

Rural Landscapes

Rural landscapes form the backbone of Alberta’s environmental stewardship and energy future. Rural municipalities are responsible for providing municipal governance to approximately 85% of land in Alberta, and therefore rural municipal land use planning decisions have a tremendous impact on the province’s landscape. RMA champions policies that enable economic development while safeguarding land and water resources, strengthening climate resilience, and ensuring energy development occurs responsibly and sustainably.

What is RMA’s position on the importance of rural landscapes?

- ◆ Policies must protect prime agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas while enabling energy and industrial development that aligns with local land use priorities. Policies must balance food security, biodiversity, and economic diversification, ensuring rural municipalities retain local autonomy over decisions in their jurisdictions.
- ◆ RMA supports provincial programs and funding that help rural municipalities prepare for and respond to climate impacts such as drought, flooding, and extreme weather. This includes investment in water security, infrastructure upgrades, and planning tools that strengthen long-term resilience in relation to unique rural risks. Water is a critical resource for rural communities and industries.
- ◆ RMA members require adequate provincial investment in water infrastructure, watershed resiliency programs, and collaborative water-sharing agreements to address increasing drought risk and ensure long-term sustainability for agriculture and rural development. This includes funding for water infrastructure that specifically supports non-residential development.
- ◆ RMA promotes mandatory reclamation security for all energy projects, renewable and non-renewable to prevent environmental liabilities and protect rural landscapes. To achieve this,

Rural Landscapes in Context

- ◆ Alberta added 3,500 MW of renewable energy capacity in recent years, primarily in rural areas, creating local economic benefits as well as land-use conflicts and reclamation liabilities
- ◆ Extreme weather events are projects to increase municipal infrastructure costs by 20% to 30% over the next decade without climate adaptation measures.
- ◆ Alberta has over 170,000 inactive or orphaned oil and gas wells, posing significant reclamation challenges.

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reclamation processes and regulatory roles clearly defined. This ensures municipalities are not exposed to unnecessary risk and that industry remains fully accountable for meeting reclamation obligations.

- ◆ RMA advocates for practical climate solutions that reduce emissions without burdening rural municipalities or undermining economic growth. Investments in technologies and programs that cut greenhouse gases are essential, but regulations must reflect rural realities and provide equitable access to funding. RMA rejects policies that impose excessive costs or unrealistic reporting requirements and works with partners such as Emissions Reduction Alberta (ERA) and the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC) to achieve meaningful results while protecting rural economic competitiveness.

Why are rural landscape-related issues relevant to rural municipalities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities host the majority of Alberta's industrial development, including oil, gas, forestry and renewables. Municipal land use planning ensures that these industries continue to grow in rural areas while preserving agricultural land and protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
- ◆ Climate-related risks such as drought and flooding directly affect the agriculture industry, which is crucial to both local and provincial economic growth. Alberta's agriculture sector faces increasing drought risk, threatening \$10 billion in annual GDP, which underscores the need for municipal climate adaptation and water security strategies.
- ◆ Provincial and federal environmental policies influence municipal planning and development decisions. Compliance requirements can impose disproportionate costs on rural municipalities if not designed with rural realities in mind, affecting local budgets and service delivery.
- ◆ Renewable energy development creates economic diversification opportunities but also introduces land-use conflicts, reclamation liabilities, and visual and agricultural impacts. With 3,500 MW of renewable capacity added in recent years, rural municipalities must be consulted on approvals and reclamation security policy to protect local interests.
- ◆ Water is a critical resource for rural communities and industries. Increasing drought frequency and competing demands require collaborative water-sharing agreements and provincial investment in water infrastructure. RMA supports programs like the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program to strengthen resilience.

Who does RMA partner with to advance the rural perspective on rural landscapes?

- ◆ Agricultural Service Board Provincial Committee and the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen: These collaborations help protect prime farmland, manage invasive species, and promote soil and water conservation, ensuring rural landscapes remain productive and sustainable.
- ◆ Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC): RMA collaborates with MCCAC to implement emissions reduction and energy efficiency programs that help municipalities meet climate goals while maintaining economic competitiveness.
- ◆ Alberta Water Council (AWC) and the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA): RMA collaborates with AWC and CASA to advance Alberta's Water for Life strategy and bring the rural municipal voice to projects of interest to RMA members. Through these multi-stakeholder forums, RMA brings

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municipal priorities into projects that protect water resources, improve drought resiliency, and support long-term planning.

- ◆ Alberta Plastics Recycling Association (APRA): RMA works with APRA to promote agricultural plastics recycling and reduce waste in rural landscapes. As a partner in APRA's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) initiative, RMA helps ensure municipal perspectives are included in developing province-wide recycling programs. This collaboration supports the collection and recycling of agricultural plastics, prevents pollution, and advances circular economy practices that benefit rural communities and the environment.

What are RMA's current priorities on rural landscapes?

Water Management

- ◆ RMA is actively engaged in ongoing advocacy to strengthen Alberta's *Water Act*, ensuring that municipal interests are reflected in water allocation, licensing, and conservation policies. This work supports long-term water security and sustainable land use planning.
- ◆ RMA continues to advocate for increased funding and streamlined approvals under the Alberta Municipal Water/Wastewater Partnership (AMWWP) to ensure rural communities have reliable water and wastewater systems. This includes addressing aging infrastructure and supporting regional collaboration for cost-effective service delivery.

Wildfire Working Group

- ◆ Through the Wildfire Working Group, RMA developed recommendations to strengthen wildfire prevention, emergency response, and recovery strategies. These efforts aim to protect rural landscapes and reduce municipal liability.
- ◆ Municipalities outside the Forest Protection Area (FPA) are responsible for responding to wildfires. For many RMA members, this means they are required to prepare to respond to large scale wildfires, including being responsible for the associated costs.

Mature Asset Strategy (MAS)

- ◆ RMA is working with provincial partners to advance the Mature Asset Strategy, which addresses the growing challenge of aging energy infrastructure. The goal is to ensure clear industry accountability for reclamation and reduce environmental and financial risks to municipalities.
- ◆ RMA is advocating for stronger regulatory requirements and enforcement to manage invasive weeds on inactive and abandoned well sites. This protects agricultural productivity and prevents the spread of invasive species across rural landscapes.

For more information visit: rmaalberta.com