established according to the objectives outlined in the design protocol. This verification statement must be prepared by a QWSP, as a third party statement. The Proponent must submit this statement to the Department to apply for the wetland project to be registered as a wetland offset.

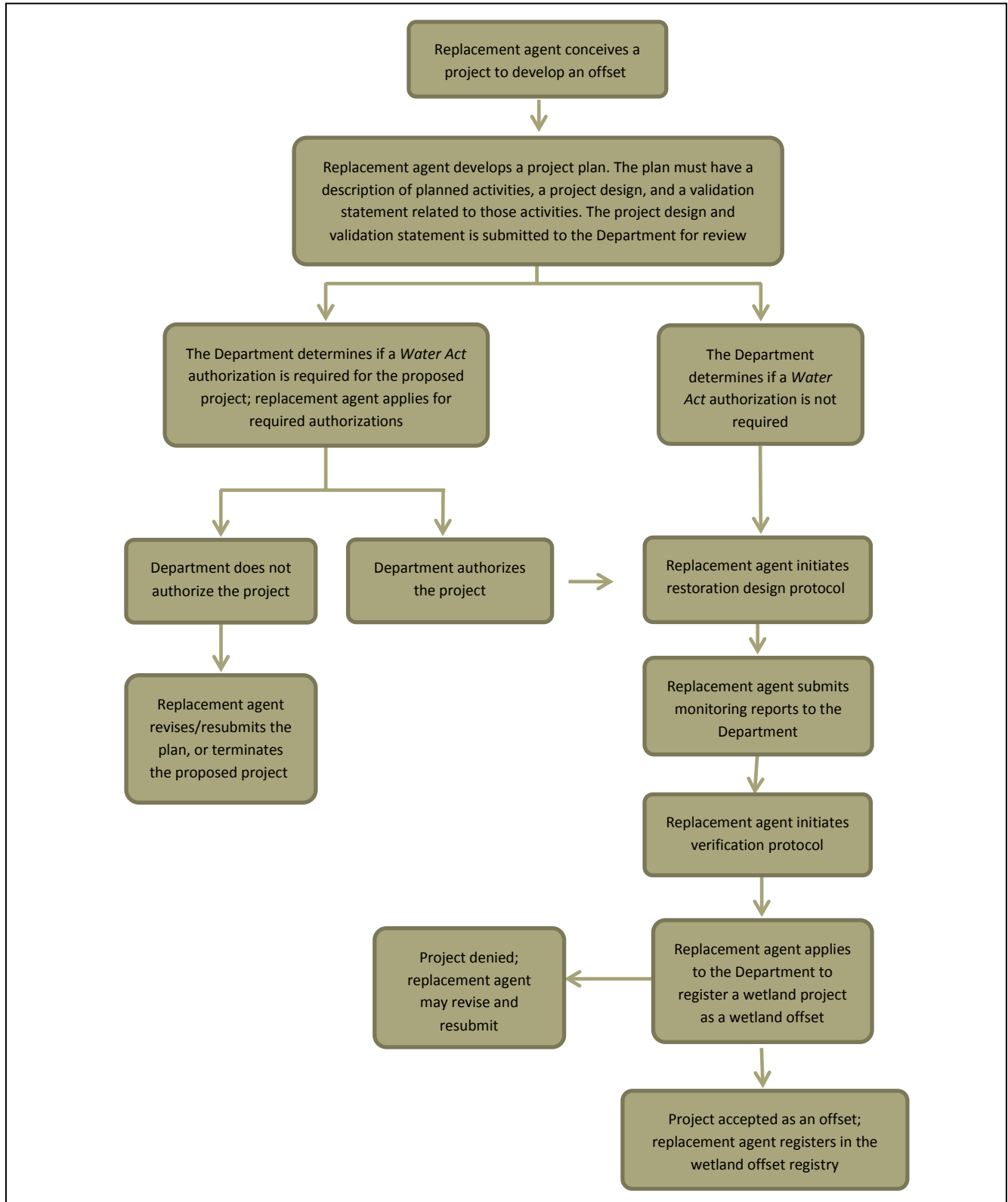
The AWP identifies three types of wetland replacement projects that can be carried out to fulfill wetland replacement requirements. These options include: restoration of a previously drained wetland; enhancement of an existing degraded wetland; and construction of a wetland where one previously did not exist.

In lieu fee is another of the replacement options allowed under the AWP. These funds are administered by the Department under the *In Lieu Fee Program*<sup>2</sup>. Under this option, a Proponent pays an *in lieu* fee to the Department; these monies are used to undertake wetland replacement projects as outlined in the protocols. The Department may also direct a portion of the *in lieu* fees to non-restorative replacement activities as outlined in the AWP.

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<sup>1</sup> Replacement Agent Program is under development

<sup>2</sup> In Lieu Fee Program is under development



**Figure 2. Wetland offset decision process**