

Natural Resources Conservation Board

Business Plan 2012-2015

THE BOARD

The Natural Resources Conservation Board is an independent, quasi-judicial and regulatory agency of the Government of Alberta. It is accountable to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and is responsible for reviews of natural resource projects under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and regulating Alberta's confined feeding industry under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.

The *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* is the responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development.

The *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* is the responsibility of Agriculture and Rural Development. A 2006 memorandum of understanding between the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Natural Resources Conservation Board describes the purpose of the act and the governance of the NRCB with respect to the act.

<i>Vision</i>	To be a respected decision-maker, exemplifying integrity and foresight in the best interests of Alberta.
<i>Mission</i>	As a quasi-judicial agency, the NRCB makes impartial and knowledge-based decisions across two distinct mandates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the <i>Natural Resources Conservation Board Act</i>, the NRCB decides if natural resource projects are in the public interest, considering social, environmental and economic effects, and • Under the <i>Agricultural Operation Practices Act</i>, the NRCB fulfills application and compliance responsibilities, administers and advances policies, and conducts board reviews for confined feeding operations.
<i>Values</i>	In achieving our mission, we honour the NRCB's core values of integrity, fairness, respect, excellence and service.

LINKS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA'S 2012-15 STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLANS

The NRCB's business plan is aligned with and supports the government's goals and priorities as outlined in *Budget 2012*, the *Government of Alberta Strategic Plan*. The NRCB's mandates to ensure responsible development and management of Alberta's resources and agricultural industry under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* directly support priority three of *Budget 2012*: "Advancing Alberta's World-leading Resource Stewardship". Developing our natural resources responsibly and protecting and growing our markets.

Advancing Alberta's World-leading Resource Stewardship . Goals six and seven: "Innovative and Responsible Resource Management" and "Build Relationships and Markets"

NRCB reviews under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and its regulation of confined feeding operations under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* support goals six and seven by ensuring sustainable development of the province's resource sectors and responding to public expectations for environmental management.

The NRCB will also contribute to the goal six and seven mandates, by supporting implementation of Water for Life initiatives, facilitating Aboriginal participation in natural resource project reviews under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, and making its expertise in environmental risk-screening tools available to Environment and Water.

Sustainable Resource Development

Goal one: Integrated policy and planning guide sound stewardship of Alberta's public lands and renewable natural resources.

1.5 Focus on the Alberta Land-use Framework strategy of regional land-use plan development and deliverables for effective regional land-use plan implementation.

- The NRCB works on cross government initiatives to support implementation of the Land-use Framework.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Goal two: Environmental stewardship

- The NRCB regulates Alberta's confined feeding industry under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*, to ensure that economic development of the industry occurs in an environmentally sustainable manner, and works with stakeholders to address environmental issues at confined feeding operations.

SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Protecting groundwater and surface water quality

Alberta's water resources are a priority for the Government of Alberta. Managed use for long term sustainability is a critical concern in some regions of the province, in particular in the South Saskatchewan watershed. Protection of groundwater and surface water quality is vital for a healthy population and economy.

The NRCB continues to play an important role in the protection of this important resource under both the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*. The NRCB will continue to:

- participate on the Water for Life Cross-Ministry Steering Group, which supports important Water for Life initiatives such as riparian protection and responses to non-point pollution sources
- provide support to Agriculture and Rural Development on a research project that will increase understanding of the effects of manure on groundwater quality
- refine its risk management approach for assessing the impact of confined feeding operations on water quality. Technical guidelines are being developed in cooperation with industry and government departments to ensure these risk based approaches are scientifically defensible and consistent

The NRCB increasingly employs science-based approaches for compliance and permitting functions under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*. This will continue. The evaluation of potential impacts to water quality and other environmental impacts requires NRCB staff to commit to continuously improving their technical and scientific competencies. The NRCB will continue to support staff with opportunities for learning in 2012-13.

Land use pressures

Under both acts, the board's mandate requires it to address issues relating to competing uses of land. In particular, the high density of the Edmonton to Lethbridge corridor will continue to pose challenges for permitting and effective complaint response under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.

Under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*, the NRCB will respond to this challenge by continuing to work closely with municipalities and operators on these issues, and to communicate NRCB policies, programs and permitting processes to all parties.

Under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, the NRCB must ensure that natural resource projects are developed on the basis of a sustainable model that is protective of the environment and that respects public interests, including Aboriginal involvement.

Managing land use pressures remains a priority for the Government of Alberta. The NRCB will ensure that natural resource project reviews are consistent with land use plans developed under the Land-use Framework as they are finalized and approved by Cabinet. The NRCB will continue to provide its expertise to the Government of Alberta for the development of regional land use plans.

Communication with stakeholders

The NRCB makes communication and consultation with stakeholders and its regulatory partners under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* an ongoing priority. Direct communication with operators can be challenging given incomplete operator listings and contact information.

The NRCB will continue to communicate directly with producers through newsletters, involvement at industry events and agricultural trade shows. It will consult with stakeholder groups to enhance its programs and policies for increased consistency and better understanding of environmental risk, and to ensure all operations are included in the NRCB's confined feeding operation database.

Economic impacts

Global competitiveness for market access and feed costs will drive Alberta's livestock industry in the future. However, in 2012-13 the NRCB does not expect a significant change in the number of applications for new or expanding operations. Excess capacity in the hog and beef sectors is expected to be used to meet new market demands. Alberta's dairy, poultry and egg industries are supply managed and are expected to be relatively stable in 2012-13; however, access to quota for expansion in Alberta is a continued challenge.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following strategic priorities are identified for 2012-15:

1. **Risk based approach to assist in regulating confined feeding operations**
 - In consultation with the Policy Advisory Group, continue to use an environmental risk based approach for compliance and enforcement functions for confined feeding operations and for the review of applications for new or expanding operations

Linkage:
NRCB goal two

2. **Cross government initiatives**
 - Continue to support priority Government of Alberta initiatives such as Water for Life, the Clean Air Strategy and the Land-use Framework. Coordinate with government ministries and stakeholders on the development of operational policy and technical guidelines to ensure the consistent delivery of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*

Linkage:
NRCB goals one and two

3. **Confined feeding operation database enhancements**
 - Validate and enhance the accuracy of the NRCB's confined feeding operation database

Linkage:
NRCB goal two

CORE BUSINESSES: GOALS, STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Core Business One: Board reviews and appeals under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*

Goal one Natural Resources Conservation Board reviews and hearings result in balanced decisions and are conducted in a manner that is effective, fair and transparent.

What it means The Natural Resources Conservation Board conducts reviews of proposed natural resource projects under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, and hears reviews of approval officer and inspector decisions under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* for confined feeding operations. In all cases, the board conducts its activities recognizing that timeliness of reviews is a key element of an effective, fair and transparent process.

Natural Resources Conservation Board Act reviews are conducted to determine whether proposed natural resource projects are in the public interest, having regard for their environmental, social and economic impact. Reviews are mandated for non-energy mining, forestry, water management, or recreation projects for which an environmental impact assessment is required under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*. Additional projects may also be referred to the board by Order in Council.

Under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*, the board must determine whether to grant a review based on the information provided by directly affected parties. Should the board grant a review, it may hold an oral, electronic or written review. The board may also recommend mediation.

- Strategies**
- 1.a Update the *Board Administrative Procedures Regulation* in consultation with NRCB staff and stakeholders.
 - 1.b Proactively provide opportunities for all participants to understand NRCB review and hearing processes through guides, public information sessions, and prompt and accurate response to direct inquiries.
 - 1.c Identify critical scientific and technical issues raised in applications under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, and determine relevant information needed to ensure that reviews are effective, fair and transparent.
 - 1.d Ensure that natural resource project reviews are consistent with regional land use plans as they are developed.

Performance measures

Efficiency of review process	20012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Percentage of Natural Resources Conservation Board decisions issued within 80 working days of the conclusion of reviews under the <i>Natural Resources Conservation Board Act</i> and within 30 working days of the conclusion of hearings under the <i>Agricultural Operation Practices Act</i>	100%	100%	100%

Core Business Two: Regulation under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*

Goal two Effective, efficient and consistently-applied approval and compliance processes for confined feeding operations and manure management.

What it means The NRCB is the named authority to regulate confined feeding operations in Alberta under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*. The purpose of the act is described in the 2006 memorandum of understanding between Sustainable Resource Development, Agriculture and Rural Development and the NRCB: %o ensure that Alberta's confined feeding industry grows in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner.+The NRCB consults with the multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Group on priority issues and operational policy development, and with regional land use plans as they are developed.

The NRCB's field services division ensures that new and expanding confined feeding operations meet the legislated requirements of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*, delivers the NRCB's risk based compliance program for groundwater, ensures that existing operations are compliant with the act and their permits, and investigates and responds to complaints.

- Strategies**
- 2.a Continue to use an environmental risk based approach for regulating confined feeding operations.
 - 2.b Enhance communication with key stakeholders on priority NRCB initiatives, policies and programs that directly affect them.
 - 2.c Continue to develop operational policies in consultation with the Policy Advisory Group to support consistent delivery of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.
 - 2.d Continue to improve the confined feeding operation database by expanding and verifying the data to better coordinate approval, compliance and enforcement activities under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.
 - 2.e Continue to co-chair the Policy Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Group with Agriculture and Rural Development and work with stakeholders on development of operational policy and technical guidelines to support delivery of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.
 - 2.f Continue to support other departments and agencies studying the effects of manure collection and storage facilities on groundwater.

Performance measures

Efficiency of permitting process	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Percentage of decisions issued within 65 working days from the date the application is determined to be complete	85%	85%	85%
Complaint resolution	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Percentage of complaint files resolved or requiring no further action within 90 days	95%	95%	95%

Organizational capacity

Successful delivery of the NRCB's two core mandates under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* requires an effective and responsive organization, with appropriate staffing, expertise and technical resources. Goal three supports the NRCB's mandates under both acts.

Goal three The Natural Resources Conservation Board has the expertise and technical resources required to fulfill its mandates under both the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*.

What it means Staff and board members of the Natural Resources Conservation Board work with diverse issues and need detailed technical knowledge. Staff and board members are highly trained, competent and motivated to deliver high standards of service. The NRCB can contract expertise to supplement internal resources on an as-needed basis.

The NRCB continues its commitment to providing orientation programs for new staff and ongoing technical training for its staff and board members.

The NRCB also remains committed to effective internal communications, including in-person communication, conference calls, video conferencing, intranet development and cross-division meetings and bench-marking exercises. This emphasis will continue to build team work and a shared understanding throughout the organization of its values and mandate.

Strategies

- 3.a Continue to provide appropriate funding and opportunities for staff training in areas of required knowledge.
- 3.b Promote awareness of programs and resources available to help employees deal with work and personal pressures.
- 3.c Maintain and continuously improve internal information technology tools to support more efficient sharing of information among staff, including populating and expanding use of the technical document repository, and creation of an image bank.
- 3.d Provide opportunities for education and training to support the use of science based risk assessment tools.
- 3.e Promote opportunities for face to face communication between managers, staff and divisions, including use of video conferencing, regularly scheduled division conference calls and training sessions.
- 3.f Maintain the NRCB's capacity to provide technical expertise through a variety of means, including using contracted experts to support both acts as required.

Performance measures

NRCB employee satisfaction	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Per cent of staff who express satisfaction on survey results	75%	75 %	75 %
NRCB employees have appropriate training	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Per cent of staff who participate in training programs	90%	90%	90%

BUDGET INFORMATION

The 2012-15 budget is based on the strategic priorities and strategies identified in the business plan.

EXPENSE BY CORE BUSINESS

	Comparable			2012-13 Estimate	2013-14 Target	2014-15 Target
	2010-11 Actual	2011-12 Budget	2011-12 Forecast			
AOPA and NRCBA Mandates						
Board: Reviews under NRCBA and AOPA	\$1,137,611	\$1,253,657	\$1,253,657	\$1,327,658	\$1,327,658	\$1,327,658
Operations: Regulation under AOPA and support for the NRCBA applications	4,879,070	4,777,343	4,777,343	5,121,342	5,121,342	5,121,342
Total Expenses	\$6,016,681¹	\$6,031,000	\$6,031,000	\$6,449,000	\$6,449,000	\$6,449,000

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Comparable			2012-13 Estimate	2013-14 Target	2014-15 Target
	2010-11 Actual	2011-12 Budget	2011-12 Forecast			
Revenues						
Transfer from Sustainable Resource Development	\$5,652,000	\$5,987,000	\$5,987,000	\$6,405,000	\$6,405,000	\$6,405,000
Miscellaneous Investment & other revenue	44,967	11,000	36,000	31,000	31,000	31,000
Total Revenues	\$5,696,967	\$5,998,000	\$6,023,000	\$6,436,000	\$6,436,000	\$6,436,000
Expenses						
Personnel	4,665,848	4,879,372	4,879,372	5,360,130	5,360,130	5,360,130
Supplies and Services	929,593	1,101,628	1,101,628	1,058,870	1,058,870	1,058,870
Amortization	30,433	50,000	50,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Total Expenses	\$5,625,874	\$6,031,000	\$6,031,000	\$6,449,000	\$6,449,000	\$6,449,000
Net Operating Results	\$71,093	(\$33,000)	(\$8,000)	(\$13,000)	(\$13,000)	(\$13,000)

¹ Includes \$382,426 leased cost for office space paid by Alberta Infrastructure and \$8,381 for shared services from the ERCB. These amounts are not included in the Statement of Operations.

Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Board at the following offices. Dial 310-0000 to be connected toll free.

Edmonton Office

4th Floor, Sterling Place, 9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2N2
T 780-422-1977 F 780-427-0607

Calgary Office

19th Floor, Centennial Place, 250 - 5 Street SW
Calgary, AB T2P 0R4
T 403-297-8269 F 403-662-3994

Fairview Office

Provincial Building, 213, 10209 - 109 Street
Box 159, Fairview, AB T0H 1L0
T 780-835-7111 F 780-835-3259

Lethbridge Office

Agriculture Centre, 100, 5401 - 1 Avenue S
Lethbridge, AB T1J 4V6
T 403-381-5166 F 403-381-5806

Morinville Office

Provincial Building, 201, 10008 - 107 Street
Morinville, AB T8R 1L3
T 780-939-1212 F 780-939-3194

Red Deer Office

Provincial Building, 303, 4920 - 51 Street
Red Deer, AB T4N 6K8
T 403-340-5241 F 403-340-5599

NRCB complaint line (AOPA):

1-866-383-6722

Email: info@nrcb.gov.ab.ca

Web address: www.nrcb.gov.ab.ca

Copies of the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* can be obtained from the Queen's Printer at www.qp.gov.ab.ca or through the NRCB website.

April 12, 2012