

# **Wetland Education Network Pilot**

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## **Agriculture Action Group Summary Report**

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Prepared for: North American Waterfowl Management Plan Partnership

*We wish to extend a special thanks to the following individuals who participated in the Agriculture Action Group, providing their feedback and engaging in the collaborative sessions:*

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Government of Alberta (GoA) has implemented a province-wide Wetland Policy in order to address the great deal of wetland loss that has been occurring across Alberta for decades. The policy, which has a goal to “*conserve, restore, protect and manage Alberta’s wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society, and the economy*”, includes both regulatory and non-regulatory means. While the emphasis of the Wetland Policy is on the regulatory aspects of wetland management, there is also an acknowledgement of the role that wetland education and outreach will play for the policy to reach its goal successfully.

There are numerous wetland educators throughout Alberta, however education and outreach efforts have been occurring in an independent and non-coordinated fashion. The Alberta North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) Partnership recognized the value in having wetland educators work collaboratively, and created the multi-stakeholder Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group in order to create a conceptual framework for a coordinated wetland education and outreach program.

The conceptual framework created by the Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group included an annual meeting for the wetland education community, a steering committee for future collaborations, and sector working groups (hereby referred to as Action Groups). The purpose of these meetings and groups being to identify wetland education needs, tools and products to improve the wetland education and outreach efforts in Alberta.

In order to follow through with the conceptual framework designed by the Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group, a pilot was created to gather each of the four Action Groups together for two half-day meetings a piece, to examine the wetland education and outreach needs of the particular sectors. In order to focus the meeting content and provide the opportunity to find synergies across the Action Groups, the members of each group were asked to concentrate on basic wetland education (i.e. basic wetland identification and function), and avoid some of the other topics of wetland education (e.g. understanding the Wetland Policy, roles and responsibility of specific groups, technical wetland topics, etc.).

The groups were populated and the process was facilitated by Liliium Consulting. Individual proceeding reports for each Action Group as well as a report outlining the state of wetland education and outreach in Alberta across the Action Group sectors were also performed.

This Agriculture Action Group report provides a summary of the discussions at the Agriculture Action Group meetings. The content represents the opinions of the workshop participants and experts, and not those of Liliium Consulting.

## 2.0 Agriculture Action Group Background

In order to gain the advice of individuals in the agriculture sector of Alberta on the topic of wetland education and outreach, Alberta NAWMP decided to utilize the Agriculture Working Group.

The Agriculture Working Group was established in 2016 as a result of a wetland stewardship workshop hosted by the Alberta NAWMP partnership and the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada. The working group was formed in order to address the need for greater agricultural engagement and empowerment in the realm of wetland stewardship. Alberta NAWMP assembled producer and policy groups, governments, conservation agencies and other stakeholders to participate in the Agriculture Working Group. The cross-section of individuals involved in the agriculture sector and the timing of the Agriculture Working Group created an excellent opportunity to engage the working group as the Agriculture Action Group for the Wetland Education Network pilot as well.

The Wetland Education Network content was added into the working group's existing meeting schedule and dedicated time was devoted to the Wetland Education Network during two of their meetings.

## 3.0 Meeting Objectives

The Agriculture Action Group had already met as the Agriculture Working Group before the Wetland Education Network content was added to their meetings, therefore the group members were already familiar with each other and introductions were not necessary. The Wetland Education Network outcomes were therefore able to focus on understanding the current state of wetland education in the agriculture sector as a starting point.

The intended outcomes of the Wetland Education Network portion of the Agriculture Action Group meetings were as follows:

### Meeting #1:

- gain understanding on wetland education and outreach materials currently in use in the agriculture sector; and

- gain clarity on the key audiences, products (tools/messaging) and engagement strategies to develop effective wetland education and outreach materials for the agriculture sector.

#### **Meeting #2:**

- define the who, what and how of a wetland education program for the agriculture sector in detail; and
- discuss the factors that would make a wetland education program meaningful to the agriculture sector.

### **4.0 Meeting Discussion Summaries**

Members of the Agriculture Action Group were given an overview presentation on the Wetland Education Network, with explanation of the Wetland Education Working Group and the Wetland Education Network Framework that had been created. The vision of the Wetland Education Network was expressed to Action Group members and clarity around the role of the pilot was provided. While Action Group members understood that their role was to attend two, three-hour meetings over the course of the pilot, the Alberta NAWMP Coordinator, Michael Barr, explained that with ideal circumstances and funding, there was a desire to continue with the work of the Wetland Education Network and affiliated Action Groups.

The first task for the Agriculture Action Group members was to identify where they felt their sector was on the Agriculture Literacy Ladder created by the NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group (Figure 1). They were also asked to identify any wetland education resources that were currently being used in the agriculture sector.

**Figure 1. Agriculture Literacy Ladder**

<b>Ladder Steps</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Action	I am stewarding wetlands on my property.
Skills	I know how to conserve wetlands and understand relevant legislation and best management practices
Attitudes	Wetlands are an important part of my operation.
Knowledge	Wetlands provide many goods and services that benefit agriculture.
Awareness	I have wetlands on my property.

(NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group 2016)

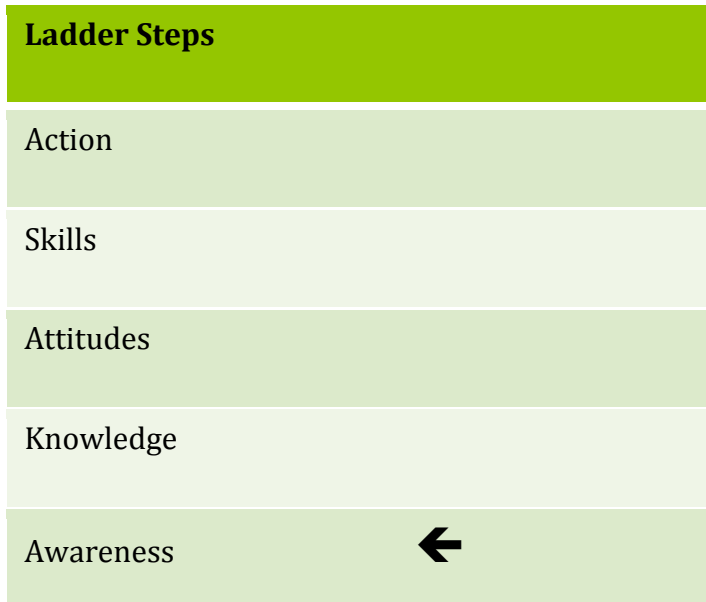
The Agriculture Action Group was then asked to move on to address the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ for the creation of a wetland education and outreach program for the agriculture sector.

The outcomes of these discussions are summarized below.

#### **4.1 Current Situation**

The Agriculture Action Group members were in agreement that there is currently a very low overall level of awareness and knowledge of wetlands in the agriculture sector. The level of awareness is often so low that producers are not even aware of whether or not they have wetlands on their property. It was therefore agreed upon that the agriculture sector as a whole would be placed on the ‘awareness’ rung of the literacy ladder (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Literacy Ladder Focus Areas for Agriculture Action Group**



#### 4.1.1 Existing Programs

The Agriculture Action Group members were asked about the existing wetland education programs in their sector. Agriculture Action Group members noted the following programs:

- Cows and Fish (although recognized as a riparian program, not specific to wetlands);
- ALUS programs (more of an incentive program than an education program);
- Fact sheet developed by Strathcona County; and
- Various best management practice manuals.

Very few of the Agriculture Action Group members seemed familiar with the above-mentioned programs, and therefore it seemed as though there was a low level of awareness of wetland education programs and materials in general. It was evident that there was not a wetland education program that was deemed effective in the agriculture sector by the Agriculture Action Group members.

#### 4.2 Key Audiences

The key agricultural audiences that were identified by the group as being important for wetland education and outreach opportunities were as follows:

- Commodity Groups,
- Producers and Landowners,
- Agriculture Fieldmen,



- Agriculture Service Boards,
- Agriculture Consultants (for crop and cattle, such as Agri-Trends), and
- Agricultural Colleges.

Commodity Groups were identified as the priority group to work with for a wetland education program, as they were noted as being trusted groups, knowledgeable to the specific circumstances of the various producer groups that were able to provide information to a large number of people in the agriculture sector.

There was also mention of working with the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) if there were a better means of having information from the group shared with producers.

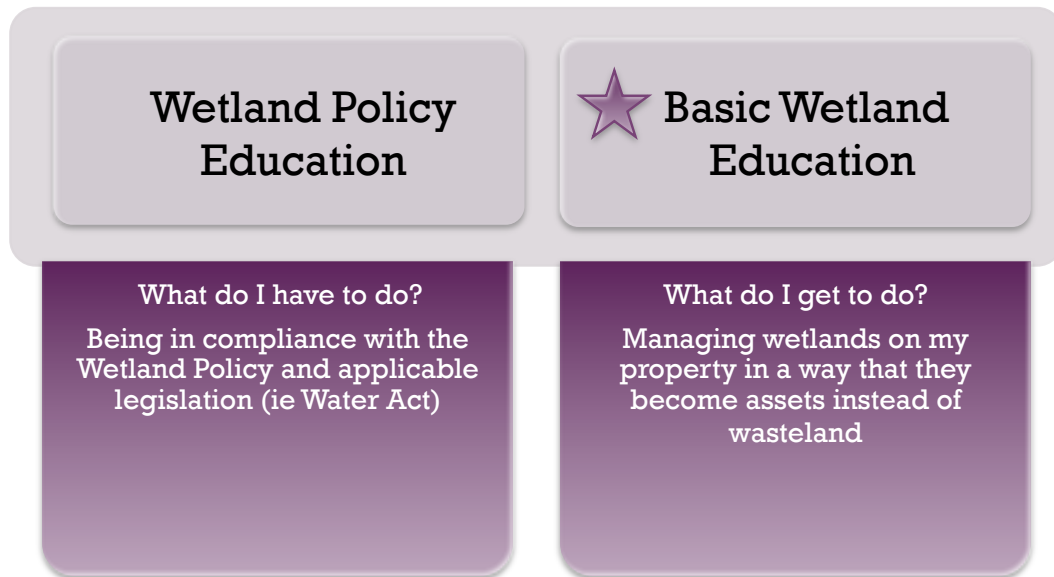
The group also felt that a wetland program for the agriculture sector should recognize key linkages with the following groups:

- Municipalities,
- Public,
- Government,
- Alberta Fish and Game Association, and
- Alberta Institute of Agrologists (AIA).

#### **4.2.1 Distinct Categories of Wetland Education for Agricultural Audiences**

During the discussion of where to focus efforts for wetland education in the agriculture sector, it became apparent that there were two main areas of education that needed to be distinguished (Figure 3). The Agriculture Action Group noted the need for a better understanding of the Wetland Policy, along with the regulations they were expected to comply with. The topic of wetland regulations was distinguished as separate from a basic wetland education topic, which would include information on wetland identification and basic information about wetland types and services wetland provide.

**Figure 3. Distinct Categories of Wetland Education for the Agriculture Sector**



Discussion around the topics of these two categories of wetland education indicated that the GoA was thought to be the best entity to deliver material around the Wetland Policy and regulation, while the basic wetland education would be better received if a neutral group that was trusted by the agriculture sector delivered it. The Wetland Education Network conversations were focused around the basic wetland education category.

#### **4.3 Product and Tool Ideas**

There was not a key idea that came forward in the Agriculture Action Group discussions that was considered to be the one product or tool that would be best suited to deliver the entire wetland education program to the agriculture sector. Instead the group came up with a suite of wetland education products and tools that would potentially be successful in raising the level of awareness of wetlands in the agriculture sector:

- Wetlands as a distinct module in the Environmental Farm Program,
- Prepared materials to send out to commodity groups (assembled from existing materials but tailored to specific commodities),
- Full balanced case presentations (full cost and benefit analysis of having wetlands on agricultural properties),

- Case studies of wetland challenges to provide to agriculture college students, and
- Award programs for shining examples of wetland retention or restoration.

These ideas are explained in more detail in section 4.4 which describes potential program delivery.

#### 4.4 Best means of delivering programs

The Agriculture Action Group came up with a host of means to deliver wetland education programs in the agriculture sector in order to raise awareness about wetlands:

- **Incentive Programs:** The agriculture industry has had success with incentive programs to encourage environmental stewardship in the past. The Agriculture Action Group felt that including wetlands as a distinct module in a successful incentive program, namely the Environmental Farm Plan, would highlight their importance, and provide a key opportunity to educate farm owners about the role wetlands can play, as well as provide financial compensation if the farm owner voluntarily retains or restores wetlands on their property as part of the program. This would also allow the education to be targeted to operations that have or had wetlands on their property (as the module would not apply if wetlands were not part of the landscape);
- **Relationship Building:** The Agriculture Action Group spoke of the need for better relationships between wetland educators and commodity groups. One means of having wetland interests at the table and building relationships was to have a wetland spokesperson attend commodity group meetings. Group members felt this would be a means of having a more engaged conversation about wetlands and allowing the communication to happen both ways to promote mutual understanding around various issues;
- **Commodity Group Communications:** The Agriculture Action Group members recognized that there are currently a lot of wetland education materials, but these materials are not getting distributed in a way that they are being received by individuals in the agriculture sector. The producers in the Agriculture Action Group noted that they receive (and mindfully read) a lot of the information that is put out through the commodity groups in the form of newsletters, magazines, etc. If wetland information could be succinctly put together to distribute through the commodity group communication channels, it would potentially be well received;

- **Presentations and Information Booths:** Giving well-rounded presentations (whole story of wetlands on agricultural land) at producer conferences (e.g. FarmTech) or having a wetland education booth at agriculture trade fairs were considered means of providing wetland education material to agriculture audiences; and
- **Involvement of Agriculture Colleges:** Involving agriculture programs at the college level was thought to be an effective means of engaging the agriculture sector prior to entrance into the work force. An idea that was well received by the Agriculture Action Group members was to create detailed case studies of wetland challenges on agriculture landscapes and have agriculture college students work on solutions as part of a project for specific course work.

The Agriculture Action Group did not feel that choosing one strategy was key to having an effective wetland education program, therefore executing the above ideas for wetland education could be prioritized and delivered, or multiple means of delivering wetland education could be done at the same time. However, a key component that would need to be built into any effective wetland education program for the agriculture industry would be relationship building, so that wetland education material would be well-received.

#### 4.5 Key Messages

There were different key messages brought forward by the Agriculture Action Group in the two meeting portions devoted to the Wetland Education Network. The first key message was a reference to the fact that the group recognized that there are two different aspects of wetland education that need to be separated (see section 4.2.1), the education toward a better understand of the Wetland Policy and regulations pertaining to wetlands, and the basic wetland education that could outline the ecosystem services provided by wetlands on an agricultural property, thereby differentiating them from perceived wastelands:

##### **“What do I have to do and what do I get to do?”**

Many of the producers in the Agriculture Action Group reflected the fact that their jobs find them mainly in the field with little time for administrative duties, including filtering through the information sent to them via email. These group members noted that it was important that wetland education materials draw the attention of producers who potentially have wetlands on their property in a way that would create enough interest to have them seek out further information:

##### **“How are wetlands relevant to my operation?”**

Finally, the Agriculture Action Group wanted to have a strong key message around ensuring they were receiving the entire story around wetlands from educators. They felt that a lot of the wetland education materials they had seen were one-sided, and that a wetland education program that was honest about costs, advantages and disadvantages of wetlands on agricultural land would have better results, as producers could then make more informed decisions about their own operations:

**“What is the whole picture when it comes to wetlands on my property?”**

These key messages (questions) really hone in on what is important to the agriculture industry, and speak to wanting to understand what is pertinent to their operations in order to make decisions in an informed way.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The Agriculture Action Group identified that there is a very low level of awareness of wetlands and where to find wetland education resources in the agriculture sector. The group members identified various means of increasing wetland awareness, and many of these means included creating better relationships between wetland educators and those involved in the agriculture sector.

While the immediate wetland education need for the agriculture sector is to increase awareness of wetlands and the services they provide to the diversity of producers, if the Agriculture Action Group continues, it will be important to address the other types of wetland education gaps and interests that were identified, such as the economic valuation of ecological services provided by wetlands and creating a better level of understanding around the Wetland Policy and wetland regulations as they apply to producers.

The key players for wetland education aimed at the agriculture sector remain to be determined, but there is a lot of potential for the level of wetland awareness and basic knowledge to be increased.

## 7.0 References

NAWMP Wetland Education and Outreach Working Group. 2016. Draft Recommendations to Improve Wetlands Literacy in Alberta via a Wetland Education and Outreach Collaborative Framework.

## **Appendix A**

### **Wetland Education Network Pilot Meeting Agendas**

#### **Agriculture Action Group**



## Wetland Stewardship & Agriculture Working Group

### Meeting # 3 – Draft Agenda

**Wednesday, December 14, 2016**

**Location:** Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) Building  
2510 Sparrow Drive, Nisku

**Time:** 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

**Meeting Objectives:**

- Continue to learn about the state of agriculture and wetland stewardship
- Continue to work on defining the issues, particularly the need for education and collaboration

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
9:30	<b>1.0 Administration</b> 1.1 Health and Safety 1.2 Welcome & Introductions 1.3 Review Meeting Objectives and Agenda 1.4 Approve Previous Meeting Minutes	Petra Rowell
9:45	<b>2.0 Wetlands and Agriculture – Cost and Benefit Analysis</b> 2.1 Facilitated Exercise 2.2 Discussion	Petra/ All
10:45	<b>Health Break</b>	
11:00	<b>3.0 Understanding the <i>Public Lands Act</i></b> 3.1 Presentation 3.2 Discussion –	Cody Nahirmiak, AB Environment & Parks
12:00	<b>Lunch (provided)</b>	
12:30	<b>4.0 Wetland Education Network</b> 4.1 Description of Wetland Education Network 4.2 Review of current agricultural wetland education and outreach products 4.3 Wetland education and outreach needs in the agriculture sector 4.4 Wetland Education Network Forum 2017, feedback for content	Terra Simieritsch, AB NAWMP Partnership
2:30	<b>5.0 Wetlands and Agriculture – Collaboration</b> 5.1 Facilitated Discussion (5Ws – Who, what, where, when, why)	Petra
3:15	<b>7.0 Next Steps</b> 7.1 Identify info needs, sources, potential speakers for future meetings. 7.2 Next meeting date (Jan, Feb.), location, agenda items, etc.	Petra
3:30	Meeting Adjourned	Michael



## Wetland Stewardship & Agriculture Working Group

### Meeting # 3 – Draft Agenda

**Thursday, January 26, 2017**

**Location:** Boardroom A, AFSC Building  
6547 Sparrow Dr, Leduc, AB T9E 7C7

**Time:** 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

**Meeting Objectives:**

- Continue to learn about the state of agriculture and wetland stewardship
- Having defined the issues, work on recommending solutions

Time	Agenda Item	Lead
9:30	<b>1.0 Administration</b> 1.1 Health and Safety 1.2 Welcome & Introductions 1.3 Review Meeting Objectives and Agenda 1.4 Approve Previous Meeting Minutes	Petra Rowell
9:45	<b>2.0 Updates – Other Initiatives</b> 2.1 Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Program 2.2 GOA Wetland Cross-ministry Committee	Diana Bingham Zahid Islam
10:15	<b>3.0 Learning Opportunity</b> 3.1 On-Farm Water Management 3.2 Q and A, Discussion	TBD All
10:45	<b>Health Break</b>	
11:00	<b>4.0 Confirming the Issues</b> 4.1 Review of issues identified in WG report so far 4.2 Discussion	Petra/ All
11:30	<b>5.0 Recommending Solutions</b> 5.1 Solution Brainstorming (Break-Out Group Exercise)	Petra/All
12:00	<b>Lunch (provided)</b>	
12:45	<b>5.0 Continued</b> 5.2 Solutions Brainstorming - Round Robin 5.3 Plenary sharing (confirm recommended solutions)	Petra / All
2:15	<b>6.0 Wetland Education Network</b> 6.1 Brief review of the last Wetland Education Network meeting 6.2 Confirm the who, what and how for a wetland education and outreach program for the agriculture sector 6.3 Discuss how to create a wetland education program that would be meaningful to the agriculture sector	Terra Simieritsch, AB NAWMP Partnership
3:15	<b>7.0 Next Steps</b> 7.1 Identify info needs, potential speakers for future meeting. 7.2 Next meeting date (Feb. 14.), location, agenda items, etc.	Petra
3:30	Meeting Adjourned	Michael