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## **Tough Choices Ahead for South Saskatchewan Regional Plan**

If the quality of our environment in Southern Alberta is to be maintained in future, then the province's South Saskatchewan Regional Plan will have to make some hard choices in determining limits and thresholds to human activity.

This is the principal finding in a new Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) report released today. The report, *Conservation Recommendations for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, makes a series of recommendations to the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, as the Alberta government's Land-Use Framework planning process begins to unfold in southern Alberta.

"The government has stressed that watershed conservation is the priority for this region," says Nigel Douglas, AWA conservation specialist. "Some activities can be entirely compatible with this priority; some will need careful management; and others will be deemed to be unacceptable uses in some places. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan must include clear, enforceable thresholds on human impacts."

"The regional plan offers a perfect opportunity to address the clear shortfall in the province's protected areas land base in southern Alberta," says Douglas. "Less than 2% of our Foothills, and less than 1% of our Grasslands are protected. By any standards that is not enough."

Public input must also be a key element of the plan, says the new AWA report. According to a 2007 government public opinion survey, 74.3% of respondents believed that "At present the balance between developing and using our land versus conservation of our land is too focused on economic development and growth." The report recommends that "As the Government of Alberta has invested considerable time and expense in soliciting the opinions of Albertans, it is imperative that the final Regional Plans accurately reflect their expressed wishes and concerns."

*The full report, Conservation Recommendations for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan is available online at [www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca)*

### **Background**

- The province's Land-Use Framework divided the province into seven regions.
- For each region, a Regional Plan will be written, with input from a government-appointed Regional Advisory Council (RAC).
- The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan is one of the first two plans to be prepared. The South Saskatchewan RAC began meeting in June 2009, and will take a year to put together its recommendations for the Regional Plan.
- Opportunity for public comment on this planning process is expected shortly.

### **For more information, contact:**

Nigel Douglas: (403) 283-2025

