



Release Date: December 18, 2014

Alberta's New Water Plan Pulls Back on Prior Environmental Promises

Alberta's Water Conversation Action Plan released yesterday outlines intended actions on four water topics the government discussed with Albertans in early 2013. While committing to improve lake health and strengthen groundwater protection from fracking, the overall plan falls short of 2009 Water for Life Action Plan commitments to improve aquatic ecosystem health. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) asks the Alberta government to remember its commitments to improve aquatic ecosystem health.

"It's very positive the government is committing to set overdue standards for baseline water well testing near fracking operations, and to improving lake management," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "However, decisive action is missing on broader instream river flow, groundwater and wetland protection that is vital for our own water security as well as our wildlife."

The new plan refers to the same support for, and complexities of, protecting instream flow needs that an extensive multi-sector process clearly outlined five years ago for Lower Athabasca River oilsands mine water withdrawals. It is high time to institute affordable off-stream water storage and cut off industry water withdrawals during the most sensitive winter low flow periods.

Where fracking is now occurring, sub-regional plans are urgently required to protect groundwater quality and quantity; instead, the new plan defers this to a 'long term' action.

This plan is silent on Alberta's announced wetland policy, which is long past the 2012 implementation date promised in 2009. Measurable goals for 'functioning wetland area' need to be set, otherwise ongoing prairie wetland loss is probable, despite their value in buffering drought and flood risks. As well, extensive areas of sensitive, irreplaceable peat wetlands are at risk and our vital boreal region ecosystem is being sacrificed.

Important commitments in the 2009 Water for Life Action Plan missing from this Water Plan include:

- by 2015, protect Alberta's critical aquatic ecosystems and develop a provincial action plan to improve the health of significantly impacted aquatic ecosystems
- by 2015, set Water Conservation Objectives on all major basins, using science-based methods and tools that determine ecological requirements for a healthy aquatic environment

For more information:

Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

