



Riparian Areas and Wetlands Municipal Engagement Needs Assessment Survey Summary

Alberta Environment and Parks commissioned NRG Research Group to deliver a survey to municipalities, related to conserving the important functions of riparian areas and wetlands throughout Alberta. This document summarizes the results of the survey, which was conducted in spring 2016. The survey was implemented so that the Alberta government can better understand how to work with municipalities to ensure riparian areas and wetlands are protected for the function of flood and drought mitigation. The survey was focused on high priority flood and drought zones that were previously identified as key areas for watershed conservation, restoration and stewardship in the province. This survey specifically was targeted at municipalities, municipal districts and counties located in priority zones 4 and 5 for flood, drought or both flood and drought (see figure 1). In total, 85 municipalities were invited to participate in the survey. Of the 85 municipalities that were invited to respond, 59 responded (70%). Planners, Chief Administrative Officers, agricultural and/or environmental specialists, elected officials and other municipal employees participated in the survey on behalf of each municipality (with some municipalities being represented by more than one type of participant).

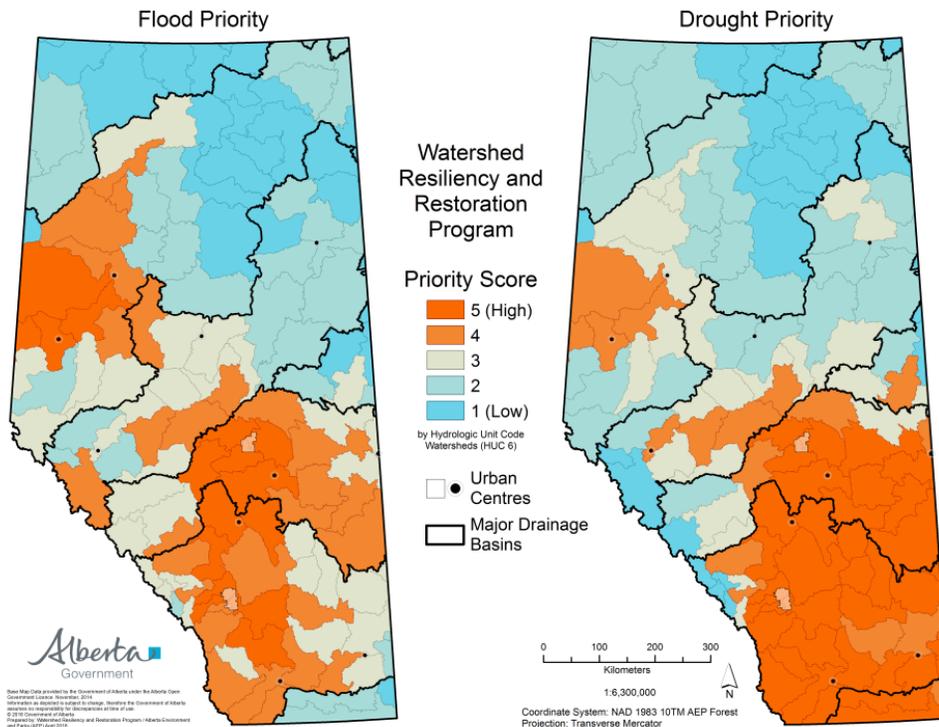


Figure 1: Flood and drought priority maps for Alberta, by Hydraulic Unit Code 6 Watersheds (HUC6) (2015).

Understanding Riparian Areas and Wetland Management

The survey indicated that just over 40% of municipalities consider their understanding to be ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ related to existing policies and legislation, agencies that work in **riparian enhancement**, and tools available to municipalities to protect riparian areas. However, only 31% indicated that they had ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ understanding of the information available to support riparian area education and outreach. The respondents were asked to indicate what they would like to know more about, specifically to assist with aspects of their roles related to **riparian areas**. The most frequent responses included information on the availability of tools for riparian area conservation, best practices, and clearer direction on policy and legislation.

The level of understanding of policies and legislation regarding **wetlands** is similar to that of riparian areas, with 40% of the respondents indicating that their understanding is ‘good’ or ‘excellent.’ The areas least understood by the survey participants pertains to the information available to support wetlands education and outreach. When asked if there are areas they would like to know more about to assist respondents with the roles in wetlands, some of the most frequent responses included an improved understanding of all aspects of **wetland management**, provincial policies and legislation (including more clarity on the approvals process), best practices, and tools regarding wetland inventories.

Engagement in Conservation and Planning

Twenty-per cent of respondents, representing municipalities, are dissatisfied with the current level of engagement in riparian area conservation in their own municipality, and the extent to which they avoid riparian impacts when undertaking planning activities. Over 80% of municipalities feel it is important to avoid wetlands in their planning and to have a good understanding of available information and decision support tools, which can be used to further support wetland conservation.

The Role of Municipal and Provincial Governments

The survey also asked about the roles of both municipal and provincial governments in riparian and wetland management. From the results of this survey, more than half of municipalities placed the lead role for education and outreach with the province, and 43% indicated that the role should be equally shared between local and provincial governments. Funding for riparian and wetland area protection programs was largely suggested as something that should be led by the province.

***Stepping Back from the Water: A Beneficial Management Practices Guide for New Development
Near Water Bodies in Alberta’s Settled Region***

Of the municipalities that responded to the survey, 22% have used Stepping Back from the Water to inform their development decisions and have found it to be a valuable resource. The remaining 88% are either unaware of it (the largest share), prefer other policies with greater value, find that it is not required in their areas, or found it to be overly simplified for their needs.

What We Heard: Municipal Needs

The Municipal Engagement Needs Assessment Survey highlighted several key needs for municipalities, municipal districts and counties located in high priority flood and drought zones in Alberta. Some of the key considerations that were noted are below.

1. There are challenges in weighing and evaluating the costs of wetland protection/conservation against the pressures for development and agriculture. Municipalities feel as though there may be a greater role for the provincial government and local officials to support management of these pressures.
2. More education and promotion of the value of wetlands could be developed, targeted at the general public, administration and elected officials.
3. There is a suggested need for more funding associated with promotion and education, as well as funding associated with incentives for landowners whom are asked to shift priorities and practices.
4. Some respondents indicated that support in scientific and technical areas is required.

What's next?

More than 60% of the survey participants suggested that they would like to remain involved in the dialogue on riparian areas and wetland protection. The province will be using this information to support the development of a toolkit for the Stepping Back from the Water guide to better equip municipalities to conserve and protect riparian areas and wetlands. As well, this information will be shared with the appropriate provincial departments to foster more awareness and understanding of municipal needs regarding riparian areas and wetlands.