

Surface Water Allocation Directive

Alberta's rivers and lakes support important environmental, recreational, cultural, aesthetic and economic values. The Water for Life strategy strives to provide healthy aquatic ecosystems, reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy, and safe, secure drinking water. In order to address all three goals of the Water for Life strategy, a new directive for surface water allocations has been developed for watersheds without current policy or legislation. Water allocation is the process of licencing water supplies for diversion and use from our rivers and lakes in the province.

What is the Directive?

The Surface Water Allocation Directive ('the Directive') provides consistent water allocation decision guidance informed by science to attempt to balance both ecological needs and economic considerations where planning processes have not established specific water management objectives. The Directive criteria maintains natural hydrologic variability and takes a cumulative water allocation approach to minimize changes to aquatic habitats. The Directive was developed based on the Desktop Method for Establishing Environmental Flows in Alberta Rivers and Streams (Locke and Paul 2011), also referred to as the 'Alberta desktop method'. In addition to rivers, this Directive also provides guidance to lakes and wetlands while using a sustainable watershed approach for water allocations. The goal of the Directive is to help minimize the impacts to our aquatic environments due to water withdrawals while considering economic water needs.

Who does it impact?

The development of this Directive is an update to the current process by setting out consistent criteria and expectations for licence applications for making water allocation decisions.

The legislative basis for the Directive is the *Water Act*, however it does not replace or override requirements specified in other existing or future guidelines, directives, regulations, policies or legislation. For example, water management plans and water conservation objectives (*Water Act*), land-use framework regional plans or environmental management frameworks (*Alberta Land Stewardship Act*), transboundary agreements, and fisheries management objectives take precedence over the Directive.

The Directive does not impact existing licences which do not expire; however the Directive will apply for new applications, temporary diversion licences (TDLs), and licence renewal applications.

When does it come into effect?

While some regions across Alberta have been piloting concepts from the Directive, it will be reviewed based on feedback provided during public engagement –from October 1 to October 31, 2018. Approval timelines for the Directive will be dependent on the amount and nature of comments received.

How can you contribute?

Alberta Environment and Parks is currently informing stakeholders of the Directive so that they can plan accordingly. Comments will be collected online at talkaep.alberta.ca/surfacewaterallocation from October 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018.