

Have Your Say on *Water for Life* Renewal

By Joyce Hildebrand

The *Water for Life* strategy is steered by the Alberta Water Council (AWC), a multi-stakeholder, consensus-based organization of which AWA is a member. Although implementation of the strategy has progressed in some areas, it has failed to meet set targets in others. At Premier Stelmach's direction, Environment Minister Rob Renner has asked the AWC to develop recommendations to "renew and resource" the strategy. To that end, the AWC is now seeking the input of Albertans across the province.

The Government of Alberta released the *Water for Life* strategy in late 2003 in an attempt to deal with increasing concerns about Alberta's water management and use. With oil sands using astounding amounts of fresh water for production, coalbed methane development affecting groundwater quality, population increase straining already over-allocated rivers, and source water in the foothills and Eastern Slopes being threatened by increased industrial



The early morning serenity of Lakeland Provincial Park belies the serious water quality and quantity issues that face Albertans today.

development, the urgent need for an effective overarching water

J. Hildebrand

management plan had become obvious.

Given the changes that have occurred in the province since the strategy's release, the AWC wants to hear Albertans' current views on *Water for Life*: its successes, failures, and priorities. The purpose of the renewal is two-fold: to re-establish the strategic intent of the strategy and to recommend changes in direction and focus.

The three goals of the strategy will not change: (1) safe, secure drinking water supply; (2) healthy aquatic ecosystems; and (3) reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. AWA supports these goals and recognizes that they are all connected. Our specific focus, however, is on the second goal – healthy aquatic ecosystems – especially as it relates to the protection of the watersheds where our rivers and lakes have their source. The industrial and recreational pressures on the headwater areas of the Eastern Slopes are of special concern. The AWC's *Review of Implementation Progress of Water for Life, 2005-2006* agrees that source water protection should have higher priority in the implementation of *Water for Life*.

AWA also believes that in order to be effective, the *Water for Life* strategy must be integrated with the Land-Use Framework process, since how land is managed affects both water quality and quantity. The two parallel processes are currently running separately with no organizational or regulatory

mechanisms to integrate them.

The deadline for submissions is August 24, 2007. To have your say, go to <http://www.waterforlife.gov.ab.ca/awc/renewal/> and see the options available for providing input. Reference materials, including the *Water for Life* strategy, can be downloaded

from the website as well. The AWC will gather the responses and present recommendations to Environment Minister Renner in early 2008, in time for next year's budget. Please take the time to present your views in order to influence these recommendations.