

Water

Water is needed for a wide array of purposes, ranging from drinking water to industry use. Municipalities play a critical role in water resource management.

What is RMA's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective related to water?

- Municipalities are responsible for land-use planning decisions where water bodies or wetlands are factors.
- Municipalities play a role in managing water systems that impact residents, the environment, and industry.
- Municipalities respond to severe weather events related to water (e.g. drought or flooding) that have short-term safety and long-term economic, environmental and social impacts.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to water resources?

- Water and wastewater infrastructure is costly and competes with the other priorities in municipalities. Adequate funding needs to be put into place to ensure that Alberta's rural municipalities and rural residents are guaranteed equitable access to safe and secure water.
- Current funding for water and wastewater infrastructure does not reflect the unique needs of rural Alberta including delivering water to small growth areas or accessing regional water lines.
- Municipalities should have equitable opportunity to economic development benefits without being impeded by water access issues.
- Delays in the application process for *Water Act* approvals can delay municipal projects and prevent work on critical community infrastructure during Alberta's relatively short construction season.

What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in relation to water?

- Water is a limited resource in high demand by multiple stakeholders including municipalities and industry. Effective communication and coordination between stakeholders is essential to enhancing effective water management practices.

- Effective service delivery requires strong working relationships with the provincial government neighbouring municipalities, regional commissions, regulatory bodies, and related service providers (e.g. septage haulers).
- Effective collaboration requires understanding specific roles. Decision makers must acknowledge and work with municipalities in their role as a primary authority regarding local water management. Similarly, municipalities must comply with the regulatory framework.
- To promote sound environmental stewardship, it is necessary to have coordinated legislation and jurisdiction surrounding the protection of water bodies and the environmentally sensitive areas adjacent to them.

How does the work of RMA support the sustainability of water resources?

- RMA positions itself to have a role in initiatives focused on sustainable practices for water management.
- Representing municipal concerns is a primary focus of RMA's involvement as a member of the Alberta Water Council. The multi-stakeholder approach used by the Alberta Water Council allows for diverse discussions and recommendations on water-related issues.
- RMA co-chairs the Drought and Excessive Moisture Advisory Group, which provides input to the Government of Alberta on how to prevent, mitigate, and respond to water-related disasters such as floods and droughts.

What current water-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Wetland Policy

- The *Alberta Wetland Policy* is intended to provide strategic direction to conserve, restore, protect and manage wetlands in a manner that sustains the social, environmental and economic benefits they provide. Recognizing the benefit of wetlands, rural municipalities are working in alignment with the *Alberta Wetland Policy* to support development decisions.
- In aligning activities with the *Alberta Wetland Policy*, rural municipalities are experiencing delayed approvals resulting in increased costs and incomplete infrastructure projects, which impacts the safety of residents. Improvements need to be made to ensure that *Water Act* approvals in alignment with the *Alberta Wetland Policy* can be received in a timely fashion.

Funding

- The Government of Alberta's sustained funding for the Water for Life program and the Alberta Municipal Water/Wastewater Partnership is an encouraging development in the provision of consistent and adequate funding for municipal infrastructure.
- Rural municipalities have unique needs and funding programs must recognize and address these infrastructure challenges (e.g. water/wastewater system upgrades, servicing small growth areas, regional water lines).
- Any significant regulatory changes to municipal water management and distribution processes must be accompanied by reasonable funding to assist municipalities in implementation.

Allocation

- Municipalities located in the South Saskatchewan River Basin are faced with the reality of no new water licenses being issued by the Government of Alberta while areas in the northern part of the province have challenges accessing potable water for residents and meeting industry needs (e.g. confined feeding operations).

Flooding and Drought

- Unprecedented flooding in the past decade has resulted in legislative changes for land-use planning in flood prone areas. Most municipalities recognize the importance of avoiding flood-prone areas, these formalized changes need to be monitored for impacts and unintended consequences.
- Provincial flood mapping must be completed in order to ensure that municipal planning decisions and associated bylaws are in place to avoid development activities in identified floodplains. Many areas of rural Alberta remain unmapped and this poses challenges for municipalities planning development near water bodies.
- Flood and drought mitigation efforts are timely and needed but must involve local governments to promote effective land-use planning decisions and implement mitigation projects.
- Drought events can have devastating impacts on industries that rely on healthy moisture amounts, such as agriculture and forestry. Consistent communication between all levels of government, agriculture and forestry producers and other stakeholders is essential to provide timely information and solutions during these events.

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