

Natural Resources Conservation Board

Business Plan 2021-24

The Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) is an independent, quasi-judicial, and regulatory agency of the Government of Alberta. It is accountable to the Minister of Environment and Parks and is responsible for reviews of natural resource projects under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* (NRCBA) and for regulating Alberta’s confined feeding industry under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* (AOPA).

On March 19, 2020, the NRCB closed its offices in response to COVID-19. Employees continue to work remotely and to deliver on the NRCB mandates to conduct public interest reviews of proposed major natural resource projects, to conduct reviews and written hearings under AOPA, and to process permit applications and respond to complaints relating to confined feeding operations.

The NRCBA is the responsibility of Environment and Parks. AOPA is the responsibility of Agriculture and Forestry. A 2006 memorandum of understanding between the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Chair of the NRCB, and the Chief Executive Officer of the NRCB describes the purpose of AOPA, and governance and mandate responsibilities.

In working closely with the ministries of Environment and Parks and Agriculture and Forestry, the NRCB also supports and prioritizes those ministries’ desired outcomes as defined in their respective business plans. For Environment and Parks these outcomes are: environment and ecosystem health and integrity support Albertans’ well-being; sustainable economic development is achieved within environmental capacity; and Albertans and visitors have enjoyable and safe experiences where they live, work, and play in Alberta’s outdoors. For Agriculture and Forestry the outcomes include: increased investments, expanded trade, and enhanced business development in Alberta’s agriculture and forest sectors supports economic growth and recovery in Alberta; Alberta’s competitive business environment provides a strong foundation for resilient agriculture and forest sectors; and robust assurance systems and effective resource management practices support agriculture and forest sector success and protect public safety.

The NRCB meets its responsibilities efficiently and effectively. It values teamwork and internal communication, and ensures its staff has the expertise, technical resources, and ongoing training to provide excellent service. The NRCB also takes pride in meeting high standards of public accountability through its financial reporting, and compliance with the *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act* and the Public Agencies Governance Framework.

<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 and regulatory 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.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Natural Resources Conservation Board has identified the following strategic priorities for 2021-24:

1. Coordinate review processes with other provincial and federal review agencies of project applications under the NRCBA to ensure reviews are as efficient and effective as possible.
2. Continue to pursue and deliver on the ministry red tape reduction targets in collaboration with Agriculture and Forestry as applied to AOPA and to NRCB operational policies that assist in the delivery of AOPA.
3. Continue to improve the efficiency of the AOPA permit application and compliance response processes.
4. Fulfill the NRCB's commitment to provide staff with on-going Indigenous education and awareness training.

CORE BUSINESSES: GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Core Business One: Public interest reviews of proposed natural resource projects under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and reviews of approval officer and inspector decisions under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*

Goal one

Natural Resources Conservation Board reviews and hearings are conducted in a manner that is effective, fair, transparent, and timely.

What it means

The Board conducts reviews of proposed natural resource projects under the NRCBA to determine whether the projects are in the public interest, having regard for their environmental, social, and economic impact. Projects subject to review under the NRCBA include forest industry, recreation/tourism, metallic or industrial mineral, and water management projects. Projects may also be referred to the Board by Order in Council. Reviews consider the consistency of proposed projects with regional plans that have been completed and publicly released under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*.

Under AOPA, the Board must determine whether to grant a request for a review of an NRCB permitting or compliance decision. Reviews granted by the Board may be conducted in person or in writing. When conducting a review, the Board may also recommend mediation. The Board must have regard for the land use provisions of municipal development plans, but is not bound by the provisions.

Strategies

- 1.a Improve Board review processes under the NRCBA and AOPA:
 - Coordinate NRCBA natural resource project review processes with other provincial and federal review agencies to ensure reviews are as efficient and effective as possible. This involves maintaining a strong role in developing the terms of reference for environmental impact assessments to ensure that all relevant information is included in the project review process.
 - Investigate further red tape reduction opportunities and efficiencies to streamline the request for review process under AOPA.
- 1.b Ensure the NRCB continues to meet its consultation obligations with Indigenous peoples whose rights may be adversely affected by regulatory activities of the NRCB.
- 1.c Proactively provide opportunities for all participants to understand NRCBA and AOPA review and hearing processes through guides; public information sessions; and prompt, accurate responses to direct inquiries.
- 1.d Continue to evaluate and refine access to the complete public record for public interest determinations under the NRCBA and reviews under AOPA.

Performance measures

Efficiency of review processes	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
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>	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of Natural Resources Conservation Board decisions issued within 30 working days of the conclusion of reviews under the <i>Agricultural Operation Practices Act</i>	100%	100%	100%

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

Goal two

Effective and efficient permitting and compliance processes for confined feeding operations and management of livestock manure.

What it means

The NRCB regulates Alberta's confined feeding operations (CFOs) and the management of manure under AOPA. It seeks advice from the multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Group on priority issues, including operational policies, to ensure consistent and effective delivery of AOPA.

Confined feeding operations must comply with the requirements of AOPA. The NRCB uses a risk-based approach to ensure that operations are compliant with their permits, to investigate and respond to complaints, and to initiate enforcement action as required. Permitting decisions consider the consistency of permit applications with land use provisions of municipal development plans, and compliance with regional plans that have been completed and publicly released under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. The NRCB makes timely, focused communication with confined feeding operators and other stakeholders an ongoing priority.

- Strategies**
- 2.a Assist Agriculture and Forestry with meeting its red tape reduction targets as applied to AOPA and NRCB operational policies that are intended to clarify AOPA requirements.
 - 2.b Continue to improve efficiencies and optimize business processes to support AOPA delivery, and engage the Policy Advisory Group in relevant discussions.
 - 2.c Maintain an open dialogue with municipalities about permitting requirements in AOPA; explain how the NRCB assesses municipal land use planning provisions when making permitting decisions; and explain the NRCB's compliance and enforcement processes.
 - 2.d Promote consistent understanding of regulatory requirements under AOPA for operators, consultants, and other stakeholders.
 - 2.e Sustain efforts to educate CFO operators and other stakeholders about compliance requirements, including unauthorized construction, application of manure on frozen or snow covered land, and record keeping for manure application.
 - 2.f Maintain communication and conduct follow-up inspections with CFO operations that have annual permit condition requirements to ensure any potential risks to the environment are being effectively monitored.
 - 2.g Continue to collaborate with government departments and educational institutions on research to better understand the environmental impacts of confined feeding operations.
 - 2.h Participate in producer meetings, Rural Municipalities of Alberta conferences, and other relevant events to better understand opportunities, challenges, and concerns related to confined feeding operations.

Performance measures

Efficiency of permitting process	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Percentage of decisions issued within 65 working days from the date the application is determined to be complete	85%	85%	85%
Complaint resolution	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Percentage of complaint files resolved or requiring no further action, within 60 days	95%	95%	95%

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

NRCB staff and Board members work with diverse and complex technical issues and are highly trained, creating a culture that ensures the delivery of a high standard of service. The NRCB is committed to providing ongoing opportunities for training to maintain a high level of expertise and to provide the technical resources required to support the work of its staff and Board.

The NRCB is also committed to achieving excellence in its financial accountability, its provision of clear internal policy and procedures, and its support for a positive work environment.

- Strategies**
1. Maintain and operationalize a COVID-19 pandemic business continuity plan, reinforcing current risk management systems and strategy.
 2. Develop and implement a flexible and responsive post-pandemic work arrangement policy.
 3. Develop a strategic worksite accommodations plan.
 4. Continue to provide in-house training and support external training opportunities in areas of required professional development, including education and training on Aboriginal issues as outlined in call to action 57 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report and endorsed by the Government of Alberta for all Alberta public servants.
 5. Continue to optimize the NRCB occupational health and safety policy and program to maintain a healthy and productive workplace.
 6. Develop the appropriate systems and procedures to implement the approved NRCB records retention and disposition schedule.
 7. Maintain and continuously improve essential infrastructure including:
 - a. improving the functionality of the confined feeding operation database, and
 - b. updating computers and other electronic devices issued to staff in accordance with the NRCB's commitment to information technology evergreening.

BUDGET INFORMATION

The 2021-24 budget is based on the strategic priorities and strategies identified in the business plan.

EXPENSE BY CORE BUSINESS

	Comparable			2021-22 Estimate	2022-23 Target	2023-24 Target
	2019-20 Actual	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 Forecast			
AOPA and NRCBA Mandates						
Board Reviews & Hearings	\$1,244,464	\$1,066,000	\$1,066,000	\$1,154,000	\$1,154,000	\$1,154,000
Regulating Confined Feeding Operations	4,572,432	4,358,000	4,358,000	4,270,000	4,270,000	4,270,000
Total Expenses	\$5,816,896¹	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Comparable			2021-22 Estimate	2022-23 Target	2023-24 Target
	2019-20 Actual	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 Forecast			
Revenues						
Transfer from Environment & Parks	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000
Miscellaneous Investment & Other Revenue	88,760	71,000	71,000	71,000	71,000	71,000
Total Revenues	\$5,485,760	\$5,468,000	\$5,468,000	\$5,468,000	\$5,468,000	\$5,468,000
Expenses						
Salaries, Wages & Employee Benefits	4,611,984	4,593,465	4,593,465	4,522,076	4,522,076	4,522,076
Supplies and Services	737,006	800,535	812,775	891,984	887,716	883,335
Amortization	38,772	30,000	17,760	9,940	14,208	18,589
Total Expenses	\$5,387,762	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000
Annual Operating Surplus (Deficit)	\$97,998	\$44,000	\$44,000	\$44,000	\$44,000	\$44,000

1. Includes \$429,134 leased cost for office space paid by Alberta Infrastructure. This amount is not included in the Statement of Operations.