



Alberta Wilderness Association
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

AWA Comments on Alberta Premier's Ministerial Mandate Letters

July 12, 2023

On Monday, July 10, it was announced that Alberta Premier Danielle Smith had delivered her new ministerial mandate letters to relevant ministers within the Government of Alberta. Four letters were released to the public on Monday, including 1. Environment and Protected Areas, 2. Agriculture and Irrigation, 3. Energy and Minerals, and 4. Jobs, Economy, and Trade.

We have not had a chance to review each of these mandate letters in detail, but AWA Conservation Specialist Phillip Meintzer has done a quick review and provided brief comments on some of the notable inclusions and omissions that we have noticed so far.

Smith's Letter To Rebecca Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas:

- “Working collaboratively with the federal government, First Nations and industry to develop and implement an accelerated strategy for oil sands mine water management and tailings pond reclamation.”
 - AWA is glad to see this listed as a priority (and as the first priority) on this mandate letter. The Government of Alberta and oil sands companies have waited far too long to meaningfully address this issue, and the extent of tailings on the landscape only continues to increase. This reclamation strategy needs to be developed in a way that minimizes harm on Indigenous communities and should not include the release of tailings effluent back into the Athabasca River watershed.
- “Alberta is the most responsible energy producer and exporter on Earth...”
 - This statement comes across as blind ignorance given recent evidence to the contrary, such as the leak, spill, and cover-up at the Imperial-owned Kearl oil sands mine.
- “We must accelerate these technological advances to significantly impact the direction the global community takes in pursuing emissions-reduction strategies.”
 - There is an over-reliance on yet unproven technological fixes, such as emissions reduction technologies (e.g., carbon capture and storage) to reduce Alberta’s GHG emissions rather than limiting and/or reducing the production of fossil fuels.
- “Reviewing Alberta’s water management strategy to increase the availability of water and water licences to Alberta municipalities, businesses and agricultural producers while maintaining the highest standards of water conservation and treatment.”
 - We are disappointed to see municipalities, businesses and agriculture prioritized here without any recognition for the need to maintain healthy aquatic (and riparian) ecosystems. In-stream or environmental flows need to be protected. It is untrue that Alberta has the highest standard of water conservation, as we are currently not meeting our own Water Conservation Objectives (WCOs) for the basins in which they have been established.
- “...streamline reclamation requirements for new and emerging energy sources.”
 - This reads like an initiative that’s designed to deregulate industry or cut red tape. We shouldn’t be trying to exploit new energy sources too quickly without understanding the



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- impacts. For new and emerging energy sources, we should be taking the most precautionary approach possible to better understand the impact of developing these resources and to ensure that reclamation to a pre-development state is even possible.
- “As lead, and working with relevant and impacted ministries, establish new land-use plans and review existing land-use plans to ensure alignment with government environmental and economic policy.”
 - AWA appreciates the recognition of the need to continue with the land-use planning process which is something that we have continually asked for. But, we have concerns that the current government’s environmental policies may be subordinated to their economic priorities, such as continued oil and gas expansion.
 - “Conducting an analysis into Alberta’s carbon sink capacity (i.e., forest, fescue, soil, etc.) to establish a true understanding of Alberta’s position in relation to carbon neutrality.”
 - On the surface, this could be a positive development for Alberta with respect to mitigating the worst impacts of climate change. However, we do not want to see this analysis serve as another means to justify continued or expanded fossil energy production if new reserves are located through this initiative, or if the carbon sink potential is calculated in such a way that it allows for increasing emissions.
 - Also, just because an analysis is conducted doesn’t guarantee the protection of carbon sinks from harm. There needs to be a process to set known carbon sinks off limits to development, such as what is needed to protect the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex.
 - “Promoting Alberta’s leading-edge regulatory and cumulative effects management systems...”
 - Alberta does not currently have leading edge cumulative effects management systems.
 - We are extremely disappointed to see no mention for continuing caribou conservation initiatives in line with the Canada-Alberta Section 11 Agreement, such as caribou task forces and subregional planning. We hope that this was solely an oversight in the drafting of the letter, and that the caribou task force process will continue under this government’s mandate.

Smith's Letter To Brian Jean, Minister of Energy and Minerals:

- “Reviewing the policies, operations, and mission of the Alberta Energy Regulator and making recommendations to streamline approvals and align [AER] policies with the government's goals of increased natural resource production, carbon neutrality by 2050, investment in emissions-reduction technologies and increased energy export.”
 - We are glad to see that there was recognition in this mandate letter that the AER needs to undergo some form of review. Ideally, we would like to see the regulator reformed entirely to ensure that it better serves the public interest.
 - This priority also includes many contradictory statements throughout. Emissions reduction technologies, such as carbon capture and storage (CCUS) are currently unproven and not scalable to the extent needed for achieving emissions reductions in line with a 1.5-degree pathway. We cannot continue to increase natural resource production and increase energy exports (for burning elsewhere), while meeting carbon neutrality by 2050. The entire statement is not achievable based on current scientific evidence. We need to limit and scale down fossil energy production as soon as possible.