



ORRSC PERSPECTIVES:

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES REGARDING THE
REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL'S ADVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA



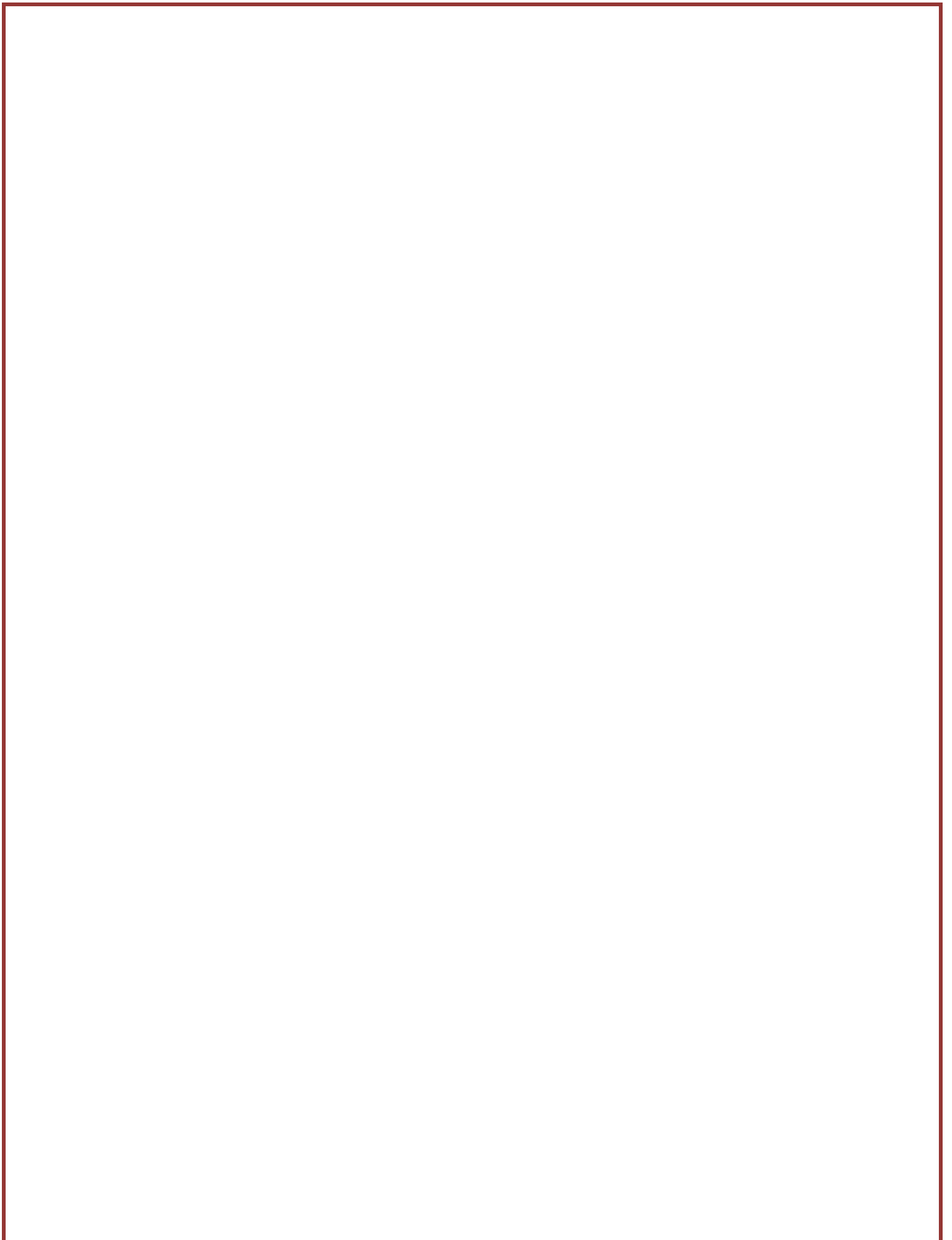


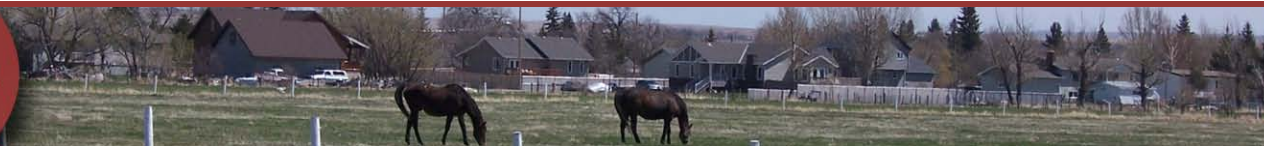
© June 2011 Oldman River Regional Services Commission. www.orrsc.com. All Rights Reserved.

This report was prepared by the Oldman River Regional Services Commission as information and may or may not reflect the views of its member municipalities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0	GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES	3
2.1	HEALTHY ECONOMY	4
2.2	HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS AND ENVIRONMENT.....	5
2.3	HEALTHY COMMUNITIES	7
2.4	LAND-USE DIRECTION AND MANAGEMENT INTENT.....	9
3.0	NEXT STEPS	13
4.0	SUMMARY OF RAC ADVICE	15





“Input and feedback received on the advice document will inform the draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan that the Government of Alberta will develop.”
(LUF Quarterly, September 2009)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

On March 25, 2011 the Alberta Provincial Government released the Regional Advisory Council’s document entitled, “Advice to the Government of Alberta for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan” (Advice). The Advice is intended to provide the provincial government with information and direction for preparation of a regional plan for the South Saskatchewan Region (Region).

Commencement of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) was announced as part of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) legislation on April 27, 2009. Integral to the preparation of the SSRP was the establishment of a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) which was charged with providing strategic advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta. The RAC was established in May of 2009 with members selected to represent a broad spectrum of interests ranging from industry to municipal and private. In preparation, the RAC held 13 regional meetings and reviewed over 100 stakeholder submissions.

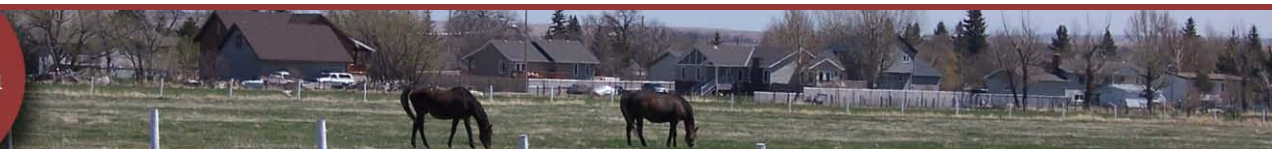
Government-supplied terms of reference, consistent with the desired outcomes established in the provincial Land-use Framework, provided the basis for the Advice. The RAC was requested to examine the relationship between population growth, water supply, economic growth and land conservation. The Advice contains four components: a regional vision statement; strategic land-use planning principles; regional outcomes, objectives and recommendations with associated resource maps; and a regional land-use map and associated management intents.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council’s Advice to the Government of Alberta including perspectives of potential municipal issues on land-use planning. Prepared by the staff of the Oldman River Regional Services Commission (ORRSC) this report is intended to provide municipalities with considerations as they participate in the Government of Alberta’s consultation process for the preparation of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. This information is not a comprehensive identification of issues or a representation of municipal views. While recognizing the Regional Advisory Council’s Advice has the potential to result in positive outcomes for municipalities, our report draws attention to land-use planning issues.

The report is divided into the following sections:

- *Introduction* – background information and purpose;
- *General Observations and Potential Issues* – compilation of ORRSC observations of the four topic areas covered in the Advice;
- *Next Steps* – an overview of upcoming consultation and response; and
- *Summary of RAC Advice* – contains a condensed version of the document entitled, “Advice to the Government of Alberta for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan”.



1.2 Considerations

As identified by the RAC, the components of their “report are highly interrelated and intended to be considered as a complete suite”. The three desired provincial outcomes – a healthy economy, healthy ecosystem and people-friendly communities – set out in the Land-use Framework are also interrelated and are of equal importance. In this context, and given the diversity of the Region, the RAC was tasked with a colossal undertaking in preparing a document that easily conveys such interrelationships and as such, the Advice at times, is contradictory and difficult to interpret.

The RAC Advice, if implemented in the regional plan, will impact municipalities differently, as individual community goals may either conflict with or enhance the objectives. Municipalities should consider whether the recommendations are consistent with municipal visions for a healthy economy, healthy ecosystem, and people-friendly communities. Until a draft regional plan is presented and the details of implementation are established, it will be difficult to determine exactly how or to what degree the Advice will affect municipalities.

As your municipality considers the RAC Advice and envisions strategies, it should be kept in mind that the Land-use Framework and ALSA are intended to “set out a new approach to managing the province’s land and natural resources” and “provide a decision-making blueprint for sustaining a growing economy while balancing social and environmental goals.”



2.0 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES

The following section is a summary of the general observations and potential issues that ORRSC has identified through a review of the Advice and is organized into the four main topic areas of the Advice document. A summary of the Advice is presented in Section 4.0 as supporting information to the observations.

Overarching Themes and Observations

There are a number of positive elements that can be derived and highlighted from the RAC Advice, including the following:

- the Advice attempts to address many diverse issues across the region;
- the Advice strives to present the interrelationships of various land uses or economic activities;
- the Advice recognizes there are many competing interests and attempts to present a context of how and under what conditions activity can be allowed on the land for multiple users;
- the Advice appears, for the most part, to have left many current land use decision making items with the local municipalities – it indicates that consideration should be given to reducing planning overlaps and redundancies while respecting the rights of affected jurisdictions in a collaborative approach to land use decisions.

Conversely, several potential issues may be of concern to municipalities. The Advice:

- has an overriding emphasis on economic development;
- is limited in its address of municipal planning and development issues;
- appears preliminary and requires additional research and public input before being implemented in the Regional Plan;
- topics would benefit from further analysis as they appear to have been considered in isolation as individual issues rather than being fully integrated or connected to primary issues and desired outcomes;
- has not provided specific solutions to achieve outcomes or attain identified objectives from the municipal perspective;
- recommends that land-use planning should “progress to outcomes based on integrated local and regional planning” that uses “triple-bottom line” principles involving market-based conservation and stewardship tools. Lack of integration and strategies for implementation are minimal or non-existent;
- addresses both provincial and municipal roles and at times, is unclear which level of government will be responsible for implementation, monitoring and funding.

The range of topics covered and the various components examined demonstrates that the RAC did consider the complexities of competing land interests. However, the information presented clearly evidences the difficulties of creating a regional plan for the South Saskatchewan Region given the region’s great diversity and highlights the need for sub-regional plans.



2.1 Healthy Economy

The prevalent theme throughout the Healthy Economy section is to support “economic growth by creating a positive investment climate”. The Healthy Economy recommendations address six sub-sections: Agriculture, Energy, Forestry, Recreation and Tourism, Economic Growth and Value-added Industries, and Infrastructure. To enhance economic viability and competitiveness, the RAC acknowledges the need to limit the challenges facing industry such as fragmentation and conversion of farmland; resource enhancement including technology, production and investment; uncertainty regarding stable land tenure and regulatory and government policy; enhanced recreation and tourism; and ensuring responsive transportation networks and systems.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES

- The general focus of many of the objectives and recommendations for a healthy economy is market based with less recognition of land-use planning issues as defined under Part 17 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA). The emphasis on ensuring the best economic use of land may have significant impacts on how a municipality plans for its future growth objectives.
- There is limited discussion of a healthy economy as it applies to urban centres.
- Many recommended policies refer to the terms “market-based” approaches, encouraging “investment”, exploring “financial incentives” with no such terminology defined. This creates uncertainty as to how the policies may be applied and how they may impact municipalities.
- The recommendation supporting “*...irrigation expansion within districts ... with a portion of water saved through improved publicly funded water-use efficiency measures...*” is unclear. What is meant by publicly funded measures and how would this work? Is the intent for water to be saved by irrigation districts and then to be rerouted to value added production?
- Rural municipalities should be concerned with the agricultural recommendations 4.2.2.7 and 4.2.2.8, which refer to encouraging and supporting rural municipalities to minimize the extent of agricultural land conversion and report the extent to the government on a five-year basis. This raises the following questions:
 - How is agricultural land to be defined, and what is the basis for categorization? It should be recognized there are different soil types, quality of land, and land used for different agricultural purposes (e.g. grazing, cultivating, intensive irrigation, horticultural) in different areas across the region.
 - What is the intent of developing metrics to report on land fragmentation and conversion? Is consistency across the province necessary, given regional differences? To what extent will this impact local autonomy with regard to subdivision policy?
 - Why are the contributions of small-scale agriculture or intensive agriculture producers not addressed?
 - Why would sub-regional plans not be considered to address agricultural diversity?
- There is a lack of reference to First Nations and their agricultural land holdings. Their land is typically leased to agricultural producers and is integral to the local agricultural economy.



- In regard to forestry, the RAC identifies a need to reduce and streamline the administrative and regulatory processes, but no strategies are provided. There is no recognition that forestry management should be undertaken with regard to municipal land management objectives being pursued (e.g. tourism) which may create conflicting or competing outcomes.
- The RAC recommends identifying “tourism nodes and establish[ing] tourism development plans within recreation/tourism areas and market[ing] these nodes to tourism developers”. This recommendation does not identify which level of government is responsible for development and implementation of these initiatives.
- Specific tourism nodes have been identified in the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, the Municipal District of Pincher Creek and the County of Newell. There are no suggested strategies as to how these municipalities may handle the infrastructure and management required to maintain natural attributes, or how tourism plans would align with their local economic development initiatives and municipal land-use plans.
- The healthy economy section does not adequately address the relationship between human habitats, built environment and the economy. Because these relationships are not defined, it is unclear how the policy recommendations would apply to or affect municipalities.
- The energy section contains wording that may cause concern with land owners and municipalities. Objectives referring to “ensuring reasonable access to the land base” and “removing regulatory impediments” for renewable energy should be defined to ensure their proper context. In light of the legislation and wording of Bill 36 (ALSA) and subsequently Bill 10 (Amendments), careful consideration should be given to such statements and their intentions.
- The Advice suggests that impediments to renewable energy regulations be minimized. What are these impediments? Does this mean that local decision-making on renewable energy will be removed?

2.2 Healthy Ecosystems and Environment

The RAC identifies *water*, *biodiversity* and *air* as the three critical components for managing healthy ecosystems and environment. The RAC’s main focus is on Water and this component is broken into five sub-categories: Water, Headwaters, Wetlands, Riparian Areas and Groundwater. The Biodiversity component is also quite extensive while the air component is brief and lacking substantive content. Common themes occur throughout each component including the recommendation for management plans, importance of quality mapping, and the development of an ecological goods and services revenue stream. In addition, each component has accompanying maps which identify the location of important ecosystem resources in the South Saskatchewan Region.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES

- Common to the RAC’s recommendations is the establishment of issue/topic specific management plans such as watershed management plans, groundwater management plans, and airshed management plans. This advice is likely recognition that the issues associated with the objectives are extremely complex requiring detailed analysis not suited to a regional plan of this scale. Evaluation of the potential impacts to municipalities and the public of such



recommendations will be dependent upon the scope, scale and details of the management plans. Items of particular concern for municipalities may include, among other things:

- the role and impact of the management plans on the municipality's vision, growth priorities and development potential;
 - the expectations for the development, management and implementation of the plans, including funding, auditing, monitoring and enforcement;
 - the scale of the management plans and cross jurisdictional impacts (inter-municipal, provincial and federal interests); and
 - the extent of municipal consultation in the preparation of any management plan to ensure municipal interests are adequately protected and/or addressed.
- Many of the recommendations include terms such as 'market-based incentives', 'best-management practices', 'managed land uses', 'desired conditions' and managed 'land fragmentation'. Many terms and directives are not defined within the Advice. Thus, potential municipal impacts are uncertain and will depend upon how these terms are interpreted and implemented within the regional plan and any accompanying regulations.
 - The Advice recommends the establishment of regional and sub-regional targets and thresholds for wetlands conservation, biodiversity and air quality. Targets must be equitable and the establishment of thresholds and baseline levels must be open and transparent. Potential concerns to municipalities may include how these will impact the development potential and the extent and/or intensity of uses permitted on the land.
 - The information presented in the following maps, including the Priority Surface Water Resource Map, Groundwater Resource Map, Wetlands and Riparian Areas Resource Map, Conservation Network Conceptual Map and Candidate Conservation Management Areas on Public Lands Map may significantly impact landowners, municipalities and the general public. The resources identified in the maps span private, municipal, provincial and federal lands and could have a multitude of impacts for development depending on the level of importance assigned to corridors and resource areas.
 - The recommendations for integrated land management appear to be based on individual (topic specific) priority assessment which may not provide for an equitable balance of interests or realistic assignment of priorities. It is critical that the data and maps identifying RAC priorities and directives are overlaid and analyzed collectively. In addition, mapping and data should also identify municipal growth interests and objectives.
 - The recommendation to enhance the development of water allocation transfer mechanisms for short-term and long-term transfers in water stressed basins may alleviate some of the water issues within the region. However, it must be managed adequately to ensure that individual municipalities or Alberta Environment are not in a position to effectively re-assign development potential from one municipality to another through the purchase/transfer of water rights.
 - Recommendations for the implementation of conservation and stewardship tools (e.g. economic and market based incentives, conservation easements, mitigation banking, transferable development credits) require further clarification. These tools should be voluntary and implemented at a local scale.



- Sub-regional plans would be more appropriate for these issues/concerns/topics, which would then set the stage for the issue/topic specific plans and serve as a more applicable scale for management plans.

2.3 Healthy Communities

The RAC provides the goals for regional healthy communities as a set of outcome statements and has provided three sub-sections in which the outcome statements may be analyzed. These include: Healthy Communities, Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations Communities, and Recreation and Tourism. The sub-sections have accompanying maps, which identify historical resources and outlines tourism and recreational concepts. From the objectives and recommendations the following observations are provided.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES:

- The Advice suggests that subdivision and development design and land-use management decisions consider health as a key design factor in order to successfully create a high quality of life for your community.
- Municipalities may take issue with the Advice which states “there is a lack of sufficient local knowledge and/or resources available to consistently apply land-use planning tools, concepts and best practices in the region.” Municipalities within ORRSC’s region are successfully applying land-use planning tools, concepts and best practices with limited resources. Community dollars are stretched and resources are underfunded, but communities manage to provide the best services economics allow.
- What really is lacking is provincial funding and involvement in providing appropriate land-use planning tools for communities to achieve healthy communities. Many provincial ministries and agencies are operating independently or are not actively participating in land-use planning. Hopefully the regional plans will address this.
- Currently the MGA does not require but suggests that a community may address “...the coordination of [and other matters relating to] municipal programs relating to the physical, social and economic development of a municipality” (MGA 632(1)(b)). If planning for healthy communities with ample recreation opportunities is mandated in the regional plan, who will be responsible for the added cost?
- The promotion of “collaboration and co-operation among municipalities to accommodate future populations” has broad regional implications. Given the limited resources available to achieve this objective it is hoped that the need for collaboration and co-operation does not jeopardize the success of individual communities by picking winners and losers.
- Unlike the rest of the Advice, the Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations Communities section provides an overview of the outcomes of healthy economy, ecosystems, and communities as they pertain to a specific community. Although, there is an understanding that oversight of Aboriginal Peoples and First Nations Communities occurs at the federal level, there needs to be a role for local communities to work with them toward common regional goals.



- The Recreation and Tourism sub-section occurs in both the Healthy Economy and Healthy Communities sections. It is necessary to refer to the Healthy Economy section for a definition of 'Iconic Tourism Destinations,' which is integral to understanding this section and the maps. Many of the Tourism Destination Nodes on the Tourism and Recreation Concept map are described with a Recreation and Tourism Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class designation. For nodes that do not have the classification designated, the municipalities should discuss what class would be appropriate or if it should be a node at all. Also tied to the ROS classification system is the Proposed Recreation/Tourism areas and the Iconic Tourism Destinations.
- The Healthy Economy section recommends bike paths along highways and the need for adequate urban facility infrastructure funding which is relevant to the healthy communities' outcomes. These items could have significant impacts on municipalities in terms of planning, management, implementation and funding.
- The Recreation and Tourism sub-section provides a fairly balanced approach to recreation and tourism where the economy, social needs and the preservation of ecosystems are considered in a "triple bottom line" scenario. The objectives for the section focus on recreation tourism preferences, a range of opportunities, sustainability of scenic areas, and emphasizes management to balance negative effects on the environment.
- As background to the Recreation and Tourism sub-section, municipalities may wish to read the government document entitled 'Plan for Parks: 2009-2019' and the proposed Bill 29: Alberta Parks Act which was recently withdrawn by the government. These documents set the stage for some of the advice provided by the RAC to the government.
- The Healthy Ecosystems and Environment section calls for an integrated land management approach to planning for recreation, tourism, access, forestry, watersheds etc. to minimize losses of native vegetation. It also looks to minimize impacts on historic sites including historic viewsheds through best management practices. This could impact municipal planning for healthy communities.
- Municipalities on the eastern slopes will need to be forceful in their position on expanding access and damage control of remote areas. All municipalities should be involved in the identification of recreation and tourism activities and dealing with land-use conflicts in their respective areas.
- The Advice suggests that public access to recreational water bodies be maintained and enhanced. Municipalities will have to provide access through easements and reserve dedications.
- The Advice acknowledges that unmanaged recreation activities have impacts on municipalities and need to be properly regulated.



2.4 Land-use Direction and Management Intent

This section of the Advice includes five sub-sections: Agriculture, Conservation, Mixed use forests, Population Centres, and Recreation and Tourism. The RAC recommends using these five sub-categories to create a new land-use classification to better reflect the diversity of land uses and activities in the South Saskatchewan Region. Further, the new classification provides policy guidance to local and provincial governments through defined management intents. Emphasis is placed on land stewardship (“wise use of land, water and energy”) to enhance biodiversity, water security, long-term productive use of land, and the other desired management goals on both public and private land. While the RAC acknowledges the diversity of the South Saskatchewan Region and recognizes that “competition between different land uses can result in conflicts and inefficient outcomes”, advice is not provided on how such conflicts should be addressed or how to deal with conflict that occurs where the recommended land-use classes intersect.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES:

Agriculture

- The RAC makes no distinction between dryland cultivation and irrigated land, only between cultivated land and rangeland. Thus, there is no proposal or direction given to address or manage these two distinct types of agricultural land any differently from one another.
- Specific recommendations to promote the mitigation of agricultural fragmentation resulting from development activities and best management practices are not forwarded by the RAC. It is not clear if best management practices applied to developments to help minimize farmland conversions will be merely voluntary (although it is implied), or, if further policy or regulations will or should be forthcoming.
- Depending on how a mitigation recommendation is implemented, and whether it is voluntary or regulatory, it has the potential to impact both urban and rural municipalities in regard to many local land use policy areas – e.g. growth planning and management, development densities, infrastructure planning, subdivision, annexation, inter-municipal cooperation.
 - How will mitigation be applied consistently by municipalities?
 - If the management intent is strictly voluntary, will this be successful?

It is also worth noting that this section does not directly link or cross reference the recommendations on population centres or development, although the two are expressly integrated.

- For public native rangelands, the RAC states best management practices will be used and gives specific examples, such as the use of access management and footprint thresholds. How this will occur has not been elaborated upon.
- One of the RAC management intents states integrated land management will be mandatory to reduce linear disturbances and development impacts on public native rangelands. It is assumed, that since this is public land, the province will be responsible for preparing such processes and plans. The method and level of public engagement for preparing such plans and how they may impact local landowners, leaseholders, industry, or municipalities is unknown at this point. How integrated land management on public land will link or work in coordination with managing



linear disturbances on adjacent private lands is not clear, especially if the private land approach is voluntary.

- For private native rangelands, the RAC indicates that voluntary stewardship will be encouraged but there is no clear direction provided on how this may be achieved other than alluding to using market-based incentives and conservation programs. The Advice does not recognize that linear disturbances, energy activity, etc. can also occur and impact the private native rangelands.

Conservation

- There is no mention of potential consequences if there is disregard for the Integrated Conservation Management Plans (ICMP) on private lands. Therefore, depending on the implementation, there may not be significant change to the current conservation efforts on private lands.
- The impact of the ICMPs and other tools on public lands may be inconsequential relative to the efforts and expense that will be required to develop, implement and maintain them when considering that 60% of the lands in the region are privately owned.
- The ICMPs will focus on “how” access and activities will occur, which will primarily affect public use of public conservation areas. It is inferred that public use will be limited more than energy, resource and infrastructure development.
- Range management plans may affect grazing practices, both positively and negatively, depending on how the plans are implemented.
- There is potential for certain conservation areas on public lands to serve as mechanisms to preserve oil and gas exploration and extraction and “forest harvesting” while other forms of development may be limited.
- There is no reference to how identified conservation areas will be reconciled with overlapping tourism and recreation areas.
 - What type of tourism and recreation opportunities will be available in these areas?

Mixed-use Forest

- The management intent of this section is focused on public lands outside the jurisdiction of municipalities. However, many municipalities and private landowners are located adjacent to these areas and what occurs on these lands will have an impact on both.
- The Advice “encourages and supports activities associated with natural resource development while maintaining large contiguous areas of forest cover within acceptable thresholds and targets.” Adjacent landowners and municipalities should be consulted in this process.
- The Advice recommends that development be “designed in a manner that maintains scenic values”. Once again, municipalities and the public should be consulted on how scenic values are determined and/or identified and how these determinations may work in conjunction with the iconic tourism areas.
- The active management of public motorized access on public lands has the potential to create a spill over effect onto private land and/or municipal lands. The resulting effects may include:



- Recreation users looking for alternative areas (with or without permission of the landowner) to undertake the desired activity.
- Municipalities requiring increased resources to address enforcement and management of recreation users.
- Natural resource development may compromise iconic tourism destinations if they are not designed in a manner that maintains scenic values and recreational opportunities.

Population Centres

- With the exception of the directive to require efficient provision of infrastructure, specific recommendations for encouraging “development of sustainable communities” has not been forwarded by the RAC. Implementation of such a directive in the SSRP would likely require municipalities to enter into inter-municipal development plans, tax-sharing agreements and provision of joint services.
- Of potential concern is the recommendation to encourage the reduction of the physical footprint of development within urban municipalities and the urban/rural fringe. Depending upon how such a recommendation is implemented, it has the potential to impact growth patterns within urban centres, annexation, and inter-municipal relations in the urban/rural fringe – increasing the need for inter-municipal cooperation and inter-municipal development plans.
- Equitable development opportunities for urban and rural municipalities will be necessary to minimize inter-municipal disputes, while achieving SSRP objectives for wise use of land, water and energy.

Recreation / Tourism

- The Advice suggests that “private landowners be encouraged to offer a range of recreation and tourism developments in key locations for economic development purposes”. There is no direction:
 - how this would be encouraged; and
 - where these key recreation/tourism areas on private land would be located.
- The management of certain environmental, scenic, and aesthetic values relevant to recreation and tourism on private lands is proposed to occur through conservation tools under ALSA. How these conservation tools are to be used is not apparent, and potential impacts are unknown at this time.
- The Advice suggests that specific tourism and recreation management and development plans will be developed for each recreation and tourism area.
 - Will the province undertake this or will individual municipalities be expected to do so?
 - Where is the funding coming from?



- ‘Iconic Tourism Destinations’ have been identified throughout the Advice with specific reference to the Castle, Kananaskis and Badlands areas. These ‘Iconic Tourism Destinations’ may not coincide with the vision of the host municipality.
- The Advice suggests there is potential for resource-based industries within public lands provided they do not compromise recreation/tourism values. Criteria would need to be developed to determine how this would occur.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

The Regional Advisory Council submitted their Advice to the Government of Alberta for consideration in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The Government released the Advice to inform the public, stakeholders, and Aboriginal consultation. The next step in the governmental process is to seek public comment. A two part approach is being undertaken:

Part 1 - A workbook entitled "Phase 2 Working Towards the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan" has been released to solicit feedback on the advice (due December 19, 2011); and

Part 2 - Public sessions on the RAC's advice to government on a regional plan for southern Alberta are to be held this fall. Dates and locations have not yet been determined.

Municipalities are encouraged to complete individual workbooks and attend the fall public sessions. The workbook may be found on the Government of Alberta website under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. In continuing participation in this consultative process, ORRSC's next steps will be:

- to complete one workbook to represent a collective response on behalf of municipalities. We will answer the questions in the workbook based on the municipal perspectives as outlined in "Municipal Perspectives: Position Paper on the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan." Where the workbook provides opportunities for additional comment, ORRSC will identify any gaps, omissions, or issues;
- to forward the completed workbook to the municipalities for review and/or endorsement by October 2011;
- to forward the final document, with municipal endorsement, to the Province of Alberta; and
- to participate in phase 2 public sessions.



4.0 SUMMARY OF RAC ADVICE

Healthy Economy

OVERVIEW

This section includes six sub-sections: Agriculture, Energy, Forestry, Recreation and Tourism, Economic Growth and Value-added Industries, and Infrastructure. The RAC focuses on each sub-section of the regional economy and provides the primary issues, objectives and recommendations for each identified sub-section.

AGRICULTURE

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC identifies access to water and irrigation as a critical component to the future growth of agriculture and related industries. Diversification of the agricultural sector is emphasized but requires capital investment. The main objectives include the enhancement of economic viability and competitiveness of agriculture, and to ensure ecological goods and services are valued and profit-generating.

Recommendations Summary

The primary recommendations focus on the diversification and sustainable growth of the agriculture industry through investment while ensuring a transparent regulatory environment. Other recommendations include supporting irrigation expansions within districts with a portion of the water saved through improved, publicly funded, water-use efficiency measures; identifying and developing water storage; and encouraging and supporting rural municipalities to minimize the extent of agricultural land conversion and report the extent to the government on a five-year basis.

ENERGY

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC identifies that the future success of the energy industry is dependent on “new and improved resource development technology, production and processing.” In addition, it will be important to maintain a positive investment climate for renewable energy development. Objectives for the energy sector include:

- promoting responsible exploration, development and extraction of regional energy and mineral resources;
- ensuring access to the land base;
- ensuring the regulatory system is streamlined and efficient to maintain and enhance the economic competitiveness of the region; and
- promoting renewable energy development.



Recommendations Summary

The recommendations include the promotion and advancement of traditional (coal, gas, and oil) and renewable energy. There is an acknowledgment that the regulatory processes in the industry should consider cumulative environmental effects, and that financial incentives and market opportunities be explored for ecological goods and services to advance the SSRP objectives beyond what is required by basic energy management obligations.

FORESTRY

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC identifies challenges to the forestry industry including the lack of a stable land base, uncertainty around land tenure, and concerns with government policy and the regulatory process. The RAC identifies a need to reduce and streamline the administrative and regulatory processes. They also recommend the industry should go beyond the act of supplying fibre, but should also contribute to the management of wildlife habitat, forest fuels and water resources. The main objectives include:

- enhancing the economic viability and competitiveness of the forestry industry; and
- promoting the economic, environmental, and social benefits that communities derive from forestry and healthy forests.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations focus on exploring opportunities to use forestry as a tool to maintain or enhance ecological goods and services and support research, marketing and commercialization of products made from raw forest materials. Consideration has also been given to enhancing land management by incorporating “natural disturbance planning” and “mitigation banking” into regional land-use planning. They also advocate using resource management approaches like integrated land management practices to minimize the loss of productive forestry land base. The Advice suggests exploring financial incentives and market opportunities for ecological goods and services that advance the SSRP objectives and go beyond what is required by basic forestry management obligations.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC identifies several “iconic tourism destinations” found within the region, including Castle, Kananaskis and the Badlands areas. These areas lack a critical mass of tourism attraction, infrastructure and appropriate management to maintain their nature-based, scenic and recreational attributes. The only objective presented in this sub-section is “to recognize and position the region as a world-class, year-round tourism destination using both public and private lands.”

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations focus on development, competitiveness and identifying opportunities of tourism/recreation areas. Specifically, the Castle (without necessarily designating it a provincial park), Crowsnest Pass, Kananaskis and a portion of the Canadian Badlands have been identified as areas which have the potential to become iconic tourism destinations.



ECONOMIC GROWTH AND VALUE-ADDED INDUSTRIES

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC indicates that the economy must be allowed to be productive and responsive to change by:

- creating the right business climate;
- developing human capacity, quality of life, supportive infrastructure, access to markets and a balanced fiscal system; and
- respecting private property rights.

The sub-section includes two objectives: enhancement of the market based economy of southern Alberta and the support and development of value-added products and services.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations of the RAC focus on pursuing improvements to the physical infrastructure that supports research and development, and education and training. They also identify the need to streamline regulatory processes, encourage small business and support new and expanded regional and inter-regional supply chains. Lastly, the RAC recommends the improvement of communication tools in rural areas to allow people the freedom to choose where they live and do business.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC advises that changes in economic development, demographics, lifestyles and technologies will require more adaptable and responsive transportation networks. In addition, demands for non-transportation infrastructure will also increase. Finally, multi-use corridors and nodal energy opportunities should be explored to support economic development. The sub-section identifies five objectives including:

- facilitating the movement of people, goods, services and energy within the region and between regions;
- ensuring infrastructure planning, development and servicing align at local and regional scales to reflect values and provincial infrastructure needs;
- addressing the water infrastructure needs of industry, society, communities and the environment;
- developing transportation infrastructure to move people, supplies, and products to support economic development; and
- minimizing environmental and ecological impacts of infrastructure.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations focus on transportation development and takes into consideration cumulative environmental effects. The Advice recognizes the need to plan and build infrastructure corridors that minimize land fragmentation and impacts to the natural environment. The concept of strategically developing water storage opportunities is addressed in this subsection, as well as the agriculture subsection. There are additional recommendations regarding multi-use corridors (located east of Highway 2) identifying the economic benefits and costs, location, and considerations for route selection.



Healthy Ecosystems and Environment

The RAC identifies three sub-sections: Water Management, Biodiversity and Air Quality as the critical components for managing healthy ecosystems and environment. The water management sub-section is further divided into recommendations for water, headwaters, wetlands, riparian areas and groundwater. In addition, each component has accompanying maps which identify the location of important ecosystem resources in the South Saskatchewan Region.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC recognizes three primary issues addressing water management: source water quality and quantity, proper planning and management, and water scarcity. Subsequent objectives for water management include:

- protection of source waters;
- implementation of management plans;
- proper management of headwaters and groundwater;
- restoration of wetlands and riparian areas; and
- maintenance of healthy aquatic ecosystems.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations of the RAC focus on ensuring source water quality and quantity are sustained (by maintaining “watershed integrity”) with a priority of ensuring areas currently in a “desired state” maintain their present condition. Implementation strategies suggested include reducing sources of pollution, increasing water conservation through mandatory requirements, facilitating the development and supporting the implementation of watershed management plans, developing and applying market-based mechanisms that support watershed management objectives, and enhancing the development of transfer mechanisms to water stressed basins. Implementation of best management practices, increased education, improved land stewardship, integrated planning, and the importance of improving the current mapping and knowledge (specifically of wetlands and riparian areas) is also suggested.

BIODIVERSITY

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC denotes both the importance of biodiversity to healthy ecosystems and the subsequent pressures on biodiversity from development, land uses and land conversion. The Advice discusses the need for co-operation from private landowners through the use of best management practices and the minimization of land fragmentation. The RAC outlines 14 biodiversity objectives primarily focusing on:

- maintaining healthy native populations of flora and fauna;
- assessing wildlife trends;
- proper species management;
- minimization of conversion of native landscapes;



- public education; and
- delivering economic benefits and incentives to landowners who steward native species.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations of the RAC focus on maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health through a multitude of initiatives including: developing a regional biodiversity management framework, developing a "suite of conservation and stewardship tools" (used voluntarily by landowners and disposition holders), identifying an integrated network of public and private lands that contribute to biodiversity, establishing conservation management areas (public lands), applying an integrated land management approach (public and private lands) and promoting the use of best management practices. The recommendations further suggest that local governments, First Nations, industry, non-government organizations and the public need to work together to coordinate activities and reduce fragmentation by minimizing the impacts of human disturbance on ecosystem health, ecosystem function and biodiversity. Additionally, the recommendations state landscapes that have been fragmented beyond a certain threshold (as per the regional biodiversity framework) will be reclaimed and restored. It should be noted that in gauging progress on biodiversity and ecosystem health, the RAC suggests the application of "rigorous inventorying, monitoring and assessments".

AIR QUALITY

Primary Issues and Objectives

The Advice does not identify any primary issues for air quality. The single objective for air quality is "To manage the integrity of air quality to enhance and maintain ecological integrity and human health".

Recommendations Summary

The RAC recommends developing an air management framework to monitor air quality for various airshed zones and where monitoring shows it is necessary, establish air management plans.

Healthy Communities

The RAC provides the goals for regional healthy communities as a set of outcome statements and has provided three sub-sections in which the outcome statements may be analyzed. These include: healthy communities, Aboriginal peoples and First Nations communities, and recreation and tourism. Each sub-section identifies primary issues, outlines objectives and provides recommendations. In addition, the sub-sections have accompanying maps which identify historical resources and outlines tourism and recreational concepts.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC acknowledges that municipalities have limited human and financial resources to consistently apply land-use planning tools. The objectives for this section concentrate on the built environment as well as the cultural and historical resources of communities. Attention to design detail and land-use management decisions, with health as a design factor, is viewed to be a key consideration for municipalities.



Recommendations Summary

The Advice encourages the use of best practises in land-use planning, collaboration with the public/private sector to meet social needs, and the promotion of collaboration and co-operation among municipalities to accommodate future populations. The recommendations also encourage the exploration of partnership opportunities to revitalize, develop and enhance parks, open space, and recreation while maintaining accessibility and affordability.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Primary Issues and Objectives

The RAC encourages continued participation of Aboriginal Peoples and First Nation Communities in the regional economy. The Advice sees opportunity to maintain Aboriginal traditional land use and values traditional knowledge in the management of wildlife and natural resources.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations seek to identify barriers to aboriginal peoples in the economy. The Advice also recommends working with aboriginal peoples in land-use planning and environmental assessment, coordinating planning processes with quality information, and considers the unique circumstances of aboriginal planning and funding for physical and social infrastructure. Lastly, the RAC encourages the use of traditional knowledge in land-use planning and in the understanding of cumulative effects to develop appropriate mitigation/minimization strategies.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Primary Issues and Objectives

The Advice identifies that the planning, supply and management of recreation opportunities do not meet the existing or projected demands of the population. The challenge is balancing the integrity of the region's most important recreation resources and significant scenic areas with the need to provide a supply of parks and open spaces and recreation infrastructure to meet the demand. In addition, there is a large amount of ageing, outdated and inaccessible recreation and tourism infrastructure.

Recommendations Summary

The recommendations under subheading, *High Value Recreation and Tourism Areas and Managing Recreation on Public Lands*, focus on user preferences, defined locales for each recreational type, education, enforcement, and policy development.

The recommendations under subheading, *Maintaining the Integrity of High Value Recreation and Tourism Areas and Infrastructure Enhancements*, focus on investment in parks, recreational water bodies, public access, and recreation/tourism infrastructure. Further, it is suggested that implementation strategies be developed to promote visitation, private/not for profit and public solutions to tourism development, and expand services in the eastern slopes.



Land-use Direction and Management Intent

INTRODUCTION

The RAC recommends that a new land-use classification replace Alberta’s existing Green and White Areas land-use designations. The new land-use classification, encompassing five classes and two sub-classes, is intended to better reflect the diversity of land uses and activities in the South Saskatchewan Region. Further, the new classification is intended to provide policy guidance to local and provincial governments through defined “management intents”. Emphasis is placed on land stewardship (“wise use of land, water and energy”) to enhance biodiversity, water security, long-term productive use of land, and the other desired management goals on both public and private land. The RAC recommends that land stewardship on private land focus on best management practices and targeted use of voluntary conservation tools and programs, such as market-based incentives. They recommend the approach for public land include the preparation of public integrated conservation management plans (ICMP) for Candidate Conservation Management Areas and tourism and recreation management and development plans.

A - AGRICULTURE, CULTIVATED AGRICULTURE AND NATIVE RANGELAND

The RAC acknowledges that agricultural land provides substantial economic, environmental and social benefits from the local to provincial scale. They note that extensive arable lands are cultivated and the region contains the majority of irrigated land in the country with productivity being amongst the highest in western Canada. The RAC also recognize that other important land uses occur on both private and public agricultural land. The RAC proposes two sub-classes of “management intents” to address the differences between cultivated areas and rangelands.

A1. Cultivated agriculture

Management intent: “The overriding intent for these areas is to support the long-term productive use of the land through the maintenance of soil productivity, improved agricultural infrastructure, and the mitigation of agricultural land fragmentation and loss resulting from development activities. Energy resources are often present and may be developed in locations where conflicts with other uses can be avoided or mitigated. As these are largely private lands, owners will be encouraged to maintain important ecological resources such as wetlands and riparian areas through stewardship practices, conservation tools and other voluntary programs. Best management practices for development will be promoted to minimize farmland conversion and fragmentation.”

A2. Native rangeland

Management intent: The RAC emphasizes that native rangeland plays an important role in connecting core wildlife habitat areas and commonly have high scenic and recreation/tourism values. The RAC believes that rangelands “should be managed to sustain the multiple ecological goods and services they provide.” “Best management practices (including access management and footprint thresholds on public lands) will be used to avoid, minimize, or mitigate associated development impacts.”

- **For private native rangelands**, the RAC states that voluntary stewardship will be encouraged, and where development does occur, best management practices will be promoted to minimize native rangeland loss and fragmentation.



- **On public native rangelands**, the RAC states “the conversion to arable agriculture or other permanent uses will not be considered.” They suggest “managed livestock grazing will be the primary approach to emulate natural disturbance.” “Integrated land management will be mandatory to reduce linear disturbance and development footprint.” They further state that “integrated management plans that consider all permitted uses will be prepared for major rangelands.”

B – CONSERVATION

According to the RAC, conservation efforts should maintain water security and ecological outcomes in areas identified as having significant ecological and historical features. More emphasis is given to water security, as all land-use decisions must meet these objectives, but when no alternatives exist for certain developments to be located outside conservation areas, such as multi-use corridors, then mitigation efforts will be utilized to reduce their ecological impact.

There are different management intents proposed for private and public lands. The management intents for the conservation of private land propose to implement conservation tools currently being developed under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and encourage voluntary stewardship by landowners. Management intents for public land propose a variety of options to properly deal with the diversity of these lands in the region. Special management areas and other designations will be considered and the RAC has identified nine initial Candidate Conservation Management Areas.

These nine areas may change in consultation with stakeholders and the First Nations, but the level of detail in describing the areas suggests they may be a precursor to the regional plan. Each area will have an ICMP created and the RAC will not endorse the establishment of conservation areas without these plans. In addition to ICMPs, range management plans are recommended to direct grazing practices. In addition, FireSmart strategies are to be prepared to reduce the impacts of wildfires. Resources and funding will be required to develop, implement, and maintain ICMPs, range management plans, and wildfire mitigation strategies. The RAC does not suggest who will be responsible for developing and managing these plans, or where the funding will come from.

Development will still occur in public conservation areas if it is determined it will not “significantly” impact water security and ecological outcomes. Crown mineral tenures that existed before a conservation management area was established will receive surface access for energy or mineral development. Forestry practices will be “modified” or “adapted” according to “desired” environmental outcomes. Management practices will focus on “how” access and activities will occur and not “if” or “who” has activity rights. Subsequently, it is implied that public conservation areas will primarily restrict public use, such as motorized access, and not economic or infrastructure developments.



C – MIXED-USE FOREST

The identified management intent for mixed-use forests on public land is to “encourage and support activities associated with natural resource development”. Secondary objectives include maintaining large contiguous areas of forest cover while minimizing fragmentation and access route density. The RAC suggests the development of economic resources are to be coordinated to reduce conflicts with other values, such as species of concern and recreation and tourism. In addition, the Advice advocates for integration between a multitude of plans including forest management plans, access management plans, energy approvals, watershed plans and all other plans. Recommendations also propose that the impacts from industrial, commercial and recreational activities be managed within established thresholds. The RAC states “integrated land management will be mandatory to reduce linear disturbance and development footprint”. Finally, direction is given to actively manage public motorized access and other intensive recreation activities on public land.

D – POPULATION CENTRES

The majority of population growth in the South Saskatchewan Region is expected to occur in the region’s urban areas. To assist in managing the pressures of urban growth, the RAC recommends that the management intent focus on supporting local governments in “creating complete and connected communities that provide a diversity of services and housing types, and encourages people to live and work in the community”. Recommendations for complete and connected communities include encouragement of compact forms of development, transit-ready communities, affordable housing, and active living – with implementation left as a municipal responsibility. Growth boundaries are not proposed, but requirements for efficiency in the provision of services and infrastructure is recommended. Reduction of the development footprint both within urban municipalities and in the rural/urban fringe is also encouraged.

E – RECREATION / TOURISM

The RAC has suggested that private landowners be encouraged to offer a range of recreation and tourism for economic development purposes. They have also noted that public land with high recreation and tourism value (features, settings and scenic quality) would be managed through the preparation of management plans. The potential for resource-based industries has been identified on public lands provided they do not compromise recreation/tourism values. A recreation and tourism opportunity spectrum (ROS) class has been identified, which includes six levels of development ranging from “unmodified natural landscapes” to a high dominance of “human modifications”. These ROS classes are intended to provide general management direction on public land while mitigating land use conflicts.