

POSITION STATEMENT

June 26, 2026

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 local municipal decision-making that balances economic development while safeguarding land and water resources, strengthening climate resilience, and ensuring energy and industrial development occurs responsibly and sustainably.

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

- ◆ Provincial legislation and policies must recognize the important role that municipalities play in protecting prime agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas while enabling energy and industrial development that aligns with local land use priorities. Rural land use planning balances food security, biodiversity, and economic diversification, and reflect local perspectives and priorities.
- ◆ 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 specified renewable and non-renewable resource developments under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* to prevent

Rural Landscapes in Context

- ◆ Alberta added over 4,500 MW of renewable energy capacity between 2021 and 2025, primarily in rural areas, creating local economic benefits as well as land-use conflicts and reclamation liabilities
- ◆ Extreme weather events are projected 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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environmental liabilities and protect rural landscapes. To achieve this, reclamation processes and regulatory roles must be 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 and strengthen local resilience 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.

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 4,500 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 from new and existing industries 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.
- ◆ Provincial Fire Liaison Committee (PFLC): RMA participates in the PFLC to support enhanced communication and collaboration across Alberta's fire service to bolster public safety and protect rural communities and landscapes.
- ◆ 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

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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. Changes to the *Water Act* include the introduction of a new category of inter-basin water transfers and additional monitoring and reporting requirements. RMA continues to oppose changes that will increase the use of inter-basin transfers.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Increased use of fresh water for fracking, and the lack of clear regulatory parameters as to approval and monitoring of such use, are posing significant risks to local water resources across the province. RMA is seeking clarity from the Government of Alberta and Alberta Energy Regulator on how industry fracking activities are approved and monitored on both a case-by-case basis and in terms of cumulative impacts.

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.
- ◆ RMA is engaged in ongoing advocacy to ensure implementation of the Alberta Wildfire Mitigation Strategy accounts for the rural municipal perspective. This includes ensuring that prevention, mitigation and response activities are accompanied by technical and financial support to municipalities in FPA and non-FPA regions.

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 continues to advocate for stronger regulatory requirements and enforcement to manage invasive weeds on inactive and abandoned well sites, including periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the *Oil and Gas Conservation Regulation*. This protects agricultural productivity and prevents the spread of invasive species across rural landscapes.