



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

RMA Advocacy Report Card

Winter 2021



RMA Advocacy Report Card: Winter 2021

Published by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA)
Copyright © 2021 Rural Municipalities of Alberta

Contents

- Contents 3
- Introduction..... 4
- Section 1a: Government Responses to Spring 2020 Resolutions..... 5
- Section 1b: Government Responses to Fall 2020 Resolutions 23
- Section 2: Advocacy Report Card 59
 - Agriculture 64
 - Broadband and Connectivity 66
 - Community Services 68
 - Emergency Services 71
 - Energy..... 73
 - Environment 79
 - Health and Seniors 88
 - Industry and Resource Development..... 90
 - Municipal Governance and Finance 91
 - Planning and Development 97
 - Policing and Rural Crime..... 100
 - Transportation and Infrastructure 107
 - Other..... 109
- Contributors 112

Introduction

The Advocacy Report Card is divided into three sections.

- ◆ **Section 1a** provides detailed information on the government response to the spring 2020 resolutions and includes the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Board of Directors’ reaction to the response as well as anticipated follow up.
- ◆ **Section 1b** provides detailed information on the government response to the fall 2020 resolutions and includes the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Board of Directors’ reaction to the response as well as anticipated follow up.
- ◆ **Section 2** updates members by reporting on all active resolutions, grouped by advocacy area.

Please note that due to a change in the Government of Alberta process and timelines for providing RMA with initial government responses to resolutions, the Winter 2021 Advocacy Report Card includes initial responses for both spring 2020 and fall 2020 resolutions (sections 1a and 1b). Future editions of the *Advocacy Report Card* may continue to include initial responses to only the previous convention’s resolutions, depending on the timing of the receipt of government responses.

Definition of Terms

Following endorsement by RMA members, resolutions are sent to the appropriate level of government for response. Once a response is received, RMA labels the resolution with one of five indicators which determines the status of that resolution. The intention of providing a status for each resolution is to evaluate whether the government response meets the intent of the resolution. The status is not intended to reflect RMA’s advocacy efforts on a resolution.

Below are the descriptions of all resolution ranking statuses.

STATUS	DESCRIPTION
Accepted	Meets RMA criteria as outlined in a) the resolution and b) as per the expectations of the Board of Directors.
Accepted in Principle	The development addresses that action is being taken to meet the intent of the resolution, but further action is required.
Accepted in Part	Some resolutions include multiple ‘asks’ in the operative clause. This status indicates that one of the ‘asks’ has been met while others require further action.
Intent Not Met	The intent of the resolution has not been met as outlined in the resolution or the current developments do not meet the approval of the Board of Directors.
Incomplete Information	RMA has not received enough information to assign a status. Further follow-up is required for RMA to make an informed decision on how to proceed.

Section 1a: Government Responses to Spring 2020 Resolutions

RMA recently received responses to the resolutions adopted at the spring 2020 convention from the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada. The following table provides an overview of the initial assessment to resolutions following the response. **RMA emphasizes that this table only reflects the initial response received from the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada and that advocacy efforts on all resolutions are in progress.**

Reactions at a Glance

#	RESOLUTION NAME	STATUS
1-20S	Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive	Accepted in Part
2-20S	Additional Depreciation of Machinery and Equipment Property (Schedule D)	Intent Not Met
4-20S	Water and Wastewater – Laws, Regulations and Funding	Intent Not Met
5-20S	Regional Economic Development Alliances Continued Provincial Funding	Intent Not Met
6-20S	Economic State of Crisis	Intent Not Met
ER1-20S	Loss of 2% Strychnine	Incomplete Information
ER2-20S	New Physician Funding Framework	Incomplete Information
ER3-20S	Housing Management Body Compliance Requirements During Pandemic Response	Accepted in Part

Resolution 1-20S

Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive

Saddle Hills County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Parks**

WHEREAS the Alberta Wetland Policy requires municipalities to implement practices that impact budgets and project timelines with minimal improvements to the environment; and

WHEREAS the wetland application process can take several months if a field assessment is required as it can only be completed during the plant growing season; and

WHEREAS most of the costs associated with the wetland restoration program are used for administration, with a minimal amount used to improve the environment; and

WHEREAS municipalities are required to hire engineers to complete desktop and wetland assessments and Alberta Environment and Parks use significant staff resources to review engineer assessments and process applications; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities manage the majority of Alberta's public road infrastructure; and

WHEREAS roads require consistent maintenance and/or re-building to support a growing province, ensure public safety, accommodate increased use including extra weight and more traffic, and align with current standards; and

WHEREAS the consequences of not completing road maintenance as required, due to extended time and extra cost, could include putting public safety in jeopardy due to a lack of upgraded roads, and loss of transportation routes for industry and the public due to road bans or road closure;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to modify the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive to minimize the administration and assessment process to reduce costs and approval times for municipalities; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that funds collected through the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive be directed to environment improvement projects that have low administration fees.

Government Response

Alberta Environment and Parks

Environment and Parks is aware that the *Water Act* and Alberta Wetland Policy (AWP) regulatory requirements for municipal road maintenance impacting wetlands can be onerous for municipalities. The department is developing a streamlined regulatory process to reduce red tape for low-risk wetland impacts resulting from municipal road maintenance activities. We appreciate RMA's support in delivering a survey to its members, which has helped to scope the department's work to reduce red tape for municipal road maintenance activities impacting wetlands. The department plans to re-engage municipalities this summer to get feedback on regulatory solutions targeted for fall 2020. We are examining how to implement the *Water Act* and AWP more efficiently. It is important that we continue to hear input and ideas from rural municipalities on red tape reduction.

A key premise of the AWP and the Wetland Replacement Program (WRP) is to replace wetland area and function in watersheds, where permanent wetland disturbances were approved under the *Water Act* and AWP. The WRP will provide funding for approved wetland replacement projects in accordance with service agreements with

municipalities. One goal of the WRP is to establish agreements with municipalities to restore and construct wetlands that will directly benefit communities and the surrounding ecosystem. Replacement projects will help manage flooding or water quality issues, provide habitat to specific species and could provide additional recreational or educational opportunities.

Our government acknowledges that up to 70 per cent of wetlands have been lost in the settled parts of Alberta, and the WRP is focused on demonstrating restoration and construction of wetland area to offset ongoing and historical wetland losses. Restoration activities that result in functional improvements to a wetland are eligible for funding, as long as they are linked to restoration activities that will result in wetland area gains. Wetland replacement projects offset wetland impacts (paid as a wetland replacement fee to the department through the *Water Act* approval process), which includes fees paid by municipalities for road impacts to wetlands. This approach will provide a substantially better opportunity for municipalities by reducing liability and increasing financial funding opportunities by:

- Ensuring collaboration to achieve shared provincial and municipal outcomes,
- Reducing administrative burden and liability associated with long-term *Water Act* conditions to complete permittee-responsible replacement, and
- Providing financial security to complete wetland replacement projects, including additional funding sources from fees collected from other activities in the other municipalities (for example, wetland losses resulting from urban development and industry).

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) response acknowledges the challenges being faced by rural municipalities related to wetland applications and indicates that AEP is currently developing a streamlined regulatory process to reduce red tape for low-risk wetland impacts resulting from municipal road maintenance activities. RMA and its members have been actively engaging with AEP and sharing challenges rural municipalities are facing in wetland applications, and RMA is pleased to hear that those concerns have helped scope the department's work to reduce red tape for municipal road maintenance activities impacting wetlands. RMA and its members look forward to continued engagement with AEP to share ideas on red tape reduction for wetlands.

One of AEP's major initiatives is the Wetland Replacement Program (WRP) which will provide funding for approved wetland replacement projects in accordance with service agreements with municipalities. One goal of the WRP is to establish agreements with municipalities to restore and construct wetlands that will directly benefit communities and the surrounding ecosystem. AEP intends for the WRP to reduce liability and increase financial funding opportunities for municipalities by ensuring collaboration to achieve shared provincial and municipal outcomes, reducing administrative burden and liability associated with long-term *Water Act* conditions to complete permittee-responsible replacement and providing financial security to complete wetland restoration projects.

This resolution specifically asks for the Government of Alberta to modify the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive to minimize the administration and assessment process to reduce costs and approval times for municipalities and that funds collected be directed to environment improvement projects. Although AEP's response does not directly state any modifications to the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive, AEP's intent for the WRP is to minimize the administrative burden, liability and reduce costs for municipalities.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted in Part** and will be re-evaluated based on the progress of the WRP.

Resolution 2-20S

Additional Depreciation of Machinery and Equipment Property (Schedule D)

MD of Opportunity

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS machinery and equipment (M&E) property is assessed in accordance with the Alberta Machinery & Equipment Assessment Minister's Guidelines (the Guidelines), adopted by way of Ministerial Order every year; and

WHEREAS additional depreciation may be granted under Schedule D of the Guidelines "[f]or any depreciation that is not reflected in Schedule C...provided acceptable evidence of such loss in value exists"; and

WHEREAS several assessment complaints have been filed with the Municipal Government Board respecting assessments for M&E requesting additional depreciation under Schedule D of the Guidelines on the basis of industry-wide economic conditions; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Assessor's policy with respect to Schedule D is to not grant additional depreciation on the basis of industry-wide economic conditions; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Assessor's policy ensures that assessments are not affected by industry-wide economic conditions and that assessment of M&E is based on a stable, predictable system; and

WHEREAS policies are already in place to reduce assessments prepared for and taxes paid on M&E, including the reduction of all assessments of M&E to 77% of the value determined in accordance with the Guidelines, a 25% immediate depreciation on M&E pursuant to Schedule C of the Guidelines, and the exemption of M&E from education requisitions; and

WHEREAS municipalities depend on the stable, predictable assessment system established by the Guidelines; and

WHEREAS if the Provincial Assessor's policy respecting the assessment of M&E is changed, there will be a significant redistribution of the assessment base within municipalities;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate for the Government of Alberta to take steps to ensure that assessments for Machinery and Equipment are not adjusted under Schedule D of the Alberta Machinery & Equipment Assessment Minister's Guidelines on the basis of industry-wide economic conditions; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate for the Government of Alberta to amend Schedule D of the Alberta Machinery & Equipment Assessment Minister's Guidelines to confirm the status of the current policy that additional depreciation under Schedule D is not available on the basis of industry-wide economic conditions; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate for the Government of Alberta to not consider any changes to the Alberta Machinery & Equipment Assessment Minister's Guidelines without full consultation and consideration of the impact of any changes on all Alberta taxpayers.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

It continues to be Municipal Affairs' perspective that Schedule D depreciation is not applied as a result of general economic conditions, and this has been reinforced in directives from the Provincial Assessor. We will

await the outcome of the ongoing complaint process related to this issue before determining whether any additional response is warranted.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

In 2020, the Government of Alberta undertook a review of the assessment model for regulated oil and gas properties. The review process included consideration of changes to how Schedule D depreciation is applied to various property types, including a shift away from the use of additional (Schedule D) depreciation in some proposed scenarios.

Following the review, the Minister of Municipal Affairs made temporary adjustments to the assessment model, which included a further reduction in the assessment value of low producing wells through changes to Schedule D of the Alberta Machinery & Equipment Assessment Minister's Guidelines. This change is intended to reduce costs of oil and gas companies responsible for low-producing wells due to the broader economic challenges currently facing the industry, which is in direct opposition to the request in the first operative clause of the resolution.

Additionally, RMA does not believe that the Government of Alberta has adequately considered impacts of changes to Alberta taxpayers during the assessment model review process (as mentioned in the third operative clause). Therefore, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**. RMA will continue to advocate for the reduced use of artificial changes to assessment levels through Schedule D in future reviews of the assessment model.

Resolution 4-20S

Water and Wastewater – Laws, Regulations and Funding

County of Grande Prairie

Carried as amended

► ***Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Parks, Environment and Climate Change Canada***

WHEREAS the Government of Canada and Government of Alberta draft and implement laws and regulations to protect the environment and public health, including the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment, and release of wastewater; and

WHEREAS the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment, and release of wastewater are essential services crucial to safe, healthy communities; and

WHEREAS the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment, and release of wastewater are often provided by municipalities, municipal commissions, or municipally-owned utility companies; and

WHEREAS the laws and regulations governing the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment, and release of wastewater can have both direct and indirect effects on the cost of providing these services; and

WHEREAS many water and wastewater service providers are challenged to fund the infrastructure deficits under the current laws and regulations governing the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment, and release of effluent;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the governments of Canada and Alberta consider and evaluate the financial impacts that all existing and proposed laws and regulations governing the production and distribution of potable water and the collection, treatment and release of wastewater will have on municipalities, municipal commissions, or municipally-owned utility companies, and share this information with RMA; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate to the governments of Canada and Alberta to recognize water commissions and cooperatives and deem them eligible for funding programs; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the governments of Canada and Alberta establish adequate, stable, long-term funding for all affected water and wastewater service providers which considers the rising costs of providing these services due to federal and provincial laws and regulations.

Government Response

Alberta Environment and Parks

Reliable access to safe, secure drinking water for all Albertans is our government's priority. The department is aware of the resourcing challenges smaller municipalities face in delivering safe, reliable drinking water and wastewater services. To support financing of infrastructure for small municipalities, the Government of Alberta administers two funds through the Alberta Municipal Wastewater Partnership and the Water for Life program. These programs have committed a combined \$207 million to municipal works over the next three years.

Given Alberta's current fiscal reality, there are no immediate plans to change the funding model for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. As part of our red tape reduction activities over the coming year, we will be examining aspects of the challenges you have identified, including opportunities to right-size regulations for smaller water treatment system managers.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta's response acknowledges the resource challenges rural municipalities face in delivering safe, reliable drinking water and wastewater services. Currently, the Government of Alberta administers two programs: Alberta Municipal Water/Wastewater Partnership and the Water for Life program to help finance water and wastewater infrastructure in smaller municipalities and has committed to a combined \$207 million to municipal works over the next three years.

This resolution is requesting that the Government of Alberta and Canada to recognize water commissions and cooperatives and deem them eligible for funding programs and to establish adequate, stable, long-term funding that considers the rising costs of providing water and wastewater service providers.

The Government of Alberta response indicates that due to the current fiscal reality, there are no immediate plans to change the funding model for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and RMA will continue to advocate for the Government of Alberta and Canada to establish adequate, stable, long-term funding for water and wastewater service providers that considers the rising costs of providing services.

Resolution 5-20S

Regional Economic Development Alliances Continued Provincial Funding

MD of Spirit River

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism**

WHEREAS for 20 years the Government of Alberta (GOA) has embraced a partnership with Alberta municipalities to plan and undertake regional economic development initiatives of mutual interest; and

WHEREAS the success of this partnership has made Alberta a leader in the delivery of regional economic development; and

WHEREAS Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) provide a cost-efficient venue for the GOA and municipalities to build partnerships to foster economic growth in their regions; and

WHEREAS REDAs provide a substantial multiplier effect on dollars invested; and

WHEREAS the GOA has limited staffing resources and capacity to offer comparable economic tools and opportunities to rural members to those in urban areas, and

WHEREAS the majority of rural municipalities cannot afford to hire their own economic development officers; and

WHEREAS REDAs are dependent on the GOA's support due to additional downloading onto municipalities such as policing, which limits the ability of REDAs to charge greater membership fees to municipalities; and

WHEREAS the five-year funding agreement for REDAs expired March 31, 2020 and there has been no response on a renewal of this contract; and

WHEREAS the loss of REDAs due to GOA funding cutbacks may result in the loss of strong intermunicipal collaborations in rural Alberta that have taken 20 years to build;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the Government of Alberta enter into a five-year contract with the existing nine Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) at an equivalent or higher funding arrangement as was in effect in the previous agreement; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the Government of Alberta enter into meaningful discussions with REDA chairs to ensure long-term sustainability of REDAs.

Government Response

Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism

Our government has made some tough decisions in planning the 2020-21 provincial budget. I am aware that measures undertaken to protect the health and safety of Albertans due to COVID-19 and the downturn in oil prices will have an important effect on our plans, the extent of which is not yet fully known.

Please be assured that the Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) will continue to receive support for their organizational operations, although given the province's fiscal challenges, this will be reduced from what was available in prior years. I feel strongly that REDAs have an important role to play in supporting growth and prosperity in Alberta's local and regional economies. The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism (EDTT) will continue to work with REDAs and other economic development partners as we continue to stabilize our economy and move towards growth.

The current economic downturn, combined with the global pandemic, is having an unprecedented effect on Alberta's citizens, regions and economy. EDTT is engaging extensively with businesses, economic development

organizations, and industries during the pandemic; and will be adjusting our response and information on an ongoing basis. We continue to actively monitor the situation and are working to provide businesses with the information and supports that they need. For workplace guidance and supports to help businesses and non-profits affected by COVID-19 begin to reopen and resume operations safely, please visit alberta.ca/Bizconnect.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

While the Government of Alberta response indicates the important role that regional economic development alliances (REDAs) play in Alberta's economic growth, RMA is concerned with the indication that REDA funding will be reduced due to the province's fiscal challenges. REDAs play a crucial role in providing promotion and support for regional investment in the province and reducing their funding may provide the province with modest short-term fiscal relief but will likely result in reduced long-term investment and economic growth in rural areas.

In further follow-up correspondence on this issue, Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation (formerly Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism) indicate that new three-year funding arrangements (2020-22) are being completed at a reduced rate from previous agreements. This is concerning as the resolution requests five-year funding arrangements at a level equivalent or higher than previous levels. Additionally, the supplementary correspondence indicated no plan to meet directly with the chairs of each REDA.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate for adequate funding for REDAs, and for increased collaboration between the Government of Alberta and REDA chairs.

Resolution 6-20S

Economic State of Crisis

Brazeau County

Carried as amended

► ***Advocacy Target: Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, Alberta Energy, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada***

WHEREAS Alberta's unemployment rate is trending upward and remains above the national average; and

WHEREAS consumer bankruptcies increased by 9.1% from November 2018 to November 2019; and

WHEREAS citizen dependence on employment insurance in Alberta is on the rise; and

WHEREAS consumer confidence is plunging due to sustained economic decline; and

WHEREAS rural crime, due in part to increased unemployment, has increased markedly since 2014; and

WHEREAS commercial bankruptcies are seeing a year over year increase since 2016; and

WHEREAS certain bureaucratic government policies in response to perceived environmental emergencies have resulted in actual corporate and personal financial crisis;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the governments of Alberta and Canada to declare an economic state of crisis and work with all levels of government to develop and enact policies designed to secure investment and employment in the energy and agricultural sectors.

Government Response

Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism

Investment attraction is a priority for the Government of Alberta, and as identified in our government's A Blueprint for Jobs Plan, we will soon be releasing an Investment and Growth Strategy. To enable job-creators in attracting investment, the Alberta Investment and Growth Strategy is an overarching framework to guide policies and programs focused on retaining and expanding domestic and foreign direct investment into the province, resulting in shared economic prosperity, using a systematic approach across the investment continuum (from identification to aftercare). This includes a concentrated effort on principal sectors like energy and agriculture, which currently have a comparative economic advantage, and tourism, as well as key enabling sectors with a high potential to fuel momentum and growth in the wider provincial economy – technology, aerospace, and financial services.

By building on our strengths in a coordinated Team Alberta approach, our investment attraction ecosystem can transform to be consistently strategic, reliable, timely and tailored. As announced in Budget 2020, a new investment attraction agency will be established to focus on high-value, high-impact investment opportunities, including new foreign direct and Canadian investment.

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Recognizing the challenges facing our industry, Agriculture and Forestry has taken action to protect employment, support agriculture, and attract investment in Alberta's agriculture and agri-processing sector, including new funding to support farmers, agri-businesses, and food processors. These include:

- Enhanced business risk management programs under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership Programs to compensate producers for disruption to processing capacity in the livestock and agri-processing sector.

- New employee support programs and training for agri-business and agriculture. The purpose of this program is to provide support to the agricultural and horticultural businesses and services to help address the impact of COVID-19. The program will provide a grant to eligible employers to offset the costs of training and ensuring safety protocols are in place for new employees hired from the available domestic labour pool. Eligible activities include training for new hire employees in the areas of COVID-19 safety procedures, training for new hire employees in occupational health and safety, and training for new hire employees in work-related duties and activities. More information on the new program is available from Mr. Drew Hiltz, Program Manager, who can be reached at drew.hiltz@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-8228. Further details can also be found by visiting <https://cap.alberta.ca/CAP/program/TRAINING>.
- Launching Alberta's Agriculture Job Connector, matching workers with employers to fill agriculture and agri-food jobs, including employer and worker resources (for details, visit <https://www.alberta.ca/agriculture-job-connector.aspx>).
- Supporting the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association to enhance connections between farms and retailers, wholesales, restaurants, the food service industry, and consumers.
- Ensuring access to fibre to support a strong and competitive forest industry, attracting investment and supporting jobs in forest communities through the [Forest Jobs Action Plan](#).

Alberta's competitive agriculture sector plays a key role in supporting rural communities and the economic success of the province. As a major economic driver in Alberta, agriculture employs more than 75,000 people and generates nearly \$12 billion in annual export sales. Agriculture and Forestry's Investment Attraction and International Market Development sections have a strong mandate to facilitate expansion of the agri-processing sector and support companies seeking access to international markets. As part of this, my ministry works closely with Alberta's international offices, economic development organizations, industry associations, and our provincial and federal partners and others on a global basis.

In addition, the Government of Alberta has launched a new strategy to champion Alberta's agricultural sector to ensure continued growth and long-term success for the sector. As part of this strategy, I have asked senior leaders from the agricultural and agri-processing sector, including farmers, ranchers, agri-business leaders and members of the academic community to come together as an Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee to provide strategic advice and recommendations on emerging issues and priorities. These industry leaders will work to highlight Alberta's sustainable agriculture practices and illustrate how our industry leads on a global stage to feed people around the world and inspire consumer confidence in agricultural products produced in Alberta.

Alberta Energy

- Alberta Energy's perspective regarding the unprecedented impacts currently facing our energy industry aligns with the RMA's Resolution 6-20S.
- The Government of Alberta is taking steps to ensure our energy industry is attractive to potential investors, and providing support for employment opportunities in the energy sector.
- The Government of Alberta appointed Dr. Jack Mintz to lead the Economic Recovery Council to provide advice on how the province can fact the economic crisis related to the energy price crash and COVID-19.

Supporting Business and Employment

- Alberta's Recovery Plan, released on June 29, takes bold action to create jobs that get people back to work, build infrastructure and diversify our economy. Through this plan, the province will build on its economic strengths to attract investment and position the province for prosperity.

- Alberta is financially supporting the Keystone XL pipeline by providing \$1.5 billion in equity investment in 2020 and a \$6 billion loan guarantee in 2021. Keystone XL is estimated to create 1,400 direct and 5,400 indirect jobs in Alberta.
- Alberta Energy has significantly increased its proactive advocacy with the federal government to increase the province's authority over areas of provincial jurisdiction, and advance our vital economic interests, such as building energy pipelines.
- Alberta's Site Rehabilitation Program launched in May 2020. The \$1 billion program, funded by the federal government COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, provides funding to eligible abandonment and reclamation work on oil and gas sites in Alberta. The program will create around 5,300 jobs.
 - Alberta also extended its loan to the Orphan Well Association (OWA) by up to \$100 million in March 2020 to help support energy sector job creation and clean up orphan wells.
- As one of the cleanest carriers of energy, the natural gas value chain will play a critical and enduring role in energy security and environmental outcomes.
 - Alberta is focusing on new and expanded pathways to promote growth in industrial demand, petrochemical manufacturing, domestic and global liquefied natural gas, plastics recycling and repurposing, and the emerging hydrogen economy,
 - The Government of Alberta confirmed its \$1.1 billion commitment to the Petrochemical Diversification Program in October 2019.
- Alberta is modernizing the province's minerals strategy to provide guidance and help establish Alberta as an attractive place for mineral investment and innovation, and to capitalize on its vast mineral resource potential.
- In response to growing global demand for helium, on May 13, Alberta announced an effective helium royalty rate of 4.25 percent. This provides clarity for investors and ensures a fair price for Albertans. It will create both direct and indirect employment opportunities from helium extraction and processing facilities.
- The Government of Alberta continues working to provide greater policy and regulatory clarity for proponents wanting to invest in Alberta's geothermal energy area that represents a significant opportunity to support economic diversification and competitiveness.

Reducing Red Tape

- Alberta Energy has taken steps to simplify and reduce the regulatory burden on Alberta's energy sector, such as repealing unnecessary and outdated regulations and legislation, enabling the OWA to better manage and accelerate their clean-up of wells and sites, and reversing course on the capacity electricity market.
 - Energy's agencies have also been directed to reduce red tape and develop work plans to address stakeholder concerns and achieve reductions.
- As a result of the Government of Alberta's review of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER), a number of steps were taken to improve the AER's mandate, governance and operations to help make Alberta more competitive.
 - In April 2020, government appointed a new board of directors and CEO. On May 27, 2020, government introduced Bill 7, the Responsible Energy Development Amendment Act. If passes, the legislation will provide government with the authority to establish maximum timelines for the AER to review applications.

- Alberta successfully negotiated a preliminary equivalency agreement with the federal government on methane emissions reductions, protecting industry from onerous federal regulations. The preliminary agreement requires review and approval by federal cabinet before Canada’s regulations are stood down.

Selling Alberta to the World

- Alberta Energy works closely with the Alberta Washington Office, and is undertaking targeted U.S. engagement to remind American audiences in oil producing and pipeline states of the importance of Canadian oil in an integrated energy market.
- A key priority for the Government of Alberta is to inform the world how Alberta produces energy with the world’s highest environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards.
 - Alberta Energy is leading the development of a provincial ESG strategy aimed at strengthening and promoting Alberta’s position as a responsible energy producer and attracting investment to its energy sector.

Alberta is accelerating development and awareness of the provinces’ leadership in ESG performance; establishing international offices as centres for advocacy and information about our energy sector; and continuing to hold conversations with United Kingdom, European Union, and other international audiences to showcase our excellent credentials.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Alberta Energy response indicates that the Ministry is working on developing a provincial environmental, social and governance (ESG) strategy that will be aimed at strengthening and promoting Alberta’s position as a responsible energy producer and attracting investment to its energy sector. In addition, Alberta Energy has been reducing red tape in the energy sector by repealing unnecessary and outdated regulations and legislation and expanding the Orphan Well Association’s (OWA) powers to better manage and accelerate their clean-up of wells and sites. RMA appreciates Alberta Energy’s efforts to attract and secure investment with these initiatives, it is too early to determine whether these efforts will attract investment to Alberta. The RMA will continue to monitor these initiatives and update members on their status.

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry’s responses also include encouraging initiatives to support the growth of the province’s agriculture industry.

Although the investment and growth strategies and supports identified in the Government of Alberta’s response is an encouraging step toward supporting the province’s economic recovery, the response makes no reference to declaring the economic state of emergency referenced in the operative clause of the resolution, or of working with the Government of Canada to encourage increased investment and growth in Alberta’s energy and agriculture sectors.

Further follow-up correspondence on this issue from Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation (formerly Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism) also highlights collaborative provincial-federal efforts to support Alberta’s economic recovery, including internationally-focused attempts to define and defend Alberta’s environmental, social and governance standards across all sectors as a means to attract international investment to the province, as well as matching levels of municipally-focused funding that will indirectly support the agriculture and oil and gas industries by supporting Alberta’s infrastructure.

As the provincial responses do not indicate a plan to declare a specific economic state of crisis, and RMA has not yet received a response from the Government of Canada, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution ER1-20S

Loss of 2% Strychnine

Cypress County

Carried as amended

▶ ***Advocacy Target: Health Canada, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Pest Management Regulatory Agency***

WHEREAS the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) has cancelled the registration for 2% Liquid Strychnine for use on Richardson's Ground Squirrels (RGS) as of March 4, 2020; and

WHEREAS agricultural producers require a product to effectively assist in the control of RGS; and

WHEREAS after March 4, 2023, owning and using strychnine will be illegal and owners/users could face fines;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Health Canada and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) reinstate the use of 2% Liquid Strychnine on a permanent basis to agricultural producers to utilize on their farms for control of Richardson's Ground Squirrels (RGS), or that Health Canada and the PMRA provide an alternative solution that produces as effective a result as strychnine in a financially responsible manner for the continued control of RGS.

Government Response

RMA has not received a response to this resolution.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA recognizes the ongoing need for tools for farmers to control pest species that impact agricultural information. As RMA has not yet received a response from the advocacy targets identified above, this resolution is assigned the status of **Incomplete Information**.

Resolution ER2-20S

New Physician Funding Framework

Lac la Biche County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Health**

WHEREAS on February 20, 2020 the Government of Alberta ended negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association and terminated the master agreement with Alberta physicians; and

WHEREAS the master agreement ended on March 31, 2020, when a new physician funding framework was implemented; and

WHEREAS the new funding framework changes how Alberta physicians are compensated; and

WHEREAS physicians have expressed serious concerns about the viability of their practices under the new framework, especially in rural Alberta; and

WHEREAS rural and small municipalities have historically struggled to attract physicians under the now-terminated master agreement, making the prospect of doctors leaving under the new framework very likely;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to reengage in negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association to mutually arrive at a new master agreement that ensures continued timely access to healthcare for all rural Albertans.

Government Response

RMA has not received a response from Alberta Health (AH) to this resolution. Both AH and the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) have made proposals regarding a new master agreement, however, there is currently not a new master agreement in place.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA remains engaged in issues regarding access to healthcare for rural Albertans, and is closely following the relationship between Alberta Health and the Alberta Medical Association. However, without a formal response to this resolution, or significant progress towards a new master agreement, RMA cannot evaluate this resolution. As a result, RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution ER3-20S

Housing Management Body Compliance Requirements During Pandemic Response

Mountain View County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Seniors and Housing**

WHEREAS the World Health Organization has declared a global pandemic for COVID-19 on March 11, 2020 and Alberta housing management bodies (HMBs) and continuing care operators (CCOs) have been in pandemic response since that time; and

WHEREAS HMBs and CCOs have been proactive in taking preventative steps and complying with directives and orders from Alberta Health (AH); and

WHEREAS Alberta HMBs and CCOs have incurred unbudgeted costs for labour and supplies and lost revenues to vacancies in order to meet AH compliance requirements; and

WHEREAS the pandemic-related revenue and cost impacts for Alberta HMBs and CCOs are not currently funded by any federal or provincial programs; and

WHEREAS these lost revenues and costs are not recoverable through business interruption insurance; and

WHEREAS at some point, HMBs and CCOs must make up lost revenues and costs to sustain operations; and

WHEREAS in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in a facility, there is a clear current that a single HMB or CCO will not be able to supply full front-line labour requirements;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request the Government of Alberta to provide funding to Alberta housing management bodies (HMBs) and continuing care operators (CCOs) in support of front-line workers for the additional labour, personal protective equipment and operational supplies and lost revenues due to complying with COVID-19 pandemic directives and orders; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request the Government of Alberta to immediately provide a plan for emergency supply of labour, personal protective equipment and operational supplies to Alberta HMBs and CCOs in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak at a facility in Alberta.

Government Response

Alberta Seniors and Housing

The Government of Alberta appreciates the efforts of staff working for HMBs and continuing care operators (CCOs), to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep residents safe and healthy. Our government is working hard to address the financial impact of public health orders on HMBs and CCOs, and to ensure they have tools in place to prevent and respond to an outbreak in their buildings. It is also vital we maintain a fiscally responsible approach to spending under Budget 2020, particularly in this challenging economic climate.

On April 20, 2020, our government announced new funding to increase staffing of health care aides to alleviate pressures in contracted continuing care facilities. This increased funding allows for wage top-up of an additional \$2 per hour for health care aides, and will help facilities hire additional staff and practicum students. The wage supplement will help alleviate the financial burden for those staff who normally work at several sites, but are now restricted to one site.

Furthermore, on May 19, 2020, our government announced more than \$170 million to help keep residents and staff in seniors' lodges, long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL), safe from the virus, with funding being used for enhanced staffing, extra cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE). Of that amount, \$30 million is being allocated to lodge operators, with the remaining \$140 million to LTC and DSL

operators. This funding is retroactive to March 15, 2020, and will continue until the public health orders from the Chief Medical Officer of Health are lifted.

Seniors and Housing and Health are working together to ensure this funding is provided to HMBs and CCOs in a timely manner. Organizations began receiving funding on June 8, 2020.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is also supplying PPE (along with directions on how to use it) at no cost to HMBs and contracted CCOs (i.e., LTC and DSL) to keep workers, and the residents they care for, safe. Finally, to support sites dealing with an outbreak, the AHS Coordinated COVID-19 Response Team has been made available to help navigate these situations.

Seniors and Housing, Health, and AHS are meeting regularly with the continuing care associations, representing both contracted and non-contracted supportive living operators from across the province, to gain a thorough understanding of their issues and difficulties. Analysis and discussions are ongoing, and our government remains committed to working closely with HMBs and CCOs to monitor their fiscal challenges and support them in maintaining operations during the pandemic.

Finally, Health is frequently updating guidance and recommendations on how to protect Albertans against the spread of the novel coronavirus, based on evidence and the expert advice of our public health officials.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response indicates that specific emergency provincial funding was provided to HMBs and CCOs beginning on June 8, 2020 to allow for the purchase of PPE and other related equipment. Additionally, the response indicates that AHS has supplied PPE to HMBs and contracted CCOs at no cost. This, combined with the two-dollar-per-hour wage subsidy to better support employees during this time, effectively addresses the resolution's first operative clause.

The resolution response also indicates that the AHS Coordinated COVID-19 Response Team has been made available to assist HMBs and CCOs in procuring and deploying PPE.

The resolution response does not indicate that the Government of Alberta has developed an emergency response plan to address a breakout of COVID-19 at a facility in Alberta. Ensuring both the province and facility operators and staff are prepared to recognize and mitigate the impacts of a breakout is critical to supporting the safety of residents, staff and the broader community. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Part**, and will seek further information on the development of an emergency response plan.

Section 1b: Government Responses to Fall 2020 Resolutions

RMA recently received responses to the resolutions adopted at the spring 2020 convention from the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada. The following table provides an overview of the initial assessment to resolutions following the response. **RMA emphasizes that this table only reflects the initial response received from the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada and that advocacy efforts on all resolutions are in progress.**

Reactions at a Glance

#	RESOLUTION NAME	STATUS
1-20F	Police Funding Model Freeze	Incomplete Information
2-20F	Blue-Ribbon Panel to Review Unpaid Taxes Owed by Oil and Gas Companies	Intent Not Met
3-20F	Support for Alberta Farmland Trust	Accepted in Principle
4-20F	Provincial Policing Costs Levy – Designate as a Requisition	Intent Not Met
5-20F	Legislated Notice Requirement	Intent Not Met
6-20F	Government of Alberta Embargoed Committee Work	Intent Not Met
7-20F	Amendments to <i>Municipal Government Act</i> Section 619	Intent Not Met
8-20F	Enhancing Support for Farmers When a State of Agricultural Disaster is Declared	Intent Not Met
9-20F	CRTC Aggregate Wholesale Pricing to Mandate Rural Investment	Intent Not Met
10-20F	Weed Issues on Oil and Gas Sites in Rural Alberta	Intent Not Met
12-20F	Expansion of Elk Hunting for Management in Agriculture Production Areas	Intent Not Met
13-20F	Provincial Government Disaster Recovery Program Payments	Intent Not Met
15-20F	Security Deposits for Dispositions	Intent Not Met
16-20F	Federal and Provincial Disaster Support	Accepted
17-20F	Rural Small Business Properties Assessment Sub-Classes Amendment	Intent Not Met
18-20F	Municipal Decision-making on Fire Bans in Hamlets Within Forest Protection Area	Accepted in Principle
19-20F	Reinstatement of the Benefit Contribution Grant for Early Childhood Educators	Intent Not Met

Resolution 1-20F

Police Funding Model Freeze

MD of Lesser Slave River

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Justice and Solicitor General**

WHEREAS the Police Funding Regulation (hereafter referred to as “the Regulation”) was enacted by the Government of Alberta on July 22, 2020; and

WHEREAS the Regulation states that each municipality receiving policing under the Provincial Police Services Agreement (PPSA) shall pay a cost in each fiscal year for receiving policing services provided by the provincial police service in an amount determined by the Minister in accordance with the Regulation; and

WHEREAS the police funding model established in the Regulation will start in 2021 at 10% of total provincial costs under the PPSA, and increase to 15% in 2022, 20% in 2023 and 30% in 2024; and

WHEREAS for municipalities that have not borne the provincial policing service cost in the past, these additional costs will be a significant budget line item in 2021 and beyond; and

WHEREAS the current PPSA was signed by the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on August 31, 2011; and

WHEREAS a corporate review of the current PPSA and the overall organizational structure, efficiency and effectiveness of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police policing service has not been completed; and

WHEREAS as with any other municipal contracted service, municipalities need the best information available to ensure that their taxpayer dollars are being used in the most cost-effective manner; and

WHEREAS rural crime in Alberta is increasing and the Government of Alberta has acknowledged this as a priority;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta to freeze municipal contributions under the police funding model at no greater than 10% of the total policing costs under the Provincial Police Services Agreement (PPSA) until a corporate review of the PPSA and the overall organizational structure, efficiency and effectiveness of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) policing service has been completed and the review made available to all municipalities in Alberta; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate to the Government of Alberta that all monies collected from the police funding model remain in the Rural Municipalities of Alberta district from which they were collected.

Government Response

N/A

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA has not yet received a government response to this resolution. The resolution is assigned a status of **Incomplete Information** and will be re-evaluated when a response is received.

Resolution 2-20F

Blue-Ribbon Panel to Review Unpaid Taxes Owed by Oil and Gas Companies

Birch Hills County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Energy**

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta oversees the development of the province's natural resources, grants industry the right to explore for and develop energy and mineral resources, and encourages industry investment that creates jobs and economic prosperity; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities require provincial support in the collection of the unpaid oil and gas property taxes; and

WHEREAS there may exist an inequity in paid taxes between similar properties depending on their location in rural Alberta; and

WHEREAS municipalities require property taxes to provide the infrastructure and services that industry relies on to access natural resources; and

WHEREAS Alberta's property tax system needs amendment to prevent oil and gas companies from refusing to pay property taxes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to appoint an independent panel of experts to review unpaid property taxes owed by oil and gas companies and its impact on rural municipalities; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the panel provide the Government of Alberta and rural municipalities with implementable recommendations related to the recovery of property taxes owed by oil and gas companies.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

The Government of Alberta recognizes the ongoing concern from municipalities regarding unpaid property taxes on oil and gas properties. With the downturn in the energy industry in recent years, some of the difficulty arises from insolvency or receivership of oil and gas properties.

The province has taken measures to help alleviate the financial burden on rural municipalities. This includes delivering the Provincial Education Requisition Credit program for uncollectable taxes on oil and gas properties, and extending the program until the end of the 2021 taxation year.

Municipal Affairs continues to work with cross-ministry partners, including Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy, and the Alberta Energy Regulator, to examine the tools available to municipalities to receive and recover property taxes from oil and gas companies. However, this is a complex problem without any comprehensive solution. The best way to ensure that oil and gas companies remain viable and capable of paying property taxes is to support Alberta's overall economic recovery, which the government continues to do through the Alberta Recovery Plan.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response makes no reference to the specific request made in the resolution: that the province appoint an independent panel of experts to review the issue of unpaid municipal property taxes by oil and gas companies. Additionally, the comment relating to Alberta Municipal Affairs working on this issue with

internal ministry partners is frustrating, as responses to similar resolutions from 2019 (1-19F) indicated that the same internal work was ongoing, with solutions estimated to be proposed in spring 2020. Clearly, no solutions have yet to be proposed, and RMA has not received any detailed information on the progress being made on this issue by the Government of Alberta.

The Government of Alberta has demonstrated its recent willingness to conduct independent reviews, panels, and inquiries on issues that it deems significant, including the Alberta Health Services review, the COVID-19 response review, the Fair Deal Panel, and the Inquiry into Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns. Given the province's frequent use of independent reviews, it is disappointing that the Government of Alberta response to resolution 2-20F does not even reference the specific request in the resolution and does not explain why an independent review of this issue may not be the province's preferred approach. Meanwhile, Alberta's rural municipalities faced approximately \$173 million in unpaid taxes based on a January 2020 RMA member survey, suggesting that this issue is extremely important for rural viability.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to emphasize the importance of this issue.

Resolution 3-20F

Support for Alberta Farmland Trust

Wheatland County

Carried

► ***Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada***

WHEREAS the Alberta Farmland Trust is a new land trust organization pursuing charitable status and advocating for the advancement of mechanisms to support the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural lands in Alberta; and

WHEREAS the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) establishes “the protection, conservation and enhancement of the environment,” “the protection, conservation and enhancement of natural scenic or esthetic values,” and “the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural land or land for agricultural purposes” as valid purposes for conservation easements; and

WHEREAS Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program (EcoGift) offers “significant tax benefits to landowners who donate land or partial interests in land to a qualified recipient” by way of a conservation easement with the purpose of protecting and preserving ecologically sensitive lands, but no similar program exists in support of the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS funding, tax benefits, and support offered to ecological conservation easements (such as EcoGift) have proven to be an effective tool for the conservation of ecologically sensitive lands; and

WHEREAS cultivated lands do not qualify under the EcoGift program; and

WHEREAS many of Alberta’s high quality, productive soils are found in areas with high development pressure and therefore are at risk of loss without an effective mechanism for legal protection; and

WHEREAS agricultural land owners are unable to conserve agricultural land because of risks and costs that would be alleviated by supports currently offered only for ecologically sensitive lands; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities, due to their obligations under regional land use plans and their role as a voice for rural landowners, have an interest in the availability of effective tools for the preservation of agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS financial barriers to placing conservation easements on agricultural land render them economically unavailable for legal protection at this time; and

WHEREAS the ALSA establishes that the Lieutenant Governor in Council or designated Stewardship Minister is responsible for establishing, supporting or facilitating the development of conservation easements and instruments, including for agricultural land or land for agricultural purposes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta support the creation of agricultural conservation easements on lands within Alberta’s highly productive, food-producing areas through the following means:

1. **The establishment of agricultural conservation as a priority under the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program so that agricultural land trusts can access funding, and benefit from policy support;**
2. **Any other policies and programs that the Government of Alberta identifies to create functional mechanisms for the protection and conservation of farmland in Alberta; and**

FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA request that the Government of Canada work with Alberta and other provinces to establish an “AgriGift” program similar to the existing “EcoGift” in support of the protection, conservation and enhancement of Canada’s most valuable food producing agricultural lands.

Government Response

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Agriculture and Forestry (AF) recognizes the loss of agricultural land to other development is a concern to Albertans. AF monitors and reports annually on fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land across the province. These reports are available for municipalities to reflect on their efforts to minimize the conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes by implementing appropriate zoning and development plans.

Conservation easements on private land have traditionally been used solely for environmental purposes, initially through the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* (1996) and more recently under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (2009). The Government of Alberta has also legislatively enabled Conservation Easement for agricultural land (CE-ag) under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. However, the practical use of CE-ag requires policy support and incentives. AF will begin internal development of a provincial CE-ag policy in 2021, which will be completed by spring 2022.

As the RMA Resolution 3-20F notes, land trusts registered for ecological purposes (to protect biodiversity, habitat, native landscape etc.) are eligible to receive grants from the Alberta Land Stewardship Fund under specific criteria. Conservation for agricultural purposes (as opposed to environmental values on agricultural land) does not qualify for this grant under the current Alberta Land Trust Grant Program. This grant program is guided by the Land Stewardship Fund Regulation under Alberta Environment and Parks. AF appreciates RMA's advocacy to update or expand the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program that will recognize the agricultural value as an eligibility criterion for grants.

Landowners who donate lands for ecological conservation receive significant tax benefits under the Ecological Gift Program, which is enabled by the federal *Income Tax Act*. This incentive is currently not available for CE-ag. A carefully crafted program similar to 'EcoGift' is important for the successful implementation of CE-ag.

Conservation easements are designed to be perpetual (i.e. hard to undo), and thus, not flexible to changing situations such as future development needs, climate change, or altered demand for that specific land-use. Agricultural lands or lands for agricultural purposes need to be clearly defined to ensure that CE-ag is applied appropriately and supported through land use planning.

AF is actively exploring policy options that will provide clear guidelines for a sensible use of CE-ag in alignment with relevant legislation and policies.

Alberta Environment and Parks

While the primary objective of the Land Trust Grant Program is the conservation and stewardship of native landscapes, I am pleased to report the program introduced new provisions in 2020 to recognize the conservation of agricultural land as part of the project evaluation process. The criteria focuses on protecting native rangelands, primarily associated with ranching operations.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's (AAF) understanding of issues related to the loss of prime agricultural land and their commitment to develop policies to support the use of conservation easements for agricultural land under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. While the Government of Canada has not yet responded, AAF indicates they support amending the *Income Tax Act* to recognize donors of agricultural lands for protection.

The AAF response also indicates a willingness to modify the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program to provide funding for agricultural easements. This work has begun, as the response from Alberta Environment and Parks indicates the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program is available for agricultural land, currently focusing on native rangeland conservation associated with ranching operations.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Principle**, and will revisit this assessment after receiving responses from the Government of Canada, and based on further action from the Government of Alberta.

Resolution 4-20F

Provincial Policing Costs Levy – Designate as a Requisition

Lacombe County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS in December 2019, the Government of Alberta approved a new police funding model which requires urban municipalities with populations less than 5,000 and all rural municipalities to pay a portion of provincial policing costs; and

WHEREAS under the new police funding model, affected municipalities will contribute 10% of policing costs in 2020, 15% in 2021, 20% in 2022, 30% in 2023 and 30% in 2024; and

WHEREAS based on 2018 population and equalized assessment information the total amount of policing costs to be borne by the affected municipalities is \$15,407,888 in 2020-21, \$26,655,970 in 2021-22, \$37,855,777 in 2022-23, \$60,351,940 in 2023-24 and \$60,351,940 in 2024-25; and

WHEREAS provincial policing costs represent a significant portion of the affected municipalities' annual operating budgets; and

WHEREAS pursuant to Section 354(1) of the *Municipal Government Act*, a municipality's property tax bylaw must set and show separately all of the tax rates imposed to raise the revenue required for requisitions, including the Alberta School Foundation Fund, school board, housing management body, and designated industrial property requisitions; and

WHEREAS Alberta Municipal Affairs has advised that policing costs are not legislatively designated as a requisition and therefore there is no authority for municipalities to show policing costs as a separate line item on the municipal tax bylaw, or to levy a specific tax rate for the collection of revenue to support policing costs; and

WHEREAS municipalities must include invoiced policing costs in municipal budgets and fund costs from revenues collected from the general municipal tax rate; and

WHEREAS all residents of Alberta should know how much of their annual property taxes is allocated to policing costs;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to amend section 326(1)(a) of the *Municipal Government Act* by designating the provincial policing costs levy as a requisition to allow municipalities to show separately on their property tax notices the tax rate imposed to raise the revenue required for the provincial policing costs levy.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

Government appreciates the desire for municipalities to be transparent with their taxpayers with respect to the use of tax dollars. In consultation with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, Municipal Affairs will consider whether or not an amendment to the *Municipal Government Act* is appropriate as part of a review of the finance provisions in the act in 2021.

However, it should be noted that amending the *Municipal Government Act* to allow policing costs to be collected through a separate tax requisition and tax rate could result in additional red tape and greater administrative work for municipalities to administer this levy.

Municipalities already have a variety of means available to them to communicate with residents and taxpayers with respect to the uses of tax revenue.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response indicates that the request in the resolution will be considered when the finance provisions of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) are reviewed in 2021. The Government of Alberta's response that designating the police costing levy as a requisition may create additional red tape is unclear, as the current levy process already requires municipalities to pay the province directly for police services on a regular basis, similar to a requisition process. Any minor administrative challenges would be more than offset by the improved transparency that allowing policing costs to be displayed on property tax notices would provide for municipal taxpayers.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will advocate on this issue during the 2021 review of the finance provisions of the MGA.

Resolution 5-20F

Legislated Notice Requirement

Big Lakes County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS both the Government of Alberta and Alberta's municipalities are committed to govern in a way that best serves the people of Alberta; and

WHEREAS both parties share a responsibility for funding and providing services utilized by Alberta residents and businesses; and

WHEREAS to maintain essential municipal services, municipalities require financial stability and adequate notice of potential provincial policy or legislative changes with significant impacts on municipal finances;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta amend the *Municipal Government Act* to provide a mandatory notice period of one year before implementing any action that will have the specific and direct effect of decreasing revenue or increasing required expenditures for municipalities.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

The Government of Alberta recognizes municipalities as key partners in providing services for Albertans and facilitating economic growth and prosperity. The government strives to work collaboratively with municipal governments and associations as much as possible—most recently exemplified by consultation on amendments to the planning and development provisions of the *Municipal Government Act* during spring/summer 2020. The RMA and other municipal associations received comprehensive consultation documents and participated in thorough discussions with department staff and industry stakeholders to help inform proposed legislative changes.

The Government of Alberta is not prepared to amend the *Municipal Government Act* to incorporate a mandatory one-year notice period for any changes affecting municipal revenues or costs. While the government fully supports the importance of the provincial-municipal partnership, the challenges facing Alberta are urgent, and solutions cannot always wait a year or more for implementation. Instead, the Government of Alberta will continue its commitment to early engagement with municipal leaders whenever and wherever possible.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs is directly responsible for working with municipalities and their associations, and is committed to making time to discuss issues and opportunities directly with municipal leaders. Other government ministers are similarly open to meeting with municipal representatives on specific issues wherever possible. In addition to the standard engagement processes already employed by the Government of Alberta, municipalities are encouraged to reach out to the appropriate minister(s) to initiate issue-specific conversations.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response does not indicate a willingness to amend the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) to provide municipalities with one year notice prior to any legislative change impacting municipal revenue. In fact, the response does not indicate any willingness to collaborate with RMA or its members to improve on the current consultation process, which is often inconsistent, ad hoc, and lacking adequate time for associations and municipalities to develop comprehensive positions on the issues being addressed.

The example of effective consultation provided in the Government of Alberta's response (changes to the planning and development provisions in the MGA) was actually quite challenging for RMA, as limited time was provided for participating associations to reach out to members, and specific proposed changes based on the request of the development industry (most of which would have the impact of reducing or narrowing municipal land use planning powers) formed the basis of the consultation. Similar challenges characterized the recent assessment model review, as municipal participants had no choice but to push back against four different proposed changes to how oil and gas wells were assessed, all of which would have reduced municipal revenues to various extents. Despite the massive implications that the changes being considered would have had on rural and small urban municipalities, RMA and AUMA were not permitted to inform their members of the changes being considered or solicit member input until the review was concluded.

RMA appreciates that due to the fast pace and unpredictable nature of government, all consultations may not be able to follow an identical process. However, this resolution suggests that RMA members are concerned with the province's current approach to consultation, and even if a legislated one-year notice period is not being considered, the Government of Alberta needs to work with RMA and its members to improve the consultation process to ensure the municipal voice is heard. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 6-20F

Government of Alberta Embargoed Committee Work

MD of Willow Creek

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Executive Council**

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has recently undertaken public policy discussions and decision-making on fundamental changes which affect local governments through “embargoed” processes which prohibit municipal organizations participating in these processes from consulting with member municipalities; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta required that organizations participating in the assessment model review abide by strict confidentiality requirements through an embargoed process; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is requiring as a condition of participation in the Alberta Police Advisory Board that organizations abide by strict confidentiality requirements through an embargoed process; and

WHEREAS embargoed processes do not allow for the application of fundamental democratic processes including transparency and consultation with parties most impacted by changes to government policy or legislation; and

WHEREAS municipal councils regularly address confidential information and are bound by the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Municipal Government Act* and municipal councilor code of conduct bylaws and as such confidentiality requirements may be assured when consultations include municipal governments;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to amend its policy development processes for embargoed committee work to ensure that organizations that represent municipal governments can share information and seek input from their member municipalities during the committee process.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

Government commends the Rural Municipalities of Alberta and other organizations for participating in policy discussions, as it is valuable for government to hear all perspectives. It is important for options to be presented to members of impacted organizations for their feedback, and government processes are designed to encourage this wherever feasible.

Depending on the nature of the subject matter, or the stage of policy development, confidentiality may be required. This is not the norm, however, and the Government of Alberta does not have a standard process for embargoed committee work. As a result, the appropriate parameters may vary depending on the issue under consideration. Whatever method is used to collect it, member feedback is invaluable in helping government to make sound policy decisions.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response indicates that the province does not currently have a formal process for determining when an embargoed process is required and have no plans to do so. As RMA members are concerned with the current arbitrary nature of when consultations are embargoed, and the lack of ability for organizations such as RMA to engage their members on issues that have been embargoed, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and RMA will continue to emphasize the need for member updates and engagement in future embargoed consultation processes.

Resolution 7-20F

Amendments to *Municipal Government Act* Section 619

MD of Willow Creek

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS the ***Municipal Government Act*** (MGA) provides for the preparation and adoption of planning documents such as intermunicipal development plans, municipal development plans, land use bylaws and area structure plans to ensure orderly, economical and beneficial development and use of land; and

WHEREAS section 619 of the MGA allows a license, permit, approval or other authorization granted by the **Natural Resources Conservation Board** (NRCB), the **Energy Resources Conservation Board** (ERCB), the **Alberta Energy Regulator** (AER), the **Alberta Energy and Utilities Board** (AEUB) or the **Alberta Utilities Commission** (AUC) to supersede municipal authority over land use planning; and

WHEREAS section 619 further states that if an application is received by a municipality for an amendment to a statutory plan, land use bylaw, subdivision approval, development permit or other authorization under this Part, and the requested amendment is consistent with the licence, permit, approval or other authorization granted by the NRCB, ERCB, AER, AEUB or AUC, the municipality must approve the application thereby restricting or removing the municipality's decision-making authority regarding land use matters; and

WHEREAS the NRCB, ERCB, AER, AEUB or AUC are not legislatively required to consider municipal land use planning bylaws when these Boards approve confined feeding operations, electrical generation or transmission projects; and

WHEREAS the NRCB, ERCB, AER, AEUB or AUC have approved projects on productive agricultural lands resulting in fragmentation and permanent loss of production; and

WHEREAS section 8 of the South Saskatchewan Implementation Plan for Agriculture requires municipalities to: identify areas where agricultural activities – including extensive agriculture and associated activities should be the primary land use in the region, limit fragmentation of agricultural lands and their premature conversion to other non-agricultural uses, employ appropriate tools to direct nonagricultural subdivision and development to areas where development will not constrain agricultural activities and to minimize conflicts between intensive agricultural operations and incompatible land uses; and

WHEREAS the protection of productive agricultural land for agricultural purposes is a principle stated within many rural municipalities' municipal development plans and land use bylaws; and

WHEREAS the NRCB, ERCB, AER, AEUB and AUC repeatedly and consistently approve licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations without consideration of local land use bylaws and without consideration of the preservation of productive agricultural land;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to amend Section 619 of the *Municipal Government Act* to clearly state that the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the Alberta Energy Regulator, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board or the Alberta Utilities Commission must consider municipal statutory land use planning related to the protection of productive agricultural lands when making decisions on licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations under their jurisdiction.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

The Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of high-quality agricultural lands and their value to economic growth and environmental sustainability. An appropriate balance must be sought between energy and utility infrastructure development and minimizing land disturbance and retaining important natural features. Provincial regulatory entities are encouraged to consult with municipalities to help develop important infrastructure to maximize economic growth.

Provincial regulatory bodies must weigh the costs and benefits of proposed infrastructure and locations, along with a range of complex economic, social, and environmental factors, when evaluating and approving projects. These decisions are not taken lightly, and provincial regulatory entities regularly seek feedback from the proposed neighbours, the public, and other local groups. In addition, provincial regulatory bodies must take into consideration the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* regional plans as part of their decision-making process. The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that decisions are made in the interest of benefiting Albertans today and into the future.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response does not indicate a willingness to amend section 619 of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) to ensure that provincial regulatory bodies must consider a project's impact on agricultural lands when making decisions on licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations under their jurisdiction. Additionally, recent changes to the MGA under Bill 48: *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)* have resulted in appeals of local development and subdivision decisions made on projects regulated under section 619 being sent to the Land and Property Rights Tribunal (formerly the Municipal Government Board), rather than the local subdivision and development appeal board. This further erodes the ability of local land use issues (including impacts on agricultural lands) from being considered in relation to approvals under section 619.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 8-20F

Enhancing Support for Farmers When a State of Agricultural Disaster is Declared

Leduc County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Agriculture and Forestry**

WHEREAS much of the northwest region of Alberta has seen excessive moisture over the past three years; and

WHEREAS harvesting, seeding, and spraying operations have been severely disrupted over the past three years, creating stress and financial difficulty for many farmers; and

WHEREAS the declaration of a state of agricultural disaster by a municipality does not provide additional supports for farmers in the affected area;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta review supports for farmers when a state of agricultural disaster is formally declared within a municipality; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the Government of Alberta develop additional programs to enhance support to farmers when a state of agricultural disaster is declared; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the Government of Alberta take a regional approach to declaring agricultural disasters such that they can be initiated within a region of Alberta where several municipalities have declared a state of agricultural disaster to allow for the release of reserve funds for farmers in that region.

Government Response

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

AF appreciates the hardship farmers face in areas where a State of Agricultural Disaster is declared. As such, Alberta has in place a suite of business risk management (BRM) programs – AgriInsurance, AgriStability, and AgriInvest – that responds to various events, including market and price disruptions and production losses. Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) administers these programs in Alberta.

AFSC reviews BRM programs in a municipality when a state of agricultural disaster is declared. The review is regional in scope, and indicated by participation rates for producers in existing BRM programs. After determining participation rates of farmers in alternate programs, AFSC may adjust their procedures to provide quicker, targeted support for producers in the declared region. AFSC maintains a high standard of timeliness when processing applications, and in doing so, delivers payments promptly to its clients. Payment delivery varies and may come through different mechanisms (e.g. AgriStability interim payments et or AgriInsurance advances).

Producers affected by extreme weather events express the importance of BRM programs to AFSC. This year, in response to excessive moisture in northern Alberta, AFSC introduced a one-time hail premium rebate initiative. Producers insured under AFSC's Hail Endorsement or Straight Hail Insurance, who had non-viable acres due to excessive moisture, were eligible to have their 2020 hail premiums refunded. AFSC also extended their enrolment deadline for AgriStability. AFSC continues to improve their suite of programs to provide greater flexibility for producers. If a significant event occurs that the existing programs are unable to respond to and extraordinary expenses are incurred, the government may use the AgriRecovery Framework to assess the need for a regional response.

At this time, there are no plans to establish programs outside of the existing suite of programs. In addition, there are no specific reserve funds or plans for reserve funding beyond the current funding allocation to the BRM programs. The government does have the ability to respond to regional issues through the AgriRecovery Framework, if there are extraordinary costs and it is determined the size and the scope of the event is large enough and beyond the producers' ability to manage using the existing programs.

A comprehensive review of BRM programming, primarily focusing on AgriStability is ongoing across Canada, and was discussed recently at the federal, provincial, and territorial agriculture ministers' meeting. As part of this review, Canada's agriculture ministers are working to find solutions and have outlined several objectives for the BRM suite, including:

- Target risks that threaten the viability of the farm;
- Treat farms fairly and equitably;
- Be affordable for government and producers;
- Respond quickly;
- Be simple and predictable;
- Be agile;
- Provide producers with flexibility; and
- Not impede adaption/investment.

In addition to the BRM programs that are available, producers have access to other programs delivered by Alberta under the Canadian Agriculture Partnership agreement. These programs may assist with longer-term on-farm solutions and agricultural stewardship. Descriptions of these programs can be found at cap.alberta.ca/CAP/Programs.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates the explanation of the various programs available to farmers through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) and how a review of these programs is triggered after a declaration of agricultural disaster. The explanation of these programs notes that AFSC does include a regional component to their review. However, the resolution calls for a Government of Alberta review of existing programs, which the resolution response does not commit to. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's response goes on to indicate there are no plans to establish new programs to support farmers when an agricultural disaster is declared.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate for support for the agricultural sector in response to states of agricultural disaster.

Resolution 9-20F

CRTC Aggregate Wholesale Pricing to Mandate Rural Investment

Big Lakes County

Carried

► ***Advocacy Target: Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada***

WHEREAS the owners of broadband infrastructure have invested significant sums of money in developing their distribution networks; and

WHEREAS the owners of broadband distribution networks set their user fees to facilitate future investment in expanded networks; and

WHEREAS the owners of broadband distribution networks allow for third party internet service providers to utilize their networks for a fee; and

WHEREAS Telecom Order CRTC 2019-288 set final rates for wholesale high-speed access that owners of broadband distribution networks can charge third party internet service providers for aggregated wholesale high speed access services; and

WHEREAS the position taken by the CRTC related to wholesale internet pricing has the potential to significantly reduce the level of investment in internet infrastructure in small and rural communities in Canada; and

WHEREAS in September 2019 the Federal Court of Appeal issued a temporary stay of Telecom Order CRTC 2019-288; and

WHEREAS the **Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)** has issued Telecom Notice of Consultation CRTC 2020-131 which reviews the approach to rate setting for wholesale telecommunications services;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge the Government of Canada and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to reconsider its position on wholesale internet pricing; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request the Government of Canada and CRTC to create a financial framework where communication and internet fee structures include funds for mandatory investment of network expansion into currently unserved areas of Canada by all telecom and internet service providers.

Government Response

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

In relation to wholesale internet pricing, on August 15, 2019, the CRTC issued Telecom Order 2019-288 - Follow-up to Telecom Orders 2016-396 and 2016-448 – Final rates for aggregated wholesale high-speed access services in September 2019 (the Order), setting final rates for the wholesale high speed access (HSA) service providers' aggregated wholesale HSA services.

As noted in the Resolution, the Federal Court of Appeal (FCA) granted a temporary stay of the implementation of the final rates for aggregated wholesale high speed access service resulting from the Order, following filed motions for leave to appeal from Bell Canada and Bell MTS, as well as from Bragg Communications Incorporated (Eastlink), Cogeco Communications inc. (Cogeco), Quebecor Media Inc. on behalf of Videotron Ltd. (Videotron), Rogers Communications Canada Inc. (RCCI), and Shaw Cablesystems G.P.(Shaw) (collectively, the cable carriers).

On November 13, 2019, the Commission received an application from TELUS Communications Inc. (TCI), as well as an application from Bell Canada and a joint application from the cable carriers, both dated 13 December 2019, in which they requested that the Commission review and vary the Order. Included in these applications, Bell Canada and the cable carriers requested that the Commission further stay the implementation of the final rates set out in Telecom Order 2019-288 if and when the stay granted by the FCA is lifted.

On September 10, 2020, the FCA denied the appeals, thereby removing the stay of Telecom Order 2019-288.

On September 28, 2020, the CRTC issued Telecom Decision 2020-342, in which it approved the stay of Order 2019-288 as requested by Bell Canada and the cable carriers. Therefore, the Commission approved the requests to stay the implementation of the final rates established in the Order pending its final determinations on the review and vary requests.

The final determinations on the review and vary requests have not been issued by the CRTC.

On April 24, 2020, the CRTC further launched Telecom Notice of Consultation CRTC 2020-131 - Call for comments – Review of the approach to rate setting for wholesale telecommunications services, in which the Commission invited interested persons to identify issues associated with the approach to rate setting for wholesale telecommunications services, with the intent to establish a more transparent and efficient rate-setting process while ensuring that rates for regulated wholesale services remain just and reasonable. This proceeding is currently in progress.

It is noted that, while the proceedings remain open, we are unable to comment on the proceedings or the findings related to either the review and vary requests related to the Order, nor the analysis related to Notice of Consultation 2020-131. That said, the Commission remains dedicated to ensuring that the wholesale rates for all regulated services remain just and reasonable, and is working towards that end in both of these proceedings.

We are also aware of the concerns expressed by the RMA in their Resolution that regulated wholesale prices have the potential to significantly reduce levels of investment. At the same time, the Commission recognizes that rates may also have the impact of hindering effective and efficient competition to the detriment of consumers. This balance has been recognized by the CRTC in paragraph 14 of Notice of Consultation 2020-131, which states:

- Wholesale rate setting can have a significant impact on the telecommunications market, and the establishment of wholesale services and associated rates is an important aspect of establishing and maintaining a competitive Canadian telecommunications environment. Rates that are not just and reasonable can have the following impacts:
- Setting rates too low creates a disincentive for incumbents to invest in their network, while simultaneously deterring wholesale customers from making further network investments, as the tariffed rates are much lower than the cost to build;
- Setting rates too high creates an environment in which wholesale customers cannot effectively compete due to inflated prices, yielding an imbalance in favour of the incumbents.

We acknowledge the concerns and issues raised by the RMA. While we are unable to comment on the ongoing work related to these two open proceedings, we would like to reinforce the Commission's commitment to ensuring that the rates for wholesale regulated services, including aggregated wholesale HSA service, are just and reasonable.

In relation to the request for the Government of Canada and the CRTC to create a financial framework where communication and internet fee structures include funds for mandatory investment of network expansion into

currently unserved areas of Canada by all telecom and internet service providers, we note that, for years the CRTC has helped subsidize local telephone service in high cost serving areas by way of a subsidy to service providers. More recently, in 2016, the CRTC expanded the definition of 'basic service' to go beyond local phone service to include broadband services as well. At the same time, due to the ubiquity of local phone service in place, the Commission indicated that it was phasing out the local phone service subsidy, and replacing it with the CRTC's broadband fund. This fund was established in order to help fund broadband service deployment in underserved and unserved communities, with an objective of helping ensure all Canadians have access to, among other things, Internet speeds of at least 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload no matter where they live, in as timely a fashion as possible.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates the prompt response from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regarding wholesale rates and investment in rural broadband infrastructure. The CRTC response details the recent history of decisions related to setting regulated wholesale prices. In this response, the CRTC explains there is a review of their approach to setting wholesale prices for telecommunications. While this review is ongoing, CRTC cannot provide comments. Until the outcome of this review is public, RMA cannot assess if the review will result in a change to wholesale prices.

The second operative clause asks for guaranteed investment in rural broadband infrastructure through the collection of a fee. The CRTC response describes how their broadband fund is open for eligible projects to provide access to 50/10 internet speeds. However, these funds are not the result of a fee, and do not guarantee investment in rural broadband.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**, and will re-evaluate after the current review of wholesale prices is concluded.

Resolution 10-20F

Weed Issues on Oil and Gas Sites in Rural Alberta

MD of Taber

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Energy, Natural Resources Canada**

WHEREAS Alberta has experienced an extended period of economic challenge in the oil and gas industry which has resulted in many resource companies becoming insolvent, forced into receivership, or ultimately claiming bankruptcy; and

WHEREAS there are thousands of oil and gas wells across Alberta where regular lease maintenance is not being carried out as per the terms of private surface lease agreements, including wells transferred to the Orphan Well Association, companies in receivership or in bankruptcy proceedings, or companies currently still operating and producing product; and

WHEREAS there are no legislated timelines for oil and gas companies to reclaim inactive wells; and

WHEREAS there are currently approximately 90,000 inactive wells in Alberta; and

WHEREAS the Alberta Energy Regulator has been reluctant to suspend well licenses or limit access to these sites for companies that are in non-compliance surface leases terms related to weed control, contamination issues, fence maintenance, or non-payment of surface rentals; and

WHEREAS agricultural operators have been left to address the liabilities of many oil and gas wells that have been abandoned by bankrupt companies or companies that are unwilling or financially unable to maintain their sites; and

WHEREAS neglect of weed control on well sites has been a recent concern of municipalities and landowners across Alberta;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the governments of Alberta and Canada to put in place appropriate legislation and standards to protect landowners from undue hardship as a result of oil and gas company neglect of weed control on well sites.

Government Response

Alberta Energy

Under the *Weed Control Act*, the landowner or occupant are responsible for the control of noxious weeds, and the destruction of prohibited noxious weeds on their property. Enforcement of the *Weed Control Act* requires the weed inspector to issue a weed notice. Municipalities have the authority to serve and enforce a notice of non-compliance, which can contain directions on the method required for weed removal and timeline for compliance.

Enforcement of the notice allows an inspector, or other authorized person, to take the necessary actions required under the notice should the landowner or occupant fail to do so. A notice can be appealed to the municipality within the time specified on the notice, or 10 days, whichever is shorter.

The AER has the authority to ensure that companies clean up and close their energy sites so that they pose no threat to the public or the environment. While the AER has limited authority over weeds, it follows up on all complaints about weed management. If a weed issue is within the AER's jurisdiction, and it is determined that

the company is failing to meet their requirements under the *Public Lands Act*, a notice of noncompliance may be issued.

Sites in the inventory of the Orphan Well Association (OWA) are managed in accordance with the OWA's policies, and the OWA does not control weeds on suspended or abandoned orphaned oil and gas sites. Given the unprecedented growth of orphaned oil and gas sites in Alberta in recent years, the OWA prioritizes available funds for closure activities – instead of weed management – to ensure that energy infrastructure is removed from the landscape as soon as possible.

The OWA addresses weed infestations on orphan well sites only after the well has been moved into its reclamation inventory, where weed management is required for reclamation success. The OWA will control weeds during reclamation, prior to applying for a reclamation certificate from the AER; as well, the OWA will control weeds prior to reclamation, but only if the OWA believes that failure to do so will significantly impact reclamation efforts.

Farmers can apply to the Surface Rights Board for compensation for adverse effects, which could include compensation for weed control, under the five-year lease review provisions of the *Surface Rights Act* (Section 27). Farmers can apply for compensation under section 30 of the Act for damage to any land that is offsite, which may include compensation for weed control or weed infestation. The board decides these matters based on the relevant evidence and arguments in each case.

For more information on how the board has decided weed control and weed infestation issues, farmers can view Surface Rights Board decisions at CanLII's online law database at www.canlii.org.

The Farmer's Advocate Office can help landowners file their paperwork with the Surface Rights Board, or help direct municipalities or landowners to the appropriate agency. The Farmers' Advocate Office can be reached at farmers.advocate@gov.ab.ca or by calling 310-FARM (3276).

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates Alberta Energy's response outlining the *Weed Control Act* and the responsibilities of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and Orphan Well Association (OWA) regarding weed management. However, due to the ongoing challenges oil and gas companies are facing, many have opted to forgo weed control measures on their lease sites on both private and Crown lands. This includes companies whose assets have been assigned to the OWA, companies in receivership or bankruptcy proceedings and companies that continue to operate. While municipalities have the authority under the *Weed Control Act* to serve and enforce a notice of non-compliance, many go unresolved from not being able to find a contact person or the company refuses to comply.

Weeds can have serious negative consequences when they spread to neighbouring lands as it can cause reduced crop yields. In most cases, landowners incur the cost, inconvenience and liability of managing these weed issues themselves. As stated in Alberta Energy's response the AER has limited authority over weeds and the OWA only addresses weed infestations on orphan well sites after the well has been moved to its reclamation inventory.

RMA appreciates the Farmer's Advocate Office's work helping landowners file their paperwork to apply for compensation for adverse effects, which could include compensation for weed control, under the five-year lease review provisions of the *Surface Rights Act* (Section 27).

Natural Resources Canada has not provided a response to this resolution. RMA will update members and the status of this resolution when a response is received.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** as the current legislation has no enforcement measures for weed management and the OWA and AER do not provide weed control on suspended or abandoned orphaned oil and gas sites. RMA will continue to advocate to the provincial and federal government for appropriate legislation and standards to protect landowners from undue hardship as a result of oil and gas company neglect of weed control on well sites.

Resolution 12-20F

Expansion of Elk Hunting for Management in Agriculture Production Areas

Leduc County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Parks**

WHEREAS Alberta's elk populations are increasing rapidly due to current wildlife management policies; and

WHEREAS increased elk populations within primarily agricultural areas has impacted agricultural producers through damage to hay land, pasture, silage crops and other crops; and

WHEREAS the introduction of an antlerless elk season in many of Alberta's wildlife management units was intended to assist in elk population control;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta increase the number of antlerless elk draw seasons to a minimum of two per wildlife management unit (WMU) located within agricultural areas; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the Government of Alberta increase the number of antlerless elk tags allocated within WMUs that are located within agricultural areas to compensate for poor hunter harvest success.

Government Response

Alberta Environment and Parks

I appreciated hearing from RMA members regarding elk depredation specific to Wildlife Management Unit 334. To mitigate elk depredation in Alberta's agricultural areas, Environment and Parks employs several management strategies, including adding extra seasons, extending antlerless seasons and changing landowner licence eligibility. While these strategies reduce depredation, they can also contribute to concerns related to hunter density, which can impact hunting access and limit harvest success.

I encourage the RMA to have concerned members track depredation events and provide details to their local fish and wildlife office (contact information is available at www.alberta.ca by searching for "fish and wildlife contacts"), as this information can be used to assist the department in managing elk.

I have asked Environment and Parks staff to review the current landowner special licence process to ensure it is efficient and relevant to minimizing depredation issues. The department will also be evaluating the antlerless elk special licence as part of its annual process for recommending changes to hunting rules, and will adjust the number to better address concerns over agricultural conflict. Department staff indicate that an increase in antlerless elk tags and split seasons will not necessarily account for limited hunter success. Hunters' ability to access lands containing the elk herds remains a key factor in determining the effectiveness of hunting as an elk-management tool. To assist on this front, I encourage RMA's members to facilitate elk hunter access to private and leased public lands. This would have a substantial impact on harvest success.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates the Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) response outlining the several management strategies currently employed to mitigate elk depredation in agricultural areas. AEP's response has indicated that the department will be evaluating the antlerless elk special licence as part of its annual process for recommending changes to hunting rules and will adjust the number to better address concerns over agricultural conflict.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will update the status of the resolution if there are any changes to elk hunting management from the annual evaluation.

Resolution 13-20F

Provincial Government Disaster Recovery Program Payments

County of Grande Prairie

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has an effective emergency management system and an effective Provincial Operations Centre; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta regularly requests emergency response deployments from municipalities to assist with regional disaster situations; and

WHEREAS municipalities typically respond quickly to disaster situations and support one another during times of need; and

WHEREAS municipalities are required to submit detailed accounting of expenses incurred during deployments under the provincial **Disaster Recovery Program** (DRP); and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is required to ensure fiscal responsibility in DRP payments;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta review its Disaster Recovery Program processes to ensure municipalities receive payments within a defined timeline for resources deployed to assist during regional disasters.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

Alberta's disaster recovery programs (DRPs) are intended to be financial assistance programs of last resort in response to widespread disasters or emergencies. The intent is that applicants first use insurance and other sources of assistance prior to accessing DRP assistance. Documentation is required from applicants to ensure that assistance is paid only for eligible uninsurable costs.

To enable DRP applicants to recover more quickly, the 2020 Disaster Assistance Guidelines (DAGs) include shortened program timelines to expedite the closure of DRPs, from five years in previous guidelines to three years. Applicants may request an extension if they experience project delays or are unable to submit the required documentation within the three-year timeline.

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) may provide a local authority applicant with an advance payment of up to 50 per cent of the eligible amount of requested assistance, if requested in writing by the community upon establishment of a DRP. Any subsequent requests for rolling advances must be supported by paid invoices from the applicant. For communities to receive an expedited final DRP payment, it is essential that they have completed their recovery projects and submitted all required records as indicated in the DAGs. Delays or discrepancies in project completion or the submission of requested documents result in final payment delays to the applicant.

The Disaster Assistance Guidelines ensure fair and transparent administration of DRPs and outline documentation requirements for applicants. The guidelines closely align with the federal Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAAs) to maximize federal reimbursement and minimize the financial burden on Alberta taxpayers. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada may provide cost-recovery funding for DRPs based on a progressive formula under the DFAAs.

In order to receive federal reimbursement, the province must pass a strict federal audit for each program and meet all documentation requirements. AEMA is looking for opportunities to reduce red tape for individuals and communities under the DRP. As part of these efforts, AEMA is advocating for changes to the DFAA guidelines that would reduce administrative burdens under the program.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response indicates that the current Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) municipal reimbursement process does allow for advance payment of municipal costs if certain conditions are met. However, the resolution indicates that the process for the reimbursement of routine municipal claims under the DRP is unnecessarily lengthy and places an unfair financial burden on municipalities.

The current Disaster Assistance Guidelines do not appear to include any timelines by which DRP support funds will be paid out to municipalities, aside from section 2.10, which states that “final payments will be made based on receipt and review of all documents submitted by the applicant prior to the program closure.” RMA appreciates that the time needed to review documents will depend on the scope and complexity of the application. However, a complete lack of timeline (even of a “goal” or “benchmark” time for reimbursement) reflects a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the Government of Alberta, and places municipalities into a challenging state of uncertainty.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 15-20F

Security Deposits for Dispositions

Saddle Hills County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Environment and Parks**

WHEREAS changes to policy regarding maintenance and renewal of Alberta Environment and Parks dispositions now requires a security deposit to be held for Crown land leases for municipalities; and

WHEREAS the changes have also forced non-profit organizations to turn to local municipalities and seek unbudgeted financial support and administration guidance to renew dispositions; and

WHEREAS the new security deposit requirement for crown land dispositions is not practical or financially sustainable for municipalities or non-profit organizations wishing to maintain or renew their dispositions; and

WHEREAS the security deposit is taking funds from a lower level of government to a higher level;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta remove the requirement for municipalities to provide a security to receive Crown land dispositions.

Government Response

Alberta Environment and Parks

As you know, municipalities are important partners in land management, including the stewardship of Crown land. Local municipalities are exempt from providing reclamation security, if they are operating under an approval, registration or code of practice, per s. 17.1 of the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation.

Not-for-profit organizations do very important work for society as a whole; however, they are not exempt from providing security on the Crown lands they lease under the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation and the Public Lands Administration Regulation (both available at www.qp.alberta.ca). Reclamation security is an essential component of Alberta's regulatory regime, and not-for-profits must provide reclamation security on Crown lands in an amount and form acceptable to the director.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta response that local municipalities are exempt from providing reclamation security if they are operating under an approval, registration, or code of practice, per s. 17.1 of the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation. However, this resolution is stating that municipalities are being held accountable to pay a security deposit for dispositions on Crown land. RMA staff will follow up with the sponsoring municipality to gain further context on what instances they have had to pay a security deposit and will follow up with AEP once the information is received. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will update this resolution once clarity has been received.

Resolution 16-20F

Federal and Provincial Disaster Support

RM of Wood Buffalo

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS the Government of Canada maintains a disaster recovery assistance program known as the Disaster Funding Assistance Arrangements (DFAA); and

WHEREAS the DFAA reimburses provinces, including the Government of Alberta, for recovery costs incurred from a natural disaster; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta maintains the Disaster Recovery Program (DRP), to which the DFAA contributes funding; and

WHEREAS natural disasters have recently increased in both frequency and severity, resulting in rising recovery costs such that according to a 2016 Government of Canada report entitled *Estimate of the Average Annual Cost for DFAA Due to Weather Events*, Alberta is the highest overall recipient of DFAA funding, having received \$2.3 billion between 1970 and 2014; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada and Government of Alberta have signaled their intention to modify disaster support such that DRP assistance may not be available in its current form to Alberta municipalities going forward;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta for continued Disaster Recovery Program funding to support community resilience and enable the relocation of affected property owners where re-construction is impractical or inadvisable.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

Disaster recovery programs (DRPs) provide or reinstate the basic essentials of life to individuals, including financial assistance to help repair and restore damaged principal residences to their pre-disaster functional condition. DRPs do not provide a full cost recovery or replacement for property, as some forms of insurance do. DRPs also do not replace municipal risk management functions.

The frequency, severity, and impacts of disasters continue to increase for several reasons, such as increasing urbanization and density, and socio-demographic change. Since 2015, the federal government has significantly reduced the amount of disaster financial assistance available to provinces and territories, further increasing the financial burden to the Government of Alberta and Alberta taxpayers. Despite the growing financial and emotional burden that Albertans face due to disasters, municipalities continue to permit development in high-risk areas.

When municipalities permit development in a recognized flood-risk area without substantial mitigation, the cost for any assistance provided through a DRP will be borne entirely by Alberta taxpayers. Under Division 3.6 of the DFAA Guidelines, structures built in a designated flood-risk area without appropriate mitigation measures are not eligible for federal cost-sharing. Additionally, as a result of changes to the federal cost-sharing formula, fewer disaster events meet the threshold for any federal assistance.

Under the Alberta Disaster Assistance Guidelines (DAGs), applicants may qualify for an innovative recovery solution and could use eligible DRP funding to relocate out of flood-risk areas. Applicants are only eligible for

assistance up to an equivalent of the eligible cost of repair, rebuilding, or replacement of the original damaged property.

The total amount eligible for federal cost-sharing of mitigation enhancements under the DFAAs is limited to 15 per cent of the total roll-up of eligible recovery costs (not including administration and engineering costs) associated with repair and/or reconstruction of damaged public and private infrastructure. The maximum value of the 15 per cent is confirmed at federal audit, which can be five years or more from the date of the event. Only actual eligible costs associated with repair and/or reconstruction of damaged public and private infrastructure are considered for federal cost-sharing; any additional costs for mitigation are the responsibility of the province or local authority.

Communities are encouraged to mitigate their disaster risks through preparation, mitigation, strategic land-use planning, and purchasing adequate insurance or having sufficient reserve funds in place for emergencies. This would enable the Government of Alberta to continue establishing DRPs when they are most needed, and to share disaster risks with all parties involved.

Significant flooding in 2020 across Alberta resulted in multiple communities being approved for DRPs. Currently, there are the Northern Alberta Floods DRP (17 communities), the East Central Floods DRP (seven communities) and the Village of Acme Flood DRP with a combined budget of \$147 million. The Northern Alberta Floods DRP is eligible for DFAA reimbursement, while the two smaller DRPs are not. In addition, there is the Calgary and Area hailstorm DRP (three communities), and other community applications for 2020 disaster events under consideration to determine if they meet the criteria to establish a DRP as set out in the Disaster Recovery Regulation.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response does not indicate that Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) funding is expected to be discontinued. Therefore, RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted**, and will continue to emphasize the need for the DRP to be maintained moving forward.

Resolution 17-20F

Rural Small Business Properties Assessment Sub-Classes Amendment

RM of Wood Buffalo

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs**

WHEREAS the Matters Relating to Assessment Sub-Classes Regulation authorizes a municipality to set tax rates for small business property at no less than 75% of the tax rate of other non-residential property; and

WHEREAS some municipalities currently have non-residential classes for both their urban service areas and rural service areas; and

WHEREAS there may exist an inequity in taxation between similar properties depending on their location in either the rural service area versus the urban service area; and

WHEREAS some municipalities may be restricted in their ability to provide tax equity within the small business property sub-class as it limits the tax rate differential for the small business sub-class in relation to the other non-residential property sub-class;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to amend the Matters Relating to Assessment Sub-Classes Regulation to allow a tax rate differential of up to 50% between the “small business property” and “other non-residential property” sub-classes.

Government Response

Alberta Municipal Affairs

The Government of Alberta commends municipalities for recognizing and supporting the needs of rural small businesses. At the same time, we must continue to be mindful of tax fairness for all taxpayers as we work to promote economic recovery. The purpose of this policy is to balance municipal autonomy in setting property tax rates with providing non-residential property owners with certainty and predictability in property taxes.

Municipalities are encouraged to continue exploring how existing legislative measures can help with achieving these outcomes. Legislative mechanisms already exist to provide councils the ability to address exceptional circumstances in a targeted way. For example, a council may reduce property taxes for specific small businesses if they believe it is equitable to do so, using section 347 of the *Municipal Government Act*.

Alternatively, a council may choose to provide tax incentives for non-residential property as stated in Section 364.2, which provides municipalities with the flexibility to define the incentive criteria locally.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

While RMA appreciates the tools currently in the *Municipal Government Act* that allow municipalities to modify tax rates for certain non-residential properties, this resolution specifically requests an amendment to the Matters Relating to Assessment Sub-Classes Regulation, which is not considered in the Government of Alberta response.

The resolution request would be particularly helpful for municipalities with large oil and gas properties within their boundaries, as the current 75% tax rate differential allowance may not allow for adequate tax equity between large industrial properties and small commercial properties taxed under the same rate class. While this issue could potentially be addressed through MGA sections 347 or 364.2, neither appear to be designed for a

permanent, broad tax rate differential within a rate class, and applying them in this way may result in increased red tape and complexity in the taxation process.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 18-20F

Municipal Decision-making on Fire Bans in Hamlets Within Forest Protection Area

Mackenzie County

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry**

WHEREAS Alberta Agriculture and Forestry is the wildfire authority under the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* in the **Forest Protection Area** (FPA) in Alberta; and

WHEREAS during times of high wildfire hazard, the Government of Alberta may issue a fire restriction or fire ban within the FPA including the hamlets that fall within this area; and

WHEREAS an urban municipality (defined as a city, town, village, summer village, or urban service area of a specialized municipality) in the FPA has the authority to issue its own fire bans within its boundaries; and

WHEREAS hamlets are also areas where there is a concentration of people and residential dwellings; and

WHEREAS the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) states that the council of a municipal district or specialized municipality may designate an unincorporated community within its boundaries as a hamlet if the unincorporated community meets certain density thresholds; and

WHEREAS the MGA allows for the council of a municipal district to pass a bylaw respecting fires that applies to the part of a hamlet that is within the FPA; and

WHEREAS the *Municipal Government Act* does not allow for the council of a specialized municipality to pass a bylaw respecting fires that applies to the parts of a hamlet that is within the FPA; and

WHEREAS the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* also does not clearly define a municipal district, other than it includes a special area, and does not provide any definition of a specialized municipality; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to amend necessary legislation (including the *Municipal Government Act* and/or the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*) to clarify that councils of municipal districts and specialized municipalities may make decisions on fire bans in hamlets within the Forest Protection Area.

Government Response

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

AF supports the RMA's resolution for rural municipalities to take on more responsibilities and decisions around fire bans within their hamlets. This year has been a challenging time for rural municipalities, and local concerns were compounded by the need for all government levels to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand this continues to be a difficult time for Albertans and communities across the province.

AF supported the government's pandemic response this spring by introducing a number of measures aimed at preventing and responding to wildfires. One of these measures was a fire ban put in place to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires in the Forest Protection Area. Because rains and increased moisture levels kept wildfire hazard conditions low during the historically higher risk spring period, the restrictions were eased and then removed as conditions allowed. Other measures were implemented to help mitigate possible wildfire impacts in communities. This included hiring 200 additional firefighters, doubling fines for contravening a fire ban or off-highway vehicle restriction, and increasing funding for the FireSmart Program by \$20 million.

Going forward there are some key considerations we are examining to support this resolution:

1. Continuing to maintain a hazard based fire ban system that is responsive to community needs and based on local wildfire danger conditions. As a part of that system, we will continue to allow burning when it is safe to do so, and implement fire bans and off-highway vehicle restrictions only when the fire danger levels are at high-risk levels.
2. We can support the RMA in approaching Municipal Affairs to examine the ability to change sections in the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) and the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* (FPPA) to remove all hamlets from the Forest Protection Area of Alberta.

Removal of hamlets from the Forest Protection Area will allow for fire bans and all wildfire responsibilities to move to the rural municipality for administration in their hamlets. This includes responsibilities for all wildfire suppression and prevention activities within the hamlet boundaries, such as providing funding and staff to issue fire permits, manage fire bans, manage and fund FireSmart projects, bylaw enforcement, and suppression of any wildfires that start within the Hamlet boundaries. This will require municipalities to have clear established corporate boundaries for their Hamlets. The municipality could then establish new fire bylaws for their hamlets. The department can continue to assist municipal firefighting efforts through mutual aid agreements, but it should be noted that the rural municipality will also be responsible for all costs associated with fighting wildfires that originate within the hamlet boundaries.

Making amendments to both the MGA and the FPPA would require time; however, in support of the RMA resolution, my department will work with Municipal Affairs to begin this process. AF is committed to protecting communities from wildfire and supportive of municipalities taking a role in wildfire prevention, mitigation, and suppression within their own communities.

Alternative Policy Option

Alternatively, if Mackenzie County wishes to make an expedited change, they are uniquely positioned to do so as a specialized municipality. They can approach Municipal Affairs and request an administrative amendment to their formation order to allow them to make bylaws to establish an urban service area. This would allow an urban service area designation to replace the hamlet or other community areas. If those hamlet areas become an urban service area, they are automatically removed from the Forest Protection Area and become exempt from the application of fire bans and ministerial orders specific to the Forest Protection Area. They then could establish their own fire bylaws to apply within their urban service area. This may be faster than the legislative amendment process for the two acts (MGA and FPPA). If Mackenzie County wishes to pursue this alternative, AF would support the initiative as well.

Alberta Municipal Affairs

In consultation with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Municipal Affairs supports a review of section 75 of the *Municipal Government Act* as part of a review of the governance provisions in the *Municipal Government Act* in 2021.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

RMA appreciates the support of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry (AAF) in amending legislation to allow municipalities to make decisions on fire bans in hamlets within the Forest Protection Area. However, RMA is concerned that AAF also indicated support for municipalities taking on a greater degree of responsibility for fire suppression within these hamlets. As local decision makers, RMA members are well positioned to understand local conditions, placing them in a position to make informed decisions about fire bans within hamlets. However, RMA members are not in a financial position to increase their service levels regarding fire management in hamlets without support from the Government of Alberta.

The Alberta Municipal Affairs response indicates a willingness to review section 75 of the *Municipal Government Act*, which relates to the ability of municipal districts to pass bylaws respecting fires that apply to land within the forest protection area. Re-wording of this section has the potential to address the issue identified in the resolution.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Principle** and will continue to work with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and Alberta Municipal Affairs on this issue.

Resolution 19-20F

Reinstatement of the Benefit Contribution Grant for Early Childhood Educators

RM of Wood Buffalo

Carried

► **Advocacy Target: Alberta Children's Services**

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has cancelled the **Benefit Contribution Grant (BCG)** for early childhood educators effective July 1, 2020; and

WHEREAS the cost of living in northern, remote communities in Alberta continues to be higher than other areas of the province; and

WHEREAS northern, remote communities will be disproportionately negatively impacted by the cancellation of the BCG; and

WHEREAS incentives such as the BCG are critical to delivering effective, accessible, and affordable childcare to children and their families; and

WHEREAS early childhood educators and their employers are at risk of exiting the profession as a result of the cancellation of the BCG; and

WHEREAS the availability of quality early childhood educators in all communities allow for a stable workforce across all industry sectors; and

WHEREAS the cancellation of the BCG for early childhood educators has compounded the crisis being experienced in the childcare profession as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta reinstate the Benefit Contribution Grant for early childhood educators, retroactive to July 1, 2020.

Government Response

Alberta Children's Services

Alberta's government recognizes that safe and reliable child care options are integral to our economic recovery, and we are committed to helping the child care sector navigate these unprecedented challenges. Over the past seven months, a total of \$99 million in financial relief funding has been provided to licensed and approved child care programs to create stability in the sector. Child care programs located in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo have accessed over \$1.5M of this relief funding. Additionally, we have maintained wage top-up and professional development grants to programs to support the recruitment and retention of qualified child care professionals.

After reading the full resolution you provided, it appears to call for reinstating the Northern Living Allowance (NLA) rather than the Benefit Contribution Grant (BCG). The NLA was intended as a temporary measure to help offset challenges in Fort McMurray related to a bustling national economy in 2007, which created a highly competitive staff recruitment and retention climate. With the current economic challenges across our province, Alberta's government must ensure all communities have equal access to provincial funding and initiatives, I understand the impact of the NLA decision on the child care sector in the Wood Buffalo region; however, we cannot afford to continue paying this benefit to only one community,

The decisions to conclude the grant was not made lightly and Alberta's government will continue to offer some of the highest wage top-ups in the country to all early childhood educators in licensed childcare facilities no matter where they live in Alberta.

RMA Reaction and Follow-up

The Government of Alberta response states that the program that this resolution appears to reference is the Northern Living Allowance (NLA) rather than the Benefit Contribution Grant (BCG). Both the NLA and BCG are important tools for ensuring stability for early childhood educators in northern Alberta, and, in the case of the BCG, throughout the province. The Government of Alberta response highlights their recent relief funding in response to COVID-19. While this funding is appreciated, the response indicates that funding will not be restored for the NLA. As a result, this resolution is assigned the status of **Intent Not Met**.

Section 2: Advocacy Report Card

The following table is a summary of RMA’s current resolutions excluding the resolutions adopted in spring 2020 and fall 2020, which are detailed in Section 1. Recent developments on the resolutions are detailed below in the corresponding categories, and readers are reminded that although resolution statuses may remain unchanged, work on each resolution is ongoing. Each resolution has a three-year lifespan to reflect the nature of shifting government policy development and timelines associated with legislative changes and implementation.

Resolutions at a Glance

#	RESOLUTION TITLE	STATUS
AGRICULTURE		
23-19F	Mandatory Agriculture Education in the Classroom	Intent Not Met
2-19S	Access to Agriculture-Specific Mental Health Resources	Intent Not Met
6-19S	Prevent Implementation of Seed Royalty on Producers for Farm Saved Seed	Intent Not Met
19-18F	Separation of Industrial Hemp from Cannabis Regulations	Accepted
4-18S	Support for Continuation of Grant Funding for Agricultural Initiatives Program	Intent Not Met
BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY		
3-18F	Federal and Provincial Funding of Municipal Broadband Projects	Accepted in Part
4-18F	Enabling High-Speed Internet Access for Rural Alberta	Intent Not Met
13-18F	TELUS Failure to Maintain Landline Operations	Incomplete Information
COMMUNITY SERVICES		
3-19F	Development of a Rural and Remote Lens for Government Services	Intent Not Met
10-18F	Community Peace Officer Access to the Canadian Police Information Centre	Intent Not Met
21-18F	Scrap Metal (Copper) Theft	Accepted
24-18F	Review of Education Funding Formula	Accepted
EMERGENCY SERVICES		
14-19F	Provincial Funding for Regional Air Ambulance	Accepted in Part

#	RESOLUTION TITLE	STATUS
21-19F	Cellular 911 Call Answer Fees Increase	Intent Not Met
ENERGY		
7-19F	Utility Distribution Rates in Rural Communities and Public Facilities	Intent Not Met
9-19F	Setback Referrals for Development Near Sour Gas Facilities in Crown Land Areas	Intent Not Met
11-19F	Requirement for Municipal Authority Input on Energy Resource Development Projects	Intent Not Met
1-19S	Municipal Support for the Energy Industry	Accepted
7-19S	Solar Power Reclamation	Intent Not Met
5-18F	Alberta Energy Regulator Requirements for Acquiring and Holding Energy Licences and Approval	Intent Not Met
12-18F	Multi-Stakeholder Committee to Work at Reducing the Use of Potable Water by the Oil and Gas Industry in Alberta	Accepted in Part
14-18F	Reclamation of Non-Producing Oil and Gas Sites on Agricultural Lands Owned by Bankrupt Companies	Intent Not Met
16-18F	Demand Meters and Rate Riders	Intent Not Met
6-18S	Wind Energy Regulations Required at Provincial Level	Intent Not Met
10-18S	Tenure Extension Requirements for Unconventional Development	Intent Not Met
ENVIRONMENT		
4-19F	Alberta Environment and Parks Water and Wastewater Facility and Landfill Approvals	Intent Not Met
13-19F	Provincial Extended Producer Responsibility Regulations	Accepted
19-19F	Water Security in Southern Alberta	Intent Not Met
4-19S	Bighorn Country Proposal Consultation	Accepted in Principle
5-19S	Amendments Required for Crown Land Recreation Disposition Applications and Renewals	Intent Not Met
9-19S	Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Funding	Intent Not Met
11-19S	Update of the Provincial Code of Practice for Compost Facilities	Intent Not Met
7-18F	Municipal and Privately-Owned Protected Areas Inventory	Intent Not Met

#	RESOLUTION TITLE	STATUS
9-18F	Impact of the Alberta Wetland Policy on the Cost of Maintaining Public Road Infrastructure	Intent Not Met
11-18F	Rural Municipalities of Alberta Represents Municipalities on <i>Water Act</i> Approvals	Accepted
15-18F	Wetland Mitigation Directive – Restoration and Compensation	Accepted
17-18F	Alberta Environment and Parks Additional Resources for <i>Water Act</i> Approvals	Accepted in Principle
20-18F	Decommissioning Costs for Wind Energy Developments	Intent Not Met
22-18F	Amendment to the Wildlife Regulations Regarding Cougars	Intent Not Met
8-18S	Amendments Required for Provincial Recycling Regulations	Intent Not Met
9-18S	Exemption of Seniors Housing from Requirement to Pay Carbon Levy	Accepted in Part
11-18S	Recycling of Solar Panels	Intent Not Met
HEALTH AND SENIORS		
20-19F	Policies for Supporting Community Hospice Associations	Accepted in Principle
12-19S	Making Children’s Healthcare a Priority in Alberta	Accepted in Part
8-18F	Restricting the Consumption of Cannabis based on Regulations for Liquor Consumption	Intent Not Met
INDUSTRY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT		
No active resolutions.		
MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE		
1-19F	Priority of Unpaid Property Taxes on Linear Property	Intent Not Met
6-19F	Municipal Recourse for Solvent Companies Choosing Not to Pay Taxes	Intent Not Met
12-19F	<i>Libraries Act</i> Review and Rural Library Services	Intent Not Met
16-19F	GST for Grants and Subsidies Interpretation	Accepted in Part
8-19S	Reinstatement of the Municipal Officer’s Expense Allowance	Accepted
2-18F	Annual Release Date of Assessment Year Modifiers	Intent Not Met
6-18F	Securing Municipal Property Taxes in the Event of Bankruptcy or Insolvency	Intent Not Met

#	RESOLUTION TITLE	STATUS
1-18S	Request for Implementation of the 2018 Assessment Year Modifier for Well and Pipeline Assessments	Intent Not Met
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT		
ER1-19F	Dissolution of Mandatory Growth Management Boards	Intent Not Met
18-18F	Utility Conflict in Municipal Right of Ways	Intent Not Met
7-18S	Standards for Property Contaminated by Fentanyl and Carfentanil	Accepted in Part
POLICING AND RURAL CRIME		
2-19F	Government of Alberta's Police Costing Test Model	Intent Not Met
10-19F	Community Peace Officer Access to RCMP Radio Channels	Accepted in Principle
2-18S	Combatting Rural Crime	Accepted in Part
3-18S	Increase Crown Prosecutor Staffing Levels for Rural Municipalities	Intent Not Met
12-18S	Victim Services Units Funding	Intent Not Met
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE		
15-19F	Provincial Highway Access and Setback Authority	Accepted in Principle
17-19F	Airports Capital Assistance Program Funding for Regional Airports in Canada	Incomplete Information
3-19S	Light Weight Concrete Bridge Girders	Intent Not Met
1-18F	Provincial Contribution to Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program	Intent Not Met
OTHER		
5-19F	Landowners' Rights	Intent Not Met
8-19F	Opportunity for Improvement in FCM Representation of Rural Issues and Western Perspectives	Incomplete Information
10-19S	Strategic Direction for the RMA	Accepted
23-18F	Social Well-Being of An Employee and Domestic Violence – <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i>	Accepted in Part

#	RESOLUTION TITLE	STATUS
5-18S	Provincial Government Consultation and Communication Protocol with Municipalities	Intent Not Met

AGRICULTURE

Resolution 23-19F

Mandatory Agriculture Education in the Classroom

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta work with fellow rural stakeholders, Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and all elected school boards to request that mandatory agriculture education be implemented in the school curriculum in Alberta.

DEVELOPMENTS: While the Government of Alberta response does outline how agricultural topics may be included in classroom education, it does not indicate action to have mandatory education in agricultural topics for all Alberta students. As a result, this resolution is assigned the status of **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 2-19S

Access to Agriculture-Specific Mental Health Resources

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta facilitates the formation of a free, year-round, all hours, mental health crisis hotline, dedicated to the agriculture industry, providing farm families with direct access to uniquely qualified professionals and resources, whom have both an understanding of mental health issues and agriculture-specific stresses;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta secure long term, sustainable funding for the operation and maintenance of this mental health crisis hotline.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response highlights existing mental health resources, including 24/7 help lines that are accessible in rural areas. The Alberta Health response also includes a budget commitment to increase funding for addictions and mental health services by \$100 million. However, there is no indication as to how this additional funding will be distributed geographically in Alberta. The Alberta Health response also identifies the possibility for rural municipalities to provide Health Link – 811 with local resources that are available for farm families; Health Link can then provide this information to those that call in from that area. As follow up, RMA staff will reach out to Health Link about how to best facilitate this information-sharing, and contact Farm Management Canada to explore the possibility of providing input into their study on mental health and farm business.

The Government of Saskatchewan operates a 24/7 Farm Stress Line that provides farm families with resources. The Farm Stress Line is answered by Mobile Crisis Services, a non-profit organization providing crisis intervention services in Saskatchewan since 1974.

The Do More Agriculture Foundation has hosted several mental health webinars in 2020. While these webinars do not meet the need of a 24/7 support line, they do share information and raise awareness of mental health issues for farmers.

Because the government responses do not commit to an agriculture-specific mental health line, or any funding for this resource, this resolution is assigned the status of **Intent Not Met**. While the response from Alberta Health does not satisfy the intent of the resolution, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food has recommended that the Government of Canada expand agriculture-specific mental health resources. RMA will continue to monitor developments at the federal level and advocate to Alberta Health for an agriculture-specific mental health line.

Resolution 6-19S

Prevent Implementation of Seed Royalty on Producers for Farm Saved Seed

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency abandon the proposal to implement the adoption of End Point Royalties or farm saved seed “trailing royalty contracts”.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) response outlines the rationale for seed royalties on farm saved seed: to increase research investment in Canada’s cereal sector. CFIA also acknowledges the interest of farmers to save seed for their own use in the next growing season. A planned online consultation for spring 2019 was delayed, and there has not been an update since. An industry-led pilot, separate from the CFIA program, launched in 2020 using a seed variety use agreement for three crop varieties. Because RMA has not received notice that the program is formally ending, this resolution is assigned the status of **Intent Not Met**. RMA will continue to engage with CFIA through consultations on this topic.

Resolution 19-18F

Separation of Industrial Hemp from Cannabis Regulations

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to classify industrial hemp as an agriculture product.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the clarification of jurisdiction from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Given that there is no provincial regulation or Act limiting industrial hemp production, reclassifying industrial hemp at a provincial level is unnecessary in Alberta if a producer is approved federally through the *Cannabis Act*.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 4-18S

Support for Continuation of Grant Funding for Agricultural Initiatives Program

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta to re-instate or replace the Agriculture Initiatives Program funding for local agricultural societies.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA recognizes the fiscal challenges faced by the Government of Alberta and is encouraged by the three-year funding commitment to agriculture societies in Alberta, the Agricultural Society Grant Program, and the eligibility of agriculture societies under the Community Facility Enhancement Program and Community Initiatives Program. However, these grants were previously available, require agriculture societies to compete for funding with other non-profit organizations, and do not adequately substitute for the loss of the Agriculture Initiatives Program (AIP), which was specifically available for capital funding for agriculture societies. Therefore, the resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY

Resolution 3-18F

Federal and Provincial Funding of Municipal Broadband Projects

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the governments of Alberta and Canada to provide direct funding to municipalities to support rural, remote and northern communities' development of high speed (50 megabits per second and faster) community broadband, with federal government grants matching municipal and provincial investment in broadband network infrastructure.

DEVELOPMENTS: Regarding provincial funding, RMA appreciated the efforts of Service Alberta to develop a long-term strategy for Albertans accessing high speed internet. However, there is not a budget commitment to fund rural broadband.

The response from the CRTC indicates that municipalities are eligible to receive funding from the Broadband Fund if they, or a partner, meet the applicant eligibility requirements. RMA understands that this will allow municipalities who can meet the eligibility requirements on their own will not need to partner with an ISP, in addition to all municipalities having the option to apply for funding if they partner with an experienced ISP.

The Government of Canada has announced their plan to provide high speed internet to all Canadians by 2030. This plan is supported by \$1.7 billion in new funding, with an additional \$1 billion in financing to be made available from the Canada Infrastructure Bank. \$750 million over five years has been allocated to the Broadband Fund, with the funding for years four and five contingent on a review of the fund in year three (2021). RMA is pleased to see a funding commitment made to provide broadband internet access in rural and remote areas.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted in Part** and will be monitored for additional funding announcements and details of the existing federal budgetary announcement.

Resolution 4-18F

Enabling High-Speed Internet Access for Rural Alberta

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge the Government of Alberta to deliver a comprehensive rural broadband strategy that realizes the path forward for all residents of rural Alberta to achieve the CRTC's universal service objective targets of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload for fixed broadband services;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA emphasize to the Government of Alberta that, for economic, political, and social concerns, the completed strategy should be made available to the public in the shortest possible time;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that such a strategy should include the following components to best serve the interests of rural Albertans and to facilitate the effective implementation of the strategy in pursuit of its goals.

- I. That the Government of Alberta should mandate (where legally permissible) and advocate for (where not within the scope of their authority) common carrier/shared access laws to allow for the more efficient deployment of infrastructure.

- II. That the Government of Alberta should incent partnerships and cooperation between municipalities, the Province, and private industry to develop rural broadband infrastructure, providing matching funds for qualified infrastructure deployments.
- III. That the Government of Alberta should enable significantly more affordable access to the Supernet for Albertans, through their relationship with Bell Canada, to provide backhaul access for local network solutions.
- IV. That the strategy should enhance competitive access to the broadband industry in Alberta for more businesses and should promote an increasingly competitive business environment.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the consultation on a provincial broadband policy and the Government of Alberta's willingness to advocate to their federal counterparts. However, there is not yet a publicly available provincial broadband strategy or draft.

RMA is pleased with an acknowledgement of wholesale and backhaul services available for purchase in SuperNet communities, however the cost of accessing these services is not addressed in Service Alberta's response.

As a result of a lack of publicly available provincial broadband strategy or draft, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**. As policies change the status of this resolution will be monitored.

Resolution 13-18F

TELUS Failure to Maintain Landline Operations

Status: Incomplete Information

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that Service Alberta direct TELUS to maintain their complete landline network until such time that there are assurances that the wireless system is as secure, economical and stable as the previous landline system has been;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) review the original agreement with TELUS to ensure they are meeting their responsibilities.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA has not yet received a response to this resolution from the CRTC.

RMA appreciates the response from Service Alberta and their offer to discuss maintenance of the landline network with TELUS. RMA will contact ISED regarding this issue.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Incomplete Information** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Resolution 3-19F

Development of a Rural and Remote Lens for Government Services

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to develop a rural and remote lens to better understand the context of, and mitigate the unique challenges of, geographic remoteness, low population, and service accessibility/density faced by human service programs in Alberta's rural and remote communities.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that although Alberta does not have a specific “rural lens” for evaluating policy decisions, community impact is a formal component of the provincial policy development cycle.

Based on the endorsement of the resolution, the current community impact measures used by the Government of Alberta are inadequate in addressing and mitigating the unique impacts that provincial policy decisions may have on rural and remote areas of the province.

In recent consultations related to the *Police Act* and the delivery of victims services, RMA has emphasized the importance of ensuring that provincial legislation, regulations and policies allow for local service delivery and community input to be adequately flexible to reflect the unique needs of rural and small urban communities, and that a “one-size-fits-all” or centralized approach to service delivery and input will often not meet the needs of diverse communities across the province. At this time, the outcomes of either review are not yet known.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and RMA will continue to advocate for the Government of Alberta to more deliberately consider the impacts of policy changes on rural and remote areas of the province.

Resolution 10-18F

Community Peace Officer Access to the Canadian Police Information Centre

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Alberta Justice and Solicitor General work with the Canadian Police Information Centre, and any other Ministry necessary, to provide direct, mobile and timely Canadian Police Information Centre access to Community Peace Officers that can be used as a proactive and preventative tool within defined guidelines.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates an ongoing collaborative effort between the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and other organizations to ensure that community peace officers (CPOs) have adequate access to Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC). The short-term commitment of five-minute processing time through Sheriffs Operations Control Centres and the long-term commitment enabling direct access through in-car laptops to eligible CPIC officers in encouraging.

In 2019, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Alberta Association of Community Peace Officers jointly requested that CPO access to CPIC be facilitated through the Provincial Radio Control Centre (PRCC), which is under the jurisdiction of Service Alberta.

RMA has formally supported this request. In December 2020, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General informed RMA that the plan to provide CPOs with access to CPIC through the PRCC is no longer being pursued, and CPOs will not have access to CPIC through the PRCC for the foreseeable future. However, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General did indicate that there is work being undertaken to provide CPOs access to CPIC through the Sheriffs Operational Communications Centre, though the extent of this access is not known.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and will be updated when direct CPO access to CPIC commences.

Resolution 21-18F

Scrap Metal (Copper) Theft

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to proclaim the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act* and create the regulation to assist with the deterrence of copper theft and other scrap metal.

DEVELOPMENTS: The initial Government of Alberta response indicated that action was being taken on scrap metal theft in the form of a cross-ministry working group that would review the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act* as well as other potential options for addressing copper theft.

On November 5, 2019, Alberta's Lieutenant Governor proclaimed the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act* into force. The Act includes an immediate requirement for scrap metal dealers and recyclers to report suspected stolen property to authorities.

In July 2020, the Government of Alberta passed Bill 25: *Protecting Alberta Industry from Theft Act, 2020*, which made further enhancements to the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Information Act* and introduced the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Regulation*. The Regulation builds on the requirements of the Act by requiring scrap metal dealers to collect personal information from all sellers, to require proof that sellers are over the age of 18, and to require the use of traceable currency. The Regulation also empowers law enforcement officers to require scrap metal dealers to hold scrap metal that is suspected of being stolen property for 30 days.

Based on the coming into force of the *Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act* and associated Regulation, RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 24-18F

Review of Education Funding Formula

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta supports the Alberta School Boards Association position that the Government of Alberta review the K-12 funding formula for schools and school boards.

DEVELOPMENTS: In budget 2019, the Government of Alberta committed to reviewing and replacing the current education funding formula with a new "K-12 Assurance and Funding Framework" that will come into effect in September 2020 for the 2020-21 school year. The transition to the new Framework is based on a recommendation earlier in 2019 from the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances* which called for a shift in education funding to "provide incentives for sharing services and achieving better

student outcomes.” According to the Government of Alberta’s 2019-23 Fiscal Plan, the new Framework will, among other things, “assure the long-term viability of rural schools.”

Following a review of the formula and stakeholder consultations in early 2020, the Government of Alberta announced a new funding framework in February 2020, for implementation in the 2020/2021 school year.

The new model introduces a Rural Small Schools Grant, which provides rural small schools (those in rural areas or in population centres below 30,000) with guaranteed block funding based on broad enrollment categories. This provides rural small schools with greater funding certainty as annual funding will not fluctuate to the same extent as under the previous model.

The model also introduces a Geographic Grant, which provides additional funding to school jurisdictions to address unique geographic challenges such as rurality, sparsity-distance, area, and location.

Based on the completion of the review and the consideration of rural school funding in the new model, this resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted**.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Resolution 14-19F

Provincial Funding for Regional Air Ambulance

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta provide funds to locally- and regionally-operated emergency response air ambulance services at the same ratio as Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) funding;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta commissions an independent review, which includes engagement with the public, industry stakeholders and municipalities across Alberta, of the helicopter emergency medical services system in Alberta.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA is pleased to hear that Alberta Health Services (AHS) is conducting a review of their current relationships that provide helicopter EMS in rural and remote areas of Alberta. The inclusion of municipalities as stakeholders in this consultation is welcome. RMA provided feedback on the AHS helicopter ambulance review, emphasizing the important role helicopter ambulances play in rural healthcare, and is awaiting the release of the review report.

In May 2020, HALO urgently requested RMA's support in requesting immediate operating funding from the Government of Alberta. Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, HALO's fundraising revenues decreased significantly to the point where, without provincial funding, they will be forced to cease operations as of July 1, 2020. In response, RMA submitted a letter to the Minister of Health restating the need for a new funding model and asking for an update on the review of helicopter EMS services, as indicated in this resolution, as well as short-term emergency operating funding due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of RMA and other stakeholders and southern Alberta-based MLAs, the Government of Alberta has indicated that they have no plans to enhance funding support for HALO. Fortunately, HALO received adequate fundraising revenue to maintain operations for the foreseeable future, but the same long-term funding issues remain.

Air ambulance funding mechanisms vary across jurisdictions. In British Columbia, air ambulance services are fully funded by the province. Ontario's ORNGE air ambulance service appears to be funded in a similar manner to STARS. Quebec began a pilot in September 2018 for two helicopter ambulances in partnership with a private operator.

Regarding funding, the Alberta Health response does not indicate any intention to change the current funding model. While the review satisfies the second therefore clause of this resolution, the lack of a commitment to review the funding model does not address the first therefore clause. As a result, this resolution is assigned the status of **Accepted in Part**.

Resolution 21-19F

Cellular 911 Call Answer Fees Increase

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta amend the *Emergency 911 Levy Regulation* and increase the 911 levy payable by cellular device subscribers to \$0.97 per month;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the increased revenues be distributed to the entities operating 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs).

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response acknowledges that the costs of implementing Next Generation 911 services will have significant impact on Alberta PSAPs and that research is underway to determine how best to fund required upgrades.

In December 2020, the Government of Alberta provided an update to RMA on this issue, indicating that administrative work has been completed on the implications of increasing the 911 call answer fee, and that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been briefed on the issue. At this point, it is expected that an increase to the levy will be formally proposed at the spring 2021 legislative session.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and will be revisited based on progress made in the spring 2021 legislative session.

ENERGY

Resolution 7-19F

Utility Distribution Rates in Rural Communities and Public Facilities

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) requests the Government of Alberta review regulatory requirements relating to transmission and distribution rates of utility companies;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA requests the Government of Alberta review the requirement that public facilities are charged commercial rates and bills based on peak demand.

DEVELOPMENTS: The RMA appreciates that Alberta Energy and the Alberta Utility Commission (AUC) is aware of customer concerns over transmission and distribution system costs, especially in rural Alberta. The resolution is requesting that the Government of Alberta review the regulatory requirements relating to transmission and distribution rates of utility companies. The Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) determines the tariff design to cover system costs, which is approved by the AUC. Though there is no mention in this resolution that the government will review the regulatory requirements, the RMA plans to accept Alberta Energy's invitation to participate in the AESO General Tariff Application Hearing in 2021 to voice member concerns.

The second part of this resolution is requesting the Government of Alberta to review the requirement that public facilities are charged commercial rates and bills based on peak demand. The AUC does not contemplate the creation of unique rate classes on bases other than how the customers in the rate classes use energy and, accordingly, cause costs for the system.

RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met** but intends to participate in the AESO General Tariff Application hearing to ensure that rural concerns are being addressed.

Resolution 9-19F

Setback Referrals for Development Near Sour Gas Facilities in Crown Land Areas

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta review the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) timelines for responding to setback referrals for development near sour gas facilities, particularly in Crown land areas, to ensure they consistently respond to applicants within their own 30-day response commitment.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) response to this resolution provides an update on AER Bulletin 2013-03 to clarify setback requirements. RMA understands the AER's commitment to public safety through setback requirements for residential and commercial developments in close proximity to sour gas facilities and pipelines. However, this resolution requests that the Government of Alberta and the AER review their setback requirement timelines to ensure they meet their 30-day response commitment. RMA has reported that late responses from the AER have prevented municipalities from meeting their legislated timelines without requesting extensions from applicants. RMA is pleased to hear that there has been communication between the MD of Greenview, the AER and Alberta Environment and Parks, however, the concerns are still being reviewed. RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met** as AER is not considering any changes to these requirements.

Resolution 11-19F

Requirement for Municipal Authority Input on Energy Resource Development Projects

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta directs the Alberta Energy Regulator to incorporate municipal authorities' input into the energy resource development project and change of use approval process.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that municipalities already have an opportunity to participate in the AER project-approval process through the submission of a statement of concern or request to participate in a public hearing. However, the background to resolution 11-19F indicates that these current methods are limiting as they require a municipality to be adversely affected, which requires that the project directly impact municipal infrastructure. The resolution refers to the need for AER to broaden the circumstances in which municipalities can provide input to empower municipalities to advocate on behalf of local property owners who may be adversely affected by a project but lack the ability to participate in the project review process individually.

As the resolution makes clear that current municipal participation processes are not adequate to address municipal and landowner concerns with energy projects, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 1-19S

Municipal Support for the Energy Industry

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate for the Government of Alberta to further develop and implement a targeted, national education and marketing campaign on behalf of Albertans in order to offset foreign protectionism and de-marketing campaigns, regulatory delays, and the combined infrastructure and economic factors that are creating a significant, negative effect on Canada's local, provincial, and national economies. The elements of the education and marketing campaign include as outlined in "Schedule A";

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Government of Alberta provide resources to offset the combined negative impacts affecting the energy industry through:

- 1. the continuation of the Petrochemicals Diversification Program;**
- 2. key energy industry-supporting infrastructure development; and**
- 3. a continued strong presence and advocacy with federal, municipal and foreign governments.**

DEVELOPMENTS: In December 2019, the Government of Alberta launched the Canadian Energy Centre (commonly referred to as the "energy war room") in an effort to promote and combat misinformation about Alberta's energy industry. The energy war room is broken into three sections:

- A rapid-response unit which is responsible for issuing swift responses to misinformation about Alberta's oil and gas industry through social media.
- An energy literacy unit which will create original content to elevate the general understanding of Alberta's energy sector and help the province take control of its energy story.
- A data and research unit which will centralize and analyze data to reinforce Alberta's energy story with factual evidence from investors, researchers and policy makers.

In addition to the war room, the Government of Alberta has also launched a public inquiry into foreign funding of anti-energy campaigns, with the plan to ban foreign money from interfering in Alberta politics.

In 2020, funds initially budgeted for the energy war room were redirected to support the Government of Alberta's efforts to protect Albertans against the COVID-19 pandemic. At the 2020 RMA Fall Convention, the Minister of Energy stated that the energy war room was conducting an internal review to strengthen their national education and marketing campaigns related to Alberta's energy sector. The outcomes of the internal review will be implemented in 2021.

RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta's confirmation that the Petrochemicals Diversification Program will continue and that two projects have already been approved under this program. These projects will help revitalize Alberta's natural gas sector resulting in job creation and economic growth. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 7-19S

Solar Power Reclamation

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to direct the Alberta Utilities Commission to establish a method of ensuring that there is funding in place for abandoned wind and solar energy to be decommissioned and reclaimed in an environmentally-responsible way.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that this resolution is not within the mandate of the Alberta Utilities Commission. However, Alberta Environment and Parks has amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation to include renewable energy operations (REO) as an activity requiring reclamation at end of life. While RMA recognizes that AEP has amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation, there is no requirement for an operator of a REO to provide a reclamation security. Landowners have the right to allow or deny REOs on their property and have the ability to negotiate reclamation security for activities related to REOs on their property. RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met** and will continue to work with AEP on ensuring that there is funding put in place for abandoned wind and solar energy to be reclaimed.

Resolution 5-18F

Alberta Energy Regulator Requirements for Acquiring and Holding Energy Licences and Approval

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) be required to ensure that there are no outstanding municipal property taxes before licenses are transferred, including licensed properties declared as "Orphan Sites";

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that outstanding property taxes form part of the liability rating for oil and gas companies;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that oil and gas companies be required to post deposits in the amount of all outstanding municipal property taxes before they can apply for a license or transfer, and that these deposits are forwarded to the municipality from the AER upon the approval of the license or transfer.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that although many factors are considered during the process of reviewing and approving a license transfer and within the AER's liability management rating (LMR), payment of municipal property taxes is not among them. RMA appreciates that Alberta Energy is working to improve the LMR and overall liability management system and is considering input from RMA and Alberta Municipal Affairs related to the extent to which outstanding municipal taxes should be considered part of a company's LMR. In 2019, the Government of Alberta announced they were seeking advice and input from stakeholders and the public on ways to improve the AER. RMA board members were invited to an in-person stakeholder workshop with other municipal leaders to discuss areas of improvement with the AER's mandate and systems operations. One comment RMA put forward was rural municipalities are facing significant issues surrounding the transfer of assets. Under AER's Directive 006, a company that sells assets or becomes insolvent must submit an application to the AER. However, this process does not inform municipalities of a change in asset ownership, often resulting in municipalities being unable to recover unpaid property taxes from the previous owner. The committee noted RMA's comment and RMA is currently waiting to hear back from the government with the recommendations and changes from the consultation process. However, as rural municipalities are faced with mounting unpaid taxes related to oil and gas infrastructure, this issue must be addressed urgently.

RMA is also concerned with AER's comments that imposing conditions on license transfers due to unpaid municipal taxes is beyond their jurisdiction, while also encouraging municipalities to intervene in the transfer approval process due to unpaid taxes. Based on the response, it is unclear what purpose this would serve, as it appears that AER could not alter the transfer approval process due to unpaid municipal taxes.

According to a 2020 RMA survey, rural municipalities are currently facing a deficit of \$173 million in unpaid property taxes from the oil and gas industry. Based on the Government of Alberta response, there are no current provisions available in the transfer approval and liability management systems to address unpaid municipal taxes, and limited interest in expanding either process to do so. Given that lack of payment of municipal taxes is often a sign of financial distress for companies, and may lead to further abandonment of other commitments, RMA urges the Government of Alberta to include this within the scope of the AER (as they are the primary oversight body for oil and gas operations in the province).

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 12-18F

Multi-Stakeholder Committee to Work at Reducing the Use of Potable Water by the Oil and Gas Industry in Alberta

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to immediately strike a multi-stakeholder committee to work at reducing the use of potable water and explore alternate options for use by the oil and gas industry in Alberta.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta and the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) are currently considering expanding the use of temporary surface pipelines (TSPs) as a regulated alternative for the transportation of various types of water, including some wastewaters. The reasoning behind expanding the use of TSPs is that the short-term need for water has increased and many stakeholders have requested that the AER reduce industry's use of high-quality water. The AER is currently engaging with Albertans in the development of a regulatory framework for TSPs. RMA has distributed the engagement

opportunity to members and has provided feedback as well. While this information is encouraging, it does not address the intent of the resolution to form a committee.

Because provincial action is being taken to reduce the use of potable water by the oil and gas industry, RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Part**, and will continue to advocate for the formation of a committee on this issue.

Resolution 14-18F

Reclamation of Non-Producing Oil and Gas Sites on Agricultural Lands Owned by Bankrupt Companies

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Orphan Well Association prioritize the reclamation of abandoned oil and gas sites on the following basis:

1. **Health, safety and environmental needs**
2. **Agricultural land**
3. **All other lands**

DEVELOPMENTS: The response by the Government of Alberta indicates that public safety and environmental protection are priorities in the reclamation of oil and gas wells, although the actual prioritization process is completed by the Orphan Well Association (OWA). The OWA has released an update on how the reclamation process of abandoned oil and gas sites is conducted. Phase 1 of the Assessment is to identify any potential concerns that may warrant further investigation. Phase 2 of the Assessment involves soil and ground water samples to be collected and sent to a laboratory for analysis. If any soil or groundwater is contaminated, it will be a priority for reclamation. RMA has assigned this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**, as the OWA reclamation process does not consider the type of land being impacted or provide any priority rating to agricultural lands. RMA will continue to monitor the progress of the OWA reclamation process of abandoned oil and gas wells.

Resolution 16-18F

Demand Meters and Rate Riders

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Alberta Utilities Commission create a separate rate class for municipal buildings and recreational facilities and require that all demand meters are reset and billed accordingly on a monthly basis.

DEVELOPMENTS: Based on this resolution, the RMA was contacted about participating Electric System Distribution Inquiry and the RMA has submitted their intention to provide input during this process. Currently, the RMA is awaiting additional information regarding phase II proceedings and will bring the intent of this resolution forward at this time. This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 6-18S

Wind Energy Regulations Required at Provincial Level

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request the Government of Alberta to undertake the creation of a Renewable Energy Division within the AER to approve, regulate, and enforce the

responsible development, reclamation, and assessment of renewable energy projects in the Province of Alberta;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that renewable energy projects formally proceeding into the review and approval stage of the above-noted Renewable Energy Division are to be corporately approved and construction ready projects, not speculative or conditional in any way;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA request the Government of Alberta to set up and enforce the collection of monetary funds towards the implementation of an Orphan Renewable Energy Fund to oversee potential future reclamation of abandoned renewable energy sites.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA recognizes the important work that has been undertaken to improve the regulatory process for wind energy projects and other renewable energy projects, and RMA appreciates the opportunity to be involved in many of these important discussions such as the creation of an updated reclamation standard for renewable energy.

Although this resolution speaks to the creation of an approving and regulating body within the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER), the broader intent of this resolution is the responsible regulation of Alberta's renewable energy resources and projects. Alberta Environment and Parks has amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation to include renewable energy operation as an activity requiring reclamation at end of life. Under the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation, security, such as cash, must be submitted by the operator to the Government of Alberta to account for reclamation costs. If an operator fails to comply with the Conservation and Reclamation Directive, then the security will be used for the reclamation at end of life for renewable resources. However, given the specific nature of this resolution and its focus on the creation of a fund for orphan renewable energy projects, it is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to work with members and the Government of Alberta to improve economic, social, and environmental outcomes for renewable energy.

Resolution 10-18S

Tenure Extension Requirements for Unconventional Development

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) requests the Government of Alberta review and examine tenure extension requirements for unconventional resource development, removing the need for industry to plan activities around securing tenure, and thereby allowing more orderly development and reduced impact on the environment.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta's response indicates some progress made from the from the area-based regulation pilot project that occurred in the MD of Greenview, but the intent of the resolution is not addressed through the pilot or other means, as the tenure system remains the same. This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and the RMA will continue to work with the Government of Alberta to fulfill the intent of this resolution.

ENVIRONMENT

Resolution 4-19F

Alberta Environment and Parks Water and Wastewater Facility and Landfill Approvals

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta adjust their processes related to municipal water and wastewater facility and landfill approvals or renewals to require that in order for a statement of concern or appeal to be valid, 10% of the landowners/residents deemed to be affected must endorse the statement of concern or appeal.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta's acknowledgement of the importance of municipal infrastructure projects to Albertans and that timely and cost-effective delivery remains a challenge. However, the Government of Alberta's response does not state that municipal water and wastewater facility and landfill approval or renewal process will be adjusted to require endorsement from 10% of landowners/residents deemed to be affected for a statement of concern to be valid. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will update this resolution based on the outcomes of future meetings with AEP regarding RMA's concerns on environmental appeals.

Resolution 13-19F

Provincial Extended Producer Responsibility Regulations

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta join the advocacy campaign to encourage the Government of Alberta to implement extended producer responsibility regulations.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta's commitment to working with external stakeholders to enhance provincial recycling programs that work for all Albertans. RMA participated as a project partner in the Alberta Collaborative Extended Producer Responsibility Study (ACES) to provide the rural context for implementing an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system in Alberta. The ACES study was funded by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Canadian Stewardship Services Alliance and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. ACES outlines a made-in-Alberta vision for EPR for residential packaging and paper products. The study proposes that producers of packaging and paper products in Alberta manage both the financial and operational obligations of collecting their products and finding markets to recycle them. RMA has advocated for an EPR program that has a comparable level of service at a comparable cost in urban municipalities and rural municipalities. The service method and service level may differ due to the cost challenges of servicing large and sparsely-populated areas, but an effective EPR model must make recycling available in a way that is reasonably accessible to rural residents.

RMA has assigned this resolution a status of **Accepted** and will continue to work with the Government of Alberta and external stakeholder to provide the rural perspective so that a recycling program works for all Albertans.

Resolution 19-19F

Water Security in Southern Alberta

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta address water security issues in southern Alberta by constructing additional water storage in southern Alberta for the purpose of buffering flood events and to retain water during periods of shortage.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the acknowledgement from the Government of Alberta that new storage opportunities are more feasible if the costs and benefits of new infrastructure is shared among a broad number of water users. However, the resolution is calling for the government to construct additional water storage in southern Alberta and since there is no indication of construction being started at this time, RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 4-19S

Bighorn Country Proposal Consultation

Status: Accepted in Principle

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to delay the Bighorn Country Proposal until an inclusive and comprehensive consultation process that includes and respects First Nations, municipalities, stakeholder groups and residents of Alberta can be developed.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that they will not be proceeding with the previous government's proposed plan for protected areas in Bighorn Country. The Minister of Environment and Parks has stated that residents, municipal officials and First Nations groups have raised concerns about how the proposal might affect oil and gas explorations and off-road vehicle use, and that economic and environmental concerns were not adequately answered through the initial consultation process. The Government of Alberta response indicates that future land use planning decisions will be dealt with through the North Saskatchewan regional planning process under the Land-use Framework. RMA appreciates that under the North Saskatchewan regional planning process, the government will consult with local residents, municipalities, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to determine how best to manage the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan region. However, since the new consultation process has not begun, RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Principle**, and will re-evaluate the resolution based on the progress of further consultation.

Resolution 5-19S

Amendments Required for Crown Land Recreation Disposition Applications and Renewals

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request the Government of Alberta to amend their policies and requirements on Crown land dispositions (leases) for not for profit organizations and municipalities;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA request the Government of Alberta to engage in additional public consultation with municipalities and not for profit organizations on the policies, requirements and process to lease Crown lands.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta's response indicates some recognition of the concerns that municipalities and not-for-profit organizations have shared regarding disposition applications and renewals. However, the intent of the resolution is not addressed through the creation of the Fish Creek

Provincial Park pilot. This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and the RMA will continue to work with the Government of Alberta to fulfill the intent of this resolution.

Resolution 9-19S

Watershed Planning and Advisory Council Funding

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to provide Watershed Planning and Advisory Council funding annually before May 1 to assure that professional staff can be retained to deliver extension and education programs, as well as examine the advantages of a three-year funding model for these.

DEVELOPMENTS: In the 2020 Budget, the Government of Alberta increased Water for Life funding to \$51 million dollars.

RMA is pleased by the commitment from Alberta Environment and Parks that they are working to further improve the grant application process, decision-making processes and to provide timely-status updates to applicants, however, the intent of the resolution is not addressed by the government's response. This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to work with the Government of Alberta to fulfil the intent of this resolution and update members on the government's progress.

Resolution 11-19S

Update of the Provincial Code of Practice for Compost Facilities

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to update the Code of Practice for Compost Facilities to reflect, at a minimum, the Standards for Composting Facilities in Alberta.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA appreciates the commitment from Alberta Environment and Parks to work with municipalities to resolve issues surrounding composting and compost facilities. However, the resolution requests the Government of Alberta to update the Code of Practice for Compost Facilities to reflect, at minimum, the Standards for Composting Facilities in Alberta.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to work with the Government of Alberta to fulfill the intent of this resolution.

Resolution 7-18F

Municipal and Privately-Owned Protected Areas Inventory

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge the Government of Alberta to recognize municipal and privately-owned protected areas in their reporting towards Alberta's 17% protection of terrestrial areas and inland waters target if they satisfy international standards for protected areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs);

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA partner with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to compile an inventory of all municipal and privately-owned protected areas in Alberta, for the purpose of providing Alberta Environment and Parks with a complete inventory of candidate protected areas and OECMs, for their 2020 17% terrestrial areas and inland waters protection target.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA is encouraged by the Government of Alberta’s recognition of the ecological and biodiversity benefits of municipal and privately-owned protected areas. RMA has been in contact with the Alberta Land Stewardship Centre which has an existing inventory of privately held conservation areas, but does not include municipally held land. In addition, RMA has reached out to the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) to discuss what options are available to RMA to create a database of all municipal and privately-owned protected areas.

RMA has reached out to AUMA to discuss this resolution and to learn if this issue is a priority among its members. AUMA has informed RMA that its members have not passed a resolution seeking the creation of an inventory of municipal and privately-owned areas, and therefore the project would not be a priority for AUMA. RMA is continuing to determine how to proceed on this resolution and will update its members on any progress. The current status is **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 9-18F

Impact of the Alberta Wetland Policy on the Cost of Maintaining Public Road Infrastructure

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to modify the Alberta Wetland Mitigation Directive to allow all wetland impacts as a result of municipal road maintenance or re-building of existing roads to utilize a one to one ratio, or D to D value wetland replacement; and/or consider exempting all wetland impacts in road right of ways that are smaller than one hectare in size.

DEVELOPMENTS: In January 2020, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) conducted a survey to gather information from municipalities about municipal road maintenance activities impacting wetlands. Based on the survey feedback, AEP updated the Wetland Assessment and Impact Form (WAIF) to allow low-risk activities such as widening, improvements or maintenance of an existing road within a registered road plan right of way or within 15 meters of the center line of an existing unregistered or private road to require a WAIF rather than a full Wetland Assessment and Impact Report (WAIR). AEP has stated that this change will reduce red tape by allowing more flexible and less costly wetland assessments within a larger project area, therefore reducing costs for municipalities.

RMA acknowledges that AEP has introduced a system change that will help reduce costs; however, it does not address replacement costs in a substantial manner and the WAIF program does not allow for the exemption of all wetland impacts in road right of ways that are smaller than one hectare in size. RMA assigns this resolution **Intent Not Met** and will continue to be in contact with AEP on this issue.

Resolution 11-18F

Rural Municipalities of Alberta Represents Municipalities on *Water Act* Approvals

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta work with Alberta Environment and Parks to provide the rural perspective and input related to streamlining and improving the *Water Act* approval process.

DEVELOPMENTS: Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) is in the process of enhancing the *Water Act* approval system to reduce approval times for regulated activities through the implementation of the Digital Assurance Regulatory System (DARS) which will serve as the technological backbone of the transformed regulatory system. DARS will replace the OneStop system and will streamline the approval process by enabling clear application requirements at the front end of the process, expedient decision making and straightforward environmental monitoring. DARS will be fully implemented by 2023;

however, implementation is phased, as AEP is aiming for DARS to be used for approvals and licenses under the *Water Act* by Summer 2021. AEP has reached out to RMA to present these new regulatory changes to streamline the *Water Act* and gather input from RMA. RMA is currently working with AEP to set up a webinar for AEP to engage with RMA members on these changes.

In 2020, AEP developed a draft code of practice on wetland restoration projects to reduce red tape and streamline the regulatory process. This was informed by an engagement process with stakeholders including RMA and its members to ensure that the draft code will meet the needs of those conducting wetland restorations. From the feedback, AEP has developed a new *Water Act Code of Practice for Wetland Replacement Works* which will reduce red tape for proponents restoring or constructing wetlands by replacing *Water Act* approval requirements with a notice process for activities that meet the Code of Practice; thereby eliminating approval wait times.

In January 2020, AEP conducted a survey to gather information from municipalities about municipal road maintenance activities impacting wetlands. Based on the survey feedback, AEP updated the Wetland Assessment and Impact Form (WAIF) to allow low risk activities such as widening, improvements or maintenance of an existing road within a registered road plan right of way or within 15 metres of the centerline of an existing unregistered or private road to require a WAIF rather than a full Wetland Assessment and Impact Report (WAIR). AEP has stated that this change will reduce red tape by allowing more flexible and less costly wetland assessments within a larger project area.

The Minister of Environment and Parks has stated that AEP is open to working with RMA to provide the rural perspective and improving the current *Water Act* approval process. In the past year, RMA has seen an increase in engagement opportunities with AEP on streamlining and improving the *Water Act* regulatory approval process. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted** and will continue to provide the rural municipal perspective related to streamlining and improving the *Water Act* approval process.

Resolution 15-18F

Wetland Mitigation Directive – Restoration and Compensation

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Alberta Environment and Parks follow the Wetland Mitigation Directive and that permittee-responsible mitigation either through enhancement or construction of wetlands be allowed, be it either through the Alternative Land Use Services program or through wetlands constructed as a part of stormwater management ponds.

DEVELOPMENTS: Changes to the management of wetland replacement in Alberta allow for greater flexibility in how municipalities can work locally to replace disturbed wetlands. The Government of Alberta has created Alberta Guide to Wetland Construction in Stormwater Management Facilities, which provides guidance on wetland construction practices in stormwater management facilities based on scientific and practical knowledge and experience across Canada. This guide allows municipalities to apply wetlands constructed as part of a stormwater management system towards their wetland replacement obligations. As a result of the release of the guide, this resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 17-18F

Alberta Environment and Parks Additional Resources for *Water Act* Approvals

Status: Accepted in Principle

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to allocate sufficient financial resources to improve and streamline its *Water Act* approvals process and systems.

DEVELOPMENTS: Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) is in the process of enhancing the *Water Act* approval system to reduce approval times for regulated activities through the implementation of the Digital Assurance Regulatory System (DARS), which will be the technological backbone of the transformed regulatory system. DARS will replace the OneStop system and will streamline the approval process by enabling clear application requirements at the front end of the process, expedient decision making and straightforward environmental monitoring. DARS will be fully implemented by 2023; however, implementation will be phased, so AEP is aiming for DARS to be used for approvals and licenses under the *Water Act* by Summer 2021.

In 2020, AEP developed a draft code of practice on wetland restoration projects to reduce red tape and streamline the regulatory process by restructuring the risk management system by lifting the requirements on minor works orders and focusing on more regulation on high-risk projects. AEP undertook an engagement process through TalkAEP with RMA and other stakeholders to ensure that the draft code will meet the needs of those conducting wetland restorations. From the feedback, AEP has developed a new *Water Act Code of Practice for Wetland Replacement Works* which will reduce red tape for proponents restoring or constructing wetlands by replacing *Water Act* approval requirements with a notice process for activities that meet the Code of Practice; thereby eliminating approval wait times.

In January 2020, AEP conducted a survey to gather information from municipalities about municipal road maintenance activities impacting wetlands. From the survey feedback, AEP updated the Wetland Assessment and Impact Form (WAIF) to allow low-risk activities such as widening, improvements or maintenance of an existing road within a registered road plan right of way or within 15 metres of the center line of an existing unregistered or private road to require a WAIF rather than a full Wetland Assessment and Impact Report (WAIR). AEP has stated that this change will reduce red tape by allowing more flexible and less costly wetland assessments within a larger project area.

The Minister has stated that these changes will help improve and streamline the *Water Act* approval process. Although these changes are new or still in the process of being implemented and the impact of these processes on approval times is unknown, AEP has allocated sufficient financial resources to create processes which are intended to improve approval times. RMA assigns this resolution as **Accepted in Principle** and will update the status of this resolution once the impact of these processes is known.

Resolution 20-18F

Decommissioning Costs for Wind Energy Developments

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request Alberta Energy to direct the Alberta Utilities Commission to establish a method of ensuring that there is funding in place to ensure that an abandoned wind energy plant is decommissioned and reclaimed in an environmentally responsible way.

DEVELOPMENTS: The RMA has been involved in a number of consultation on the end-of-life management of renewable energy infrastructure in Alberta to ensure that reclamation and remediation occurs in a timely and effective manner that will minimize future impacts to the land, neighbours, and

land owners. In comparison to oil and gas activity, landowners have more control over the direct siting of renewable energy projects and have a greater ability to request accountability for the end-of-life management if they are informed at the outset of a project. The RMA has developed, in partnership with the Miistakis Institute, a resource to inform municipalities of the renewable energy approval process.

Alberta Environment and Parks has amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation to include renewable energy operation as an activity requiring reclamation at end of life. While the RMA recognizes that AEP has amended the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation, there is no requirement for an operator of a renewable energy operation to provide a reclamation security. RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met** and will continue to work with AEP to ensure there is funding put in place to reclaim abandoned wind energy plants in a responsible way.

Resolution 22-18F

Amendment to the Wildlife Regulations Regarding Cougars

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to amend section 7, subsection 3 of the *Wildlife Regulation* to provide the same hunting allowances for cougars on private land that already exist for wolves and black bears;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that section 7, subsection 8 of the *Wildlife Regulation*, which establishes separate hunting allowances for cougars on private land, be repealed;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that reporting a cougar kill remain as a requirement of the *Wildlife Regulation*.

DEVELOPMENTS: The response from the Government of Alberta indicates that there is not anticipated legislative or regulatory changes that impact the management of cougars and therefore, this status is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 8-18S

Amendments Required for Provincial Recycling Regulations

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate to the Government of Alberta to make the changes outlined under the 2013 proposed *Designated Materials Recycling Regulation*.

DEVELOPMENTS: Alberta Environment and Parks have announced a commitment to working with stakeholders, including RMA to enhance provincial recycling programs and an interest in shifting to an Extended Producer Responsibility System. RMA was a project partner on the Alberta Collaborative Extended Producer Responsibility Study (ACES) which outlines a made in Alberta vision for Extended Producer Responsibility. The report was distributed to the Minister of Environment and Parks, however, little information is currently known on the status of this review.

The Government of Alberta has approved a two-year electronics pilot project which could see an additional 24,600 tonnes of electronics diverted from landfills. The Alberta Recycling Management Authority (ARMA) is leading the project and is currently in the planning phase to develop the pilot framework that will include the procurement of external expertise to support planning, implementation and execution, stakeholder engagement and a communications program. The project is expected to start in August 2020. While the pilot is a positive development in improving Alberta's recycling practices,

at this time, the majority of the recommendations linked to the *Designated Materials Recycling Regulation* are not implemented. RMA has assigned this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**.

RMA is active on the Agriculture Plastics Recycling Group (APRG) which was awarded \$1,000,000 to initiate a three-year agriculture plastics recycling program. RMA appreciates the Government of Alberta's recognition of this important initiative and will continue to work with the government to see to it that a permanent solution to the end-of-life management of agriculture plastics can be found.

Resolution 9-18S

Exemption of Seniors Housing from Requirement to Pay Carbon Levy

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) urge the Government of Alberta to exempt housing management bodies from the provincial carbon levy;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA advocate to Alberta Seniors and Housing for additional capital funds to be accessed by housing management bodies to install more efficient infrastructure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in regulated housing facilities.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta passed Bill 1: *An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax* and it received Royal Assent on June 4, 2019. The provincial carbon levy no longer applies to any type of fuel. In December 2020, the Government of Canada announced *A Healthy Environment and Healthy Economy* plan which builds on the *Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change*. The main goal of the new federal plan is to provide investments and grants to help incentivize the construction of energy efficient homes and buildings that will reduce pollution. Under the *Pan Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change*, seniors housing authorities are subject to the carbon tax. RMA will revisit this resolution when more details related to the *A Healthy Environment and Healthy Economy* plan are announced.

The Affordable Housing Energy Solutions program is closed and will not be scheduling new appointments. In partnership with the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, the Affordable Housing Energy Solutions program was created to improve energy efficiency, reduce energy use and increase comfort for those with low incomes, including seniors. This fulfils the second request of the resolution, however, the program does not state when, if ever, the application process will re-open. This resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted in Part**.

Resolution 11-18S

Recycling of Solar Panels

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta expand existing recycling programs to include solar panels (photovoltaic modules).

DEVELOPMENTS: The majority of solar panels operate with a 25- to 30-year lifespan, and many of the systems installed since solar energy became financially viable are still in operation. This has meant that the recycling of solar panels has not yet become a widespread concern. However, there will be a time in the near future when an economic and pragmatic approach to solar panel recycling is needed.

RMA is interested in seeing proper end-of-life management programs developed for a wide range of materials used commonly in the province, including solar panels. RMA is awaiting a review of Alberta's recycling program, and hopes that solar panel recycling will be considered within that review. At the current time, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

HEALTH AND SENIORS

Resolution 20-19F

Policies for Supporting Community Hospice Associations

Status: Accepted in Principle

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta develop standardized procedures and policies to interface community hospice associations with Alberta Health Services.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA is pleased to learn that the Government of Alberta (GOA) is investing \$20 million over four years to improve palliative care in rural communities. The GOA response indicates that part of this funding is to develop training and education, which supports the operative clause in this resolution. Additionally, their engagement with the Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Association is welcomed by RMA. However, as a policy with clear rules outlining how AHS works with hospice and home care organizations has not yet been developed, this resolution is assigned the status of **Accepted in Principle**.

Resolution 12-19S

Making Children’s Healthcare a Priority in Alberta

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta make all aspects of children’s health care a priority by making excellent pediatric care accessible to all Alberta children, regardless of where they live;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA request that the Government of Alberta support enhancements to existing infrastructure and programming in order to provide an increased level of care to children and recognize that the Stollery Children’s Hospital and the Alberta Children’s Hospital serve as critical hubs to this network of care for children’s health across the province.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Alberta Health response affirms ongoing support for the Stollery Children’s Hospital, including new funding for a pediatric intensive care unit. Their response also highlights increased funding for mental health services in rural areas including child psychiatry. This additional funding for children’s mental health care is welcome; RMA will continue to monitor how these services will be accessed by rural Albertans. The Alberta Health response closes by outlining existing children’s healthcare services available through the Primary Care Network, which has offices in rural Alberta, however 16 of the 41 offices are in the Edmonton or Calgary regions. RMA assigns this resolution the status of **Accepted in Part**, and will continue to advocate for access to children’s healthcare in rural Alberta.

Resolution 8-18F

Restricting the Consumption of Cannabis based on Regulations for Liquor Consumption

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta amend Section 90.28 (a) of *An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis* to reflect that no person may smoke or vape cannabis in any area or place where that person is prohibited from consuming liquor under the *Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act* or any other Act or the bylaws of a municipality.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA understands that public consumption challenges differ between cannabis and alcohol due to the different ways the substances are consumed. However, several provinces and

territories in Canada have chosen to prohibit public consumption of cannabis. RMA encourages Alberta to review the public health and enforcement impacts of its current public consumption allowances and compare them with impacts in jurisdictions that prohibit public consumption periodically.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to advocate on this issue.

INDUSTRY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

No active resolutions.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

Resolution 1-19F

Priority of Unpaid Property Taxes on Linear Property

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate for the Government of Alberta to take steps to ensure that municipalities are able to effectively recover all property taxes, including property taxes on linear property;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate for the Government of Alberta to address the growing concern regarding unfunded abandonment and reclamation costs for oil and gas properties and the affect that those costs have on the ability of municipalities to recover unpaid property taxes;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate for the Government of Alberta to make immediate amendments to *the Municipal Government Act (MGA)* to

1. Clarify that the reference to “property tax” in section 348 includes all property taxes, including property taxes on linear property;
2. Clarify the meaning of the phrase “...land and any improvements to the land...” in section 348 to specify that all of the property that is subject to assessment pursuant to Part 9 of the MGA within that municipality is subject to the special lien established in that section;
3. Provide municipalities with improved enforcement powers, such as the specific power to apply to the courts for the appointment of a receiver to enforce a claim for unpaid linear property taxes against the assets that are subject to a special lien established by section 348;
4. Apply the above amendments retroactively to ensure that existing linear property tax arrears constitute a secured claim.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response acknowledges the challenges being faced by rural municipalities related to unpaid property taxes on oil and gas properties and indicates that multiple Government of Alberta ministries are working to develop solutions to the issue, including special liens and other options. Although RMA has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this issue, no detailed discussions on solutions have taken place between RMA and either Alberta Municipal Affairs or Alberta Energy on this issue.

RMA understands that Alberta Energy’s response indicates the importance of designing an abandoned well remediation approach that supports industry competitiveness. However, this approach must also consider industry accountability and the impacts that municipalities are facing due to the lack of municipal input into the current liability management system. A January 2020 RMA member survey indicated that rural municipalities face an estimated \$173 million in unpaid taxes from the oil and gas industry, which illustrates the seriousness of this issue and the need for both short-term fiscal support for municipalities and long-term legislative and policy change to prevent the continuation of this issue.

Following an October 2020 announcement by the Minister of Municipal Affairs of several short-term oil and gas property assessment changes intended to support industry competitiveness, former RMA President Al Kemmere stated in a media article (<https://calgaryherald.com/opinion/columnists/varcoe-after-providing-tax-relief-to-oilpatch-province-must-tackle-unpaid-taxes-to-municipalities>) that “unpaid taxes is our number one concern. It has got some of our member municipalities on the cusp of not being

able to pay their bills.” In the same article, industry organizations also acknowledged the seriousness of the issue, with an Explorers and Producers Association of Canada representative stating that “from an oil and gas perspective, property taxes have to be paid. We understand there’s a problem.” The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers stated that “the fix is to find a path, some tool, that would enable government to compel companies to pay.”

Although the Government of Alberta continues to indicate that they are making internal progress on developing a solution to this issue, they have not specifically committed to updating the *Municipal Government Act* as requested in the resolution. RMA is hopeful that the proposed amendments will be considered as part of a solution to this issue.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met** and will be re-evaluated based on engagement with Alberta Municipal Affairs and Alberta Energy in collaborating with RMA on this issue.

Resolution 6-19F

Municipal Recourse for Solvent Companies Choosing Not to Pay Taxes

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate that the Government of Alberta direct the Alberta Energy Regulator to add unpaid municipal taxes to the grounds for which a company may be denied a licence to operate in Alberta.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Alberta Municipal Affairs response indicates that the Ministry is working with RMA and Alberta Energy on possible solutions to address unpaid property taxes by the oil and gas industry. At this point, no detailed discussions on solutions have taken place between RMA and either Alberta Municipal Affairs or Alberta Energy on this issue. Additionally, the response does not reference the specific request in resolution 6-19F, which is to “add unpaid municipal taxes to the grounds for which a company may be denied a licence to operate in Alberta.”

Both the Alberta Energy and AER responses do not indicate an interest in revising liability management criteria specifically to address unpaid municipal taxes, although Alberta Energy does indicate that the liability management framework is being reviewed.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and will be re-evaluated based on the outcomes of collaboration among Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Energy, and the AER, as well as Alberta Energy’s work with industry to review the liability management framework.

Resolution 12-19F

Libraries Act Review and Rural Library Services

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta review the the *Libraries Act* and *Libraries Regulation* through a comprehensive public consultation process;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the review include a focus on amending population density and service point indicators related to requirements for hiring professional librarians;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA requests that the Government of Alberta update population lists to the most recent census information to ensure proper funding is provided to rural library boards.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that funding for library operating grants has remained steady at \$30 million in budget 2019, as has other related funding. Funding also remained stable in budget 2020. While this stability is appreciated, the response does not address any of the requests within resolution 12-19F, including a public review of the *Libraries Act* and *Libraries Regulation*, a greater focus on population density related to professional librarian hiring requirements, and updating of population lists to determine proper funding is provided to rural library boards.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 16-19F

GST for Grants and Subsidies Interpretation

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Alberta advocate to the Government of Canada on behalf of the municipalities of Alberta that the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) interpretation be reviewed and the tax status of cost-sharing agreements be clarified;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request that the CRA reassess the 2019 GST/PSB audit on the Town of Peace River regarding the interpretation of the CRA Bulletin on GST for grants and subsidies.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates a concern with the impact that the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) interpretation of the tax status of cost-sharing agreements may have on Alberta's municipalities. RMA appreciates that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has informed his federal counterpart of this concern.

The response from Alberta Treasury Board and Finance indicates that it is the Ministry's policy not to interfere in the application of federal rules in specific cases. As the CRA decision has fiscal impact on both municipalities and the province more broadly (as a municipal funding source), RMA is concerned with this lack of response from Treasury Board and Finance.

RMA also continues to work with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to address this issue with the CRA, including through the possible development of a guide or FAQ document to ensure municipalities use language in cost-sharing agreements that minimizes the likelihood of a perception of an exchange of taxable services.

As Municipal Affairs has noted that Minister Madu wrote a letter expressing concern about this issue to the Minister responsible for the CRA, this resolution is assigned the status of **Accepted in Part**.

Resolution 8-19S

Reinstatement of the Municipal Officer's Expense Allowance

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta requests that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities ask the Government of Canada to consider reinstating the municipal officer's expense allowance.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) response indicates that they have categorized the resolution as "Category D." According to *FCM Procedures for Resolutions*, Category D resolutions are defined as follows:

this category contains resolutions on issues dealt with by FCM in the previous three (3) years or that are in accordance with FCM's standing policy and advocacy priorities. These resolutions will be received by the Board of Directors for information only. FCM staff is authorized to inform a sponsoring local government or affiliate member that its resolution will be categorized as "D".

Based on this categorization, FCM is already advocating for the return of the municipal officer's expense allowance. RMA is aware of a guide developed by FCM titled *Change in "One-Third" Federal Tax Exemption for Elected Officials: A Guide for Canadian Municipalities* that is intended to support municipalities in understanding the implications of the change and considering various options for addressing the elimination of the exemption, including increasing elected official salaries and expanding expense policies.

RMA is also aware of a response that the federal Minister of Finance provided to FCM on this issue, which stated the following:

Government took steps to bring the tax treatment of non-accountable allowances to municipal office holders in line with that afforded to other employees. An employer may reimburse work-related expenses on a tax-free basis, but non-accountable allowances may substitute for salary and are thus taxable.

The letter also indicated that the federal government was not planning to reconsider its decision on the issue. Although the finality of the federal decision is disappointing, the letter provides confirmation that FCM has advocated on this issue, which is the intent of the resolution. Therefore, this resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 2-18F

Annual Release Date of Assessment Year Modifiers

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to set the annual date of release of assessment year modifiers at September 15th or the nearest business day afterwards to allow municipalities to be properly informed when making budget decisions.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that due to requirements within the *Municipal Government Act* requiring assessed values to be based on a July 1 date, the process of gathering and analyzing assessment data and developing the annual assessment year modifier (AYM) cannot be significantly changed. RMA understands the impact of these regulatory requirements.

RMA has followed up with Alberta Municipal Affairs to discuss the possibility of amending the *Matters Relating to Assessment And Taxation Regulation* to change the July 1 estimate date to allow the finalized AYMs to be shared with municipalities at a date that better aligns with the municipal budget cycle. Alberta Municipal Affairs staff appeared open to considering this change, but no formal action has taken place to date.

As the 2020 assessment model review process concluded with no major changes to the actual assessment model, RMA expects a new multi-year assessment model review to commence in 2021. The mechanism for determining and applying AYMs is likely to be a part of the upcoming review.

Additionally, as this resolution was partly necessitated due to the unexpected freezing of AYMs in late 2017 after draft AYMs were shared earlier in the year with no indication of a possible freeze, Alberta Municipal Affairs should enact a policy or internal requirement that final AYMs can differ by no more

than a set percentage from draft AYMs, to allow municipalities with some assurance when drafting budgets prior to receiving final AYMs.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**, and will work with Alberta Municipal Affairs to develop possible solutions.

Resolution 6-18F

Securing Municipal Property Taxes in the Event of Bankruptcy or Insolvency

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta partner with Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to advocate to the Government of Alberta to amend section 348 and other relevant sections of the *Municipal Government Act* to ensure that municipal property taxes are legally assured a status as a secured claim in the event that the property owner enters bankruptcy or receivership.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta has taken some action in recent years to lessen the impacts of unpaid taxes (such as the Provincial Education Requisition Credit [PERC] and allowing municipalities to place a \$0 assessment on linear properties owned by defunct companies). Unfortunately, these measures provided limited support and come nowhere close to addressing the fundamental issue of a lack of tools for municipalities to address tax recovery from bankrupt companies. According to a January 2020 RMA member survey, rural municipalities are facing approximately \$173 million in unpaid property taxes from oil and gas companies, many of which are bankrupt.

In September 2019, the Supreme Court of Canada denied the application brought forward by three Alberta rural municipalities related to the Alberta Court of Appeal decision in *Northern Sunrise County v Virginia Hills Oil Corp*, 2019 ABCA 61. The denial confirms that the *Municipal Government Act* does not grant a municipality a special lien for unpaid linear property taxes. The decision confirms that municipalities cannot use s. 348 to seize linear property for unpaid taxes, severely limiting their tax recovery tools. The decision heightens the urgency for action on amending the MGA to ensure municipalities have tax enforcement and recovery powers.

It should also be noted that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Alberta moved quickly to allow for a deferral of the education portion of all non-residential property taxes until October 1, 2020 in an effort to assist businesses with short-term liquidity issues. Rather than pay a portion of the education tax requisition to the Government of Alberta quarterly, municipal requisition deadlines were delayed until December 31, 2020 (50%) and March 31, 2021 (50%). However, the deferral program does not address the likelihood that many businesses may become insolvent due to the pandemic, and many others may not be in a financial position to pay property taxes as of October 1, 2020. For municipalities, this will likely exacerbate the unpaid tax issue as the province will require education requisition amounts to be paid by municipalities by the dates above, with no backstop in place in the event municipalities are unable to collect this from business owners. RMA requested an expansion of PERC, or the creation of a similar program to support municipalities facing this situation. After initially committing to “explore” the idea, the Government of Alberta has indicated they will not implement a municipal support program for COVID-19-related unpaid taxes.

In September 2021, the Government of Alberta introduced the Municipal Operating Support Transfer Program (MOST), which provides financial support for municipalities to offset increased expenses or lost revenue linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Included among eligible MOST expenses are any unpaid

property taxes from the 2020 tax year. There is no need for taxes to be written off to apply the unpaid taxes to MOST, and taxes can still be collected at a later date. Although this is a helpful tool for rural municipalities continuing to struggle with unpaid taxes, it does not address the legislative gaps causing the problem.

As the Government of Alberta has not amended section 348, including through recent omnibus bills that made significant changes to many sections of the MGA, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to advocate on this issue moving forward.

Resolution 1-18S

Request for Implementation of the 2018 Assessment Year Modifier for Well and Pipeline Assessments

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) lobby the Government of Alberta to immediately implement the 2018 assessment year modifier to well and pipeline assessments as identified in the draft calculation.

DEVELOPMENTS: The freezing of assessment year modifiers (AYMs) at 2017 levels caused significant frustration for RMA members, many of whom had prepared budgets based on draft AYM projections that the Government of Alberta had shared with municipalities prior to the freeze. In early 2019, Alberta Municipal Affairs informed RMA that the AYM process was being reviewed as part of a larger assessment model review that also includes updating construction costs for machinery and equipment and pipeline properties and depreciation measures. The review concluded in late 2020 with no changes to the current AYM process. A new review is expected to commence in 2021, which will likely include changes to the AYM process.

The Government of Alberta's continued freeze of the AYM means that this resolution is assigned the status of **Intent Not Met**.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Resolution ER1-19F

Dissolution of Mandatory Growth Management Boards

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the Government of Alberta remove mandatory growth management boards (GMBs) from the *Municipal Government Act*;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA advocate that the Government of Alberta strengthen existing regulatory tools and mechanisms to encourage and incentivize regional cooperation with respect to land use planning and service delivery to residents;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that should the Government of Alberta fail to abolish mandatory GMBs, the RMA shall advocate to amend the current voting structure to remove double majority vetoes and ensure the interests of all members of a GMB are equally considered and represented;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that should the Government of Alberta fail to abolish the mandatory GMBs, the RMA shall advocate to implement an independent appeal process for members to appeal decisions of the GMB that may have a detrimental impact on a member;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that should the Government of Alberta fail to abolish the mandatory GMBs, the RMA request that the Government of Alberta amend the Regional Evaluation Framework and the Interim Regional Evaluation Framework for the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board and the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board respectively.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that a review of growth management boards (GMBs) will take place soon and provide member municipalities an opportunity to provide input on solutions to challenges facing the boards. Unfortunately, the resolution response provides no information related to the specific changes to GMBs requested in resolution ER1-19F, including the removal of mandatory GMBs from the *Municipal Government Act*, or alternatively, strengthening of tools to incentivize regional collaboration within GMBs, the development of a more equitable GMB voting structure, an independent appeal process, or amendments to regional evaluation frameworks.

In late 2020, the Government of Alberta passed Bill 48: *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2020 (No. 2)*. Bill 48 included several changes to the sections of the *Municipal Government Act* establishing the requirements for GMBs. The majority of changes made to the GMB structure through Bill 48 removed specific requirements related to the development and approval of growth plans, the ability of a GMB to require a member to cease an action deemed inconsistent with a growth plan, and other areas. Most of the areas removed may be addressed through regulations, as Bill 48 also alters the Minister's regulation-making power by allowing the Minister to make regulations relating to areas such as membership and voting rights, operations and management, consistency with municipal plans and bylaws at any time, whereas the MGA previously allowed such regulations to be made only when a GMB was established. While broadening the Minister's regulation-making power could result in some of the changes requested in resolution ER1-19F being implemented for existing GMBs, there is no indication at this time that any changes to the current operations will take place.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will continue to advocate on this issue.

Resolution 18-18F

Utility Conflict in Municipal Right of Ways

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta collaborate with the Government of Alberta and other stakeholders to create a better process of locating and marking utilities to alleviate the added costs and delays being incurred by municipalities conducting infrastructure maintenance or construction; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that options considered in this process include:

- negotiate with utility companies to ensure they honor their schedules or be held responsible to pay for all delays, impacts and costs associated with these delays; and
- create a universal master agreement for utility companies to enter into with all municipalities whereby utility companies pay a fee per lineal meter for their utilities to be located within municipal road right of way.

DEVELOPMENTS: The response provided by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) indicates the unique challenges related to the utility right of way approval process. The first part of this resolution requests an improvement to the utility marking and locating process to reduce delays and costs. The AUC response explains the current process but does not indicate plans to improve it. Not mentioned in the response but relevant to the resolution is the introduction of Bill 211: *Alberta Underground Infrastructure Notification System Consultation Act* in the Alberta Legislature in early 2019. Bill 211 would form a committee of the Legislative Assembly to prepare and submit a “report on the underground infrastructure notification system in Alberta, which must include any recommendations for amendments to legislation to improve safety for excavators and to protect underground infrastructure.” Among other things, the report must consider “enforcement of rules pertaining to the underground infrastructure notification system.” RMA formally supported the passing of Bill 211. Bill 211 received first reading in March 2019. Unfortunately, due to the provincial election in April 2019, the Bill did not proceed to second reading or receive royal assent. In May 2020, RMA submitted a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs requesting the re-introduction of Bill 211 or similar legislation to support ground disturbance notification requirements. More recently, RMA has supported work by the Alberta Common Ground Alliance to reintroduce a private member bill on this issue, potentially for the spring 2021 legislative session.

The second part of this resolution requests the development of a master agreement which would include a fee per lineal metre to be paid by utility companies with infrastructure within a municipality’s boundaries. The AUC response raises concerns about the costs such an approach would impose on utility companies, which would be passed along to consumers. RMA looks forward to discussing this approach and its pros and cons with the AUC. At this point, this resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**.

Resolution 7-18S

Standards for Property Contaminated by Fentanyl and Carfentanil

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request the Government of Alberta to establish defined standards and consistent regulated approaches for inspecting property contaminated by fentanyl or carfentanil.

DEVELOPMENTS: In May 2020, the Government of Alberta released *Fentanyl Remediation: Guidance for Remediators, Regulatory Agencies and Professionals*. The document is intended to assist organizations in managing risks related to inspecting and remediation properties and materials contaminated by fentanyl. This guide is meant for municipalities, law enforcement, environmental health inspectors, companies owning or operating real estate, and the construction and remediation sectors. The guide provides an overview of site assessments, remediation work procedures, and post-remediation assessment. It also provides guidance related to selecting a remediation contractor, the use of personal protective equipment, and other technical aspects of the remediation process.

While the guide is an important step in supporting municipalities and other organizations in safely inspecting and remediating fentanyl-contaminated properties, the resolution requests a *regulated* approach to contaminated property inspections, and the guidelines are not mandatory. As a result, this resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted in Part**.

POLICING AND RURAL CRIME

Resolution 2-19F

Government of Alberta's Police Costing Test Model

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to engage in further consultation with municipalities on the police costing test model to examine options to meet the Government of Alberta's goal of reducing policing costs without negatively impacting policing service delivery or municipal financial viability.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that adequate consultation occurred with municipal stakeholders during the development of the police costing mode in late 2019. While consultation did take place, RMA does not consider the original test model, or the final model, as adequate to improve police service in rural and small urban communities in the province. RMA has the following concerns with the model that should be addressed through further consultation with municipal stakeholders:

- The Government of Alberta response indicates that the new cost model “will bring small and rural municipalities into line with larger communities and cities.” However, the cost model does not provide rural and small urban municipalities with any enhanced local input into policing to align with their new financial responsibilities. While large cities with their own police forces can form police commissions to provide mandated direction to local police services, rural and small urban communities continue to be limited to forming voluntary police committees, which are much more limited in both scope and power. RMA’s formal submission into the police costing model development requested “no costs should be recovered from municipalities without corresponding enhancements to service delivery and local input into policing.” While the Alberta Police Advisory Board will allow RMA (and AUMA) to provide input into high-level policing priorities in the province, it will in no way allow individual municipalities to provide enhanced **local input** into policing that reflects their new financial responsibilities.
- Throughout the consultation process, the Government of Alberta did not provide municipal stakeholders with any information on how the new costing model would be linked to improved local police services. There was no plan, outline or principles to provide stakeholders peace of mind that the cost model was anything other than a download. Following the completion of the consultation, the Government of Alberta announced that the cost model would be used to support 300 new RCMP officers and 200 new civilian administrative staff for the province, but provided no information on how these resources would be deployed or whether municipalities would have any input as to how they would be used to address local rural crime challenges. More recently, the RCMP has provided monthly staffing updates to the Alberta Police Interim Advisory Board. As of December 2020, 76 new regular member positions and 57 public service employee positions have been linked to the costing model and are in the process of being filled, both in rural detachments and in specialized or centralized units. While this progress is a positive step, municipalities have not had a say in determining how these resources are allocated.
- RMA emphasized the importance of linking the police costing model to service levels by including a subsidy or modifier based on the proximity of a municipality to a detachment. While the costing model includes a detachment subsidy (municipalities without a detachment receive a 5% reduction on their invoice) rural municipalities are inexplicably excluded from this subsidy, although at least

nine rural municipalities should qualify. While urban municipalities located as close as four kilometres to a detachment in a neighbouring municipality receive the subsidy, there are cases of hamlets in rural municipalities being located approximately 75 kilometres from a detachment that are ineligible for the subsidy.

- The Government of Alberta response correctly indicates that rural municipalities expressed concern with the use of equalized assessment in the costing model formula. However, the reduction of the weighting of equalized assessment from 70% in the test model to 50% in the final model does not address RMA’s primary concern with the metric, which is that it in no way aligns with required service levels, which should be driven by a combination of population and crime statistics. RMA’s formal submission into the police costing model development expressed the following concerns with the use of equalized assessment:
 - Equalized assessment is not an accurate measure of municipal “wealth” or ability to pay
 - In rural municipalities, equalized assessment represents “high-risk” revenue from the oil and gas industry, which is reflected in current issues with uncollected municipal taxes on oil and gas property
 - Relying on equalized assessment to measure ability to pay may result in a greater tax burden on oil and gas companies operating in rural municipalities
 - Other provincial programs use equalized assessment as a measure of need, rather than wealth, which call into questions its usefulness as a measure of a municipality’s ability to pay

The examples above are intended to demonstrate that although consultation did take place in relation to the development of a police costing model, the test model, the consultation process, and the final model did not adequately consider rural municipal concerns relating to service levels or local input. The current model has the potential to impact both local police service and municipal viability and does require further consultation. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to request further amendments to the model moving forward.

Resolution 10-19F

Community Peace Officer Access to RCMP Radio Channels

Status: Accepted in Principle

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta work with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) ‘K’ Division and National Headquarters, and any other organizations necessary, to develop policies and/or a memorandum of understanding to permit community peace officers to monitor and transmit on local RCMP Alberta First Responders Radio Communication System radio channels in the normal course of their duties.

DEVELOPMENTS: In 2020, the Government of Alberta completed a pilot project involving the use of the Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS) to allow shared radio communications between RCMP and community peace officers (CPOs). The pilot involved six municipalities (Town of Okotoks, County of Grande Prairie, City of Grande Prairie, City of Red Deer, Foothills County and Clearwater County). According to the Government of Alberta, the pilot was successful, and plans are in place to enact the permanent use of AFRRCS for RCMP/CPO communications in the six pilot

municipalities, as well as expand the option of using AFRRCS for RCMP/CPO communications in all municipalities in the province.

At this point, the Government of Alberta and RCMP are developing the process for making this option available, and hope to provide municipalities with detailed implementation information, including technology requirements, costs, etc. at some point in 2021.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted in Principle** and will be re-assessed based on the roll-out of enhanced RCMP/CPO communication through AFRRCS.

Resolution 2-18S

Combatting Rural Crime

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request that the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta develop and implement strategies and initiatives to prevent and combat rural crime, and punish those convicted of committing rural crime in a manner that will maximize deterrence;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the RMA, through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, request the Government of Canada to continue with its review of the criminal justice system and sentencing reforms in a way that gets repeat offenders off the street for longer periods of time.

DEVELOPMENTS: In March 2018, the Government of Alberta implemented a Rural Crime Action Plan intended to reduce rural crime by better focusing resources in rural areas and prioritizing a proactive and strategic approach to addressing rural crime. The Action Plan included the following seven points:

- ◆ Crime reduction units: Specially trained officers will focus on arresting prolific offenders. This initiative will expand on a successful pilot project in Central Alberta.
- ◆ Specialized police intelligence: Six additional intelligence-focused RCMP officers plus four crime analyst positions will allow the RCMP to identify prolific offenders and target organized crime.
- ◆ Policing support centre: RCMP officers need to be on the streets protecting our communities, not behind a desk filling out paperwork. Twenty-three civilians will input investigative updates dictated over the phone by officers.
- ◆ More Crown prosecutors: \$2 million will allow the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service to hire up to 10 Crown prosecutors who will focus solely on rural crime.
- ◆ Better coordination: Sharing information with Alberta sheriffs, Fish and Wildlife Enforcement, Commercial Vehicle Enforcement and conservation officers will effectively make these officials additional “eyes and ears” for police.
- ◆ Enhanced technology: The RCMP will work with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and other partners to explore new ways of using technology to target rural crime, including bait programs.
- ◆ Public education and engagement: The RCMP will engage and educate Albertans about crime prevention.

The Action Plan was supported by a \$10 million investment from the Government of Alberta.

In September 2018, the Government of Alberta and Royal Canadian Mounted Police jointly announced an 11% decrease in property crimes in rural Alberta detachments between January and July 2018 – a reduction that is at least partly linked by the Government of Alberta to the initiatives in the Action Plan.

In February 2019, the Government of Alberta announced the next phase of the Action Plan, called “Project Lock-Up,” which will focus on collaboration between police and other enforcement organizations such as community peace officer, sheriffs, fish and wildlife officers, and others to increase patrols in “hard hit” rural areas, enhance victim support and communication, provide residents of “hard hit” areas with trace pens to increase the likelihood of recovering stolen property, and further enhance investigative response in high priority areas.

In spring 2019, the newly-elected UCP government announced a rural crime strategy based on their 2018 report titled *A Safer Alberta: United Conservative Strategy to Tackle the Rural Crime Crisis*. In fall 2019, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General Doug Schweitzer undertook a province-wide townhall tour to gather information to support the further development of a plan. Additionally, in November 2019, the Government of Alberta announced several more initiatives to address rural crime, including the expansion of the role of approximately 400 peace officers to respond to a wider range of calls and better support the RCMP, a strengthening of property rights through changes to the *Occupiers’ Liability Act*, an increase in enforcement and preventative measures related to metal theft, and the allowance of “community impact statements” in trials related to rural crime.

RMA is pleased with the Action Plan and the early positive indicators of its effectiveness in decreasing rural crime, as well as the initiatives taken to date by the UCP government, and will advocate for the Government of Alberta to make a long-term funding commitment to sustain or expand the initial Action Plan.

RMA is concerned that the new police costing model implemented by the Government of Alberta in early 2020 may not be effective in addressing rural crime. It remains unclear how the model will increase local policing capacity, and whether benefits will be distributed equally across the province. In some cases, the increased policing costs that municipalities are required to pay may reduce protective services in the form of peace officers, bylaw officers, and social service provision that helps to prevent crime. RMA is hopeful that the newly formed Alberta Police Advisory Board will contribute to establishing a link between the increased policing costs borne by municipalities and enhanced service across rural Alberta. As of December 2020, 76 regular member positions and 57 public service employee positions have been linked to the costing model and are in the process of being filled, both in rural detachments and in specialized or centralized units. While this progress is a positive step, municipalities have not had a say in determining how these resources are allocated.

RMA also forwarded this resolution to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) as per the second operative clause. FCM reviewed the resolution and categorized it as “issues not within municipal and/or federal jurisdiction,” meaning it is not within the scope of FCM’s mandate, mainly because a request to advocate for “sentencing reforms in a way that gets repeat offenders off the street for longer periods of time” is not a specific municipal issue, although it would indirectly support municipalities by helping to address rural crime. RMA is disappointed with this response but will continue to work with FCM to share the rural Alberta perspective on issues related to crime and justice.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Part**, and will continue to advocate on this issue at the provincial level and to the FCM.

Resolution 3-18S

Increase Crown Prosecutor Staffing Levels for Rural Municipalities

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) encourage the Government of Alberta to increase Crown prosecutor staffing levels as well as relevant administrative staff for rural municipalities and collaborate with rural municipalities to ensure that court cases are being sufficiently prosecuted in a timely manner.

DEVELOPMENTS: As indicated in the Government of Alberta response, two million dollars has been allocated under the Rural Crime Action Plan to hire up to ten Crown prosecutors to focus on rural crime. RMA is pleased with this commitment as well as the Government of Alberta's swiftness in hiring eight of ten prosecutors to this point.

The UCP government built on this commitment in their pre-election platform by committing to spending \$10 million per year over the next four years to hire an additional 50 prosecutors. This initiative was supported in the 2019 provincial budget. Additionally, in November 2019, the Government of Alberta announced a plan to double the number of articling students hired by the Crown prosecution service from eight to 16, with an increase to at least 20 by 2021. According to Minister of Justice and Solicitor General Doug Schweitzer, the increase in articling students is in addition to the commitment to hire an additional 50 Crown prosecutors, and that the students will be prioritized for placement in rural Alberta.

Alberta's 2020 provincial budget included a reiteration of the commitment to hire an additional 50 prosecutors over the next three years, at an additional cost of \$10 million annually. However, the actual financial commitments for the Crown prosecutor service in the 2020 budget reflect a decrease of approximately 10% from the amount indicated in the province's 2019 budget (\$340 million decreased to \$306.7 million). Additionally, according to the Alberta Crown Attorney's Association, Alberta currently has 33 unfilled Crown prosecutor positions. Given the currently unfilled positions combined with the planned reduction in funding for the Crown prosecution service, RMA is concerned that the Government of Alberta may be unable to fulfill their commitment of hiring 50 new Crown prosecutors.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and will be reviewed based on actual hiring of additional Crown prosecutors and their deployment in rural Alberta.

Resolution 12-18S

Victim Services Units Funding

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) lobby the Government of Alberta to use the monies from the Victims of Crime Fund to adequately fund provincial victim services units so they can provide the staffing levels required to assist victims of crime.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates action to divert greater amounts from the Victims of Crime Fund to support victim services units. More specifically, the Government of Alberta has increased the maximum annual funding that victim services units in Alberta's large urban centers can access, as maximum amounts will increase from \$300,000 to \$500,000 in Edmonton and Calgary, and from \$150,000 to \$300,000 in Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (which had already been temporarily increased to \$265,000 due to

wildfires in 2016). While this is a positive development, the maximum annual funding amount for all other victim services units appears to have remained at \$150,000. As some rural areas in Alberta are experiencing extremely high crime rates, and victim services unit funding is based on an allocation formula that takes into consideration local crime rates, RMA believes that the maximum potential annual funding amount should be increased for all victim services units to allow for consistent access to funding across the province, as crime rates do not necessarily align with population.

In December 2019, the Government of Alberta undertook a consultation on the replacement of the Victims of Crime Financial Benefits Program (VCFBP) with a new “Alberta Victim Assistance” program, which is intended to replace the financial support focus of the VCFBP with a program that is more service-oriented and effectively meets the needs of victims who may experience challenges in accessing legal, emotional, or other support services, including those in rural areas. RMA is awaiting the results of the review.

In June 2020, the Government of Alberta introduced Bill 16, *Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act*. As of the writing of this response, Bill 16 is currently in second reading in the legislature. One change proposed through Bill 16 is to expand potential uses of the Victims of Crime Fund beyond programs and initiatives that support victims of crime to also include programs and initiatives that promote public safety. There is a significant risk that should Bill 16 pass, funding from the Victims of Crime Fund may be diverted from victims services units to support broader policing and public safety initiatives unrelated to victim support. The Alberta Police Based Victim Service Association issued the following statement concerning Bill 16:

Amendments to the Act [through Bill 16] will see the tearing down of the fundamental principles entrenched in the original *Victims of Crime Act* created in 1990.

The original Act collected a surcharge on fines assessed for various offences in Alberta, therefore, these are not tax dollars. Those funds were intended to support victim serving organizations in providing services direct to those who have suffered as victims of crime and or tragedy. The money supports a cohort of volunteers in every corner of Alberta to be there in times of crisis to support and assist when tragedy strikes.

Frugal use of those funds by community organized police based organizations results today in a \$74M surplus. The surplus guarantees sustainable support for victims for many years and therefore no reliance on tax dollars, an achievement like none other in Canada. If this legislation is successful, the Solicitor General will arbitrarily have unfettered access to the fund to provide more police, more prosecutors and fund other undefined public safety initiatives. This amounts to a raid on a fund that for 30 years has carefully and prudently provided a safe landing for those criminally and brutally treated.

[...]

The Association is disturbed with the direction taken by this Minister in this legislation. Victims are central in the criminal justice system, a ploy such as this does a great disservice to them, and those dedicated to supporting them. Association members have already felt impacts of victim funds being redirected for public safety initiatives as requests for operating funds have been reduced and training dollars all but eliminated.

This is the wrong move for this province. Funds need to first address the needs of victim services while any expanded use be judiciously considered after consultations with the victim serving community.

Although still awaiting the results of the 2019 consultation on the replacement of the Victims of Crime Financial Benefits Program (VCFBP) with a new “Alberta Victim Assistance” program, RMA is concerned with the impacts that Bill 16 may have on victim services unit funding.

In fall 2020, the Government of Alberta consulted on further potential changes to the victims services delivery model, including potentially replacing the current model with a centralized, regional, or municipal service delivery model. RMA expressed concerns with these options, arguing that the current model allows for victim services to be developed based on unique local needs, and that the current model required improved funding and capacity support, rather than a complete overhaul. At this time, it is unknown whether the delivery model will change.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met**, and will continue to advocate on this issue.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Resolution 15-19F

Provincial Highway Access and Setback Authority

Status: Accepted in Principle

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta engage with the Government of Alberta to reduce red tape that limits rural development or economic potential, through a delegation of additional authority to municipalities to regulate provincial highway access and setback requirements, and a review of the provincial framework in this area to reflect best practices from jurisdictions across Canada.

DEVELOPMENTS: The response from Alberta Transportation does include a discussion of the current role municipalities play in development near provincial highways through the development of area structure plans. However, the Alberta Transportation response is clear that they do not support delegating provincial highway access and setback authority to municipalities.

While Alberta Transportation is not delegating the approval of permits in highway control zones to municipalities, they have engaged RMA in a consultation to develop a framework for highway vicinity management agreements (HVMAs). HVMAs would be an enabling tool that would allow municipalities the option to exempt certain types of developments within highway control zones from Alberta Transportation approval, while not limiting the authority of municipalities to issue municipal development permits.

As a result, this resolution is assigned the status of **Accepted in Principle**.

Resolution 17-19F

Airports Capital Assistance Program Funding for Regional Airports in Canada

Status: Incomplete Information

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) request the Government of Canada to review and increase funding for the Airports Capital Assistance Program (ACAP);

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA request support from all relevant federal, provincial, municipal, and business associations for ACAP funding for regional airports in Canada.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA has not yet received a response from Transport Canada, making it not possible to evaluate the first therefore clause. However, Alberta Transportation's response does clarify their role in funding capital costs for regional airports. While Alberta Transportation is not involved with the ACAP funding, they do administer the Community Airports Program (CAP), which supports small airports. This supports the operation of regional airports outside of the ACAP program. Until a response from Transport Canada is received, this resolution is assigned the status of **Incomplete Information**.

Resolution 3-19S

Light Weight Concrete Bridge Girders

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta urge the Government of Alberta to establish a program for financial assistance, over and above current Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program funding, to municipalities that manage bridges affected by the premature deterioration of "SC" light weight bridge girders.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response provides a summary of why legal action was not pursued. Alberta Transportation identifies the resources they developed and shared with affected municipalities to mitigate the effects of the deteriorating girders. Finally, Alberta Transportation confirms that there is no additional funding for the repair or replacement of the municipal SC girder bridges. RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to monitor resources available to municipalities to address the SC girder bridges.

Resolution 1-18F

Provincial Contribution to Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta advocate to the Government of Alberta to provide additional funding to municipalities for the provincial contribution of Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program funding.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that due to fiscal restraints additional funding is not available to support municipalities in leveraging funding under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) beyond the use of existing provincial grants that support the same project types as those eligible under ICIP.

RMA appreciates the fiscal challenges facing the Government of Alberta and the challenges that federal cost-share requirements can have on provincial budgets. However, ICIP presents a unique opportunity to leverage federal funding to cover a significant portion of the costs of infrastructure projects that would otherwise be entirely a municipal or provincial (through grant funding) responsibility.

Additionally, Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) funding is intended to support long-term municipal capital planning and expecting municipalities to redirect that funding to apply to ICIP-supported projects contradicts the emphasis that the Government of Alberta has placed on long-term planning in recent years.

RMA appreciates that, as identified in Alberta Infrastructure's response, ICIP's Community, Culture, and Recreation stream, which is most likely to require municipalities to use funds to meet provincial cost-share requirements, is already significantly oversubscribed. However, this is not an indicator that the provincial cost-share contribution is meeting the needs of most municipalities in the province, but rather that many of Alberta's municipalities are so in need of infrastructure funding that they are willing to divert previously planned MSI funding to pursue ICIP-supported projects.

This resolution is assigned a status of **Intent Not Met**, and RMA will advocate for the more strategic leveraging of provincial funding in future federal grant programs.

OTHER

Resolution 5-19F

Landowners' Rights

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request the Government of Alberta to develop a clear definition of landowners' rights;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that all relevant acts and regulations be amended to reflect the clarified definition of landowners' rights.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta's response indicates that they amended the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) to include a clear statement that government must respect property and other rights of individuals. However, the government has stated that although the definition of landowners' rights may not be centrally located, Alberta's various legislation and regulations already contain consideration of rights largely in respect to property and land. This resolution is requesting the Government of Alberta to develop a clear definition of landowners' rights and that all regulations be amended to reflect the clarified definition. The RMA assigns this resolution as **Intent Not Met**, as based on the government's response, property rights are being considered as part of a platform commitment to create legislation to address property rights, however legislation has not been created yet.

Resolution 8-19F

Opportunity for Improvement in FCM Representation of Rural Issues and Western Perspectives

Status: Incomplete Information

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) use their collective strength and understanding of the rural municipal perspective and priority issues to promote accurate inclusion of rural and western Canadian issues and perspectives at the annual Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) conference, and in FCM communications and advocacy efforts;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that RMA send a letter to FCM identifying areas of alignment and concern with the content of the 2019 annual FCM conference and requesting that planning committees for future annual conferences include appropriate representation from rural western Canada to ensure that conferences are relevant and meaningful to all member municipalities.

DEVELOPMENTS: RMA is represented on FCM's Standing Committee on Conference Planning by RM of Wood Buffalo Councillor Krista Balsom, Parkland County Councillor AnnLisa Jensen, Sturgeon County Councillor Wayne Bokenfohr, and Cypress County Councillor Robin Kurpjewit. Combined, these RMA and rural municipal representatives provide input into the structure and content of annual FCM conventions. However, the committee also includes participation from 35 other municipal representatives from across Canada, each with their own priorities for conference content. Due to the cancellation of the 2020 FCM Conference, it is currently unknown the extent to which rural programming will be improved over the 2019 conference. RMA will continue to advocate for adequate rural programming, both through the FCM Standing Committee on Conference Planning and other means, and re-evaluate this resolution based on the 2021 FCM Conference. This resolution is currently assigned a status of **Incomplete Information**.

Resolution 10-19S

Strategic Direction for the RMA

Status: Accepted

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) adopts the Strategic Direction as presented at the Spring 2019 Convention to guide planning and activities for the organization from 2019 through 2022.

DEVELOPMENTS: This resolution is assigned a status of **Accepted**.

Resolution 23-18F

Social Well-Being of An Employee and Domestic Violence – Occupational Health and Safety Act

Status: Accepted in Part

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Government of Alberta define what is meant by “social well-being” of an employee within the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and the responsibilities of an employer with regard to “domestic violence or suspicion of domestic violence” within the OHSA.

DEVELOPMENTS: The Government of Alberta response indicates that although “social well-being” is now included in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), it is not specifically defined. As monitoring and identifying risks to social well-being can often be much more difficult than physical aspects of health and safety, employers (including municipalities) may face significant difficulties in balancing the need to be aware of situations which may compromise social well-being with the need to respect the privacy of their employees, even within the workplace. For employers to effectively monitor the social well-being of their employees, further guidance is needed from the Government of Alberta.

The Government of Alberta response is effective in clarifying how domestic violence is linked to the workplace and employer. Clarifying that this is a valid consideration in health and safety planning will help to support safe workplaces. However, like the comment above, guidance on how municipalities can appropriately monitor their workplace for risks of domestic violence without infringing on employee property would be appreciated.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Accepted in Part**, and will continue to advocate on greater clarity around defining “social well-being.”

Resolution 5-18S

Provincial Government Consultation and Communication Protocol with Municipalities

Status: Intent Not Met

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) appeal to the Government of Alberta to establish and maintain a uniform consultation and communication protocol with municipal elected officials which is applicable to all provincial bodies;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that through this consultation and communication protocol, the Government of Alberta recognizes and acknowledges the legislated significance of municipal elected officials, and that the Government of Alberta engage municipalities openly and transparently to provide input and feedback on the consultation and communication protocol from inception through to implementation.

DEVELOPMENTS: This resolution requests a uniform approach to gathering direct input from municipal elected officials on issues that impact municipalities, regardless of ministry. In endorsing this resolution,

RMA members have indicated that current the quality of provincial consultation with municipalities varies widely, and a consistent approach is needed to ensure the municipal voice is heard.

Recently, RMA has experienced several cases in which government officials leading consultations or changes to legislation and policy in certain areas were unaware of changes underway in other areas of government that, when combined, would have a cumulative impact on municipalities. RMA and its members have also been frustrated recently by embargoed or confidential consultation processes, during which RMA was not permitted to provide updates to members or solicit their input. These embargoed consultations have contributed to reduced trust and credibility in the consultation process on the part of some RMA members.

RMA assigns this resolution a status of **Intent Not Met** and will continue to work with the Government of Alberta to improve the consultation process with municipalities.

CONTRIBUTORS

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta wishes to thank the Board of Directors members who provided content, input, and advice to this Report Card:

- ◆ Paul McLauchlin, President
- ◆ Kara Westerlund, Vice President
- ◆ Jason Schneider, Director, District 1
- ◆ Amber Link, Director, District 2
- ◆ Kathy Rooyakkers, Director, District 3
- ◆ Tom Burton, Director, District 4
- ◆ Soren Odegard, Director, District 5

Acknowledgements also to RMA staff who worked to produce this report:

- ◆ Gerald Rhodes, Executive Director
- ◆ Tasha Blumenthal, Director of External Relations and Advocacy
- ◆ Wyatt Skovron, Senior Policy Advisor
- ◆ Alex Mochid, Policy Advisor
- ◆ Warren Noga, Policy Advisor