

National Wetland Policies -- Canada

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The Canadian Federal Government Policy on Wetland Conservation

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Objective

The objective of the Federal Government with respect to wetland conservation is to:

"promote the conservation of Canada's wetlands to sustain their ecological and socio-economic functions, now and in the future."

Goals

In support of the above objective, the Federal Government, in cooperation with the provinces and territories and the Canadian public, will strive to achieve the following goals:

- maintenance of the functions and values derived from wetlands throughout Canada
- no net loss of wetland functions on all federal lands and waters
- enhancement and rehabilitation of wetlands in areas where the continuing loss or degradation of wetlands or their functions have reached critical levels
- recognition of wetland functions in resource planning, management and economic decision-making with regard to all federal programs, policies and activities
- securement of wetlands of significance to Canadians
- recognition of sound, sustainable management practices in sectors such as forestry and agriculture that make a positive contribution to wetlands conservation while also achieving wise use of wetland resources
- utilization of wetlands in a manner that enhances prospects for their sustained and productive use by future generations

Guiding Principles

In pursuing the above objectives, the Federal Government will respect the following principles. All are critical to this Policy and are not presented in a particular order of importance:

- Wetlands and their functions contribute significantly to the health and well-being of Canadians and are a desirable element of Canada's natural diversity; as such, they are a priority requirement of environmental conservation and sustainable development efforts.
- Wetland conservation is dependent on the incorporation of environmental objectives into the economic decision-making process, as recommended by the (Brundtland) World Commission on Environment and Development, the CCREM National Task Force on Environment and Economy, the Federal-Provincial Agriculture Committee on Environmental Sustainability, and the Sustaining Wetlands Forum.
- Wetlands and wetland functions are inextricably linked to their surroundings, particularly aquatic ecosystems, and therefore, wetland conservation must be pursued in the context of an integrated systems approach to environmental conservation and sustainable development.
- On-going development and refinement of scientific knowledge and expertise in Canada is fundamental to the achievement of wetland conservation.
- Wetland conservation can only be achieved through a coordinated, cooperative approach involving all levels of government and the public, including landowners, non-government organizations, and the private sector.
- The Federal Government will play a major role in advocating and achieving wetland conservation, while respecting the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories and the rights of individual landowners.

- In consultation and cooperation with native institutions and representatives in Canada, the Federal Government will promote a cooperative approach to wetland conservation for lands and waters held by the Federal Government for native peoples.
- A basic change in the attitude and perceptions of Canadians regarding wetlands, through communication and education programs, is a vital prerequisite of wetland conservation.
- Canada has a special responsibility to provide leadership in international wetland conservation efforts, through the management of transboundary resources such as water and wildlife in North America, encouragement of global wetland conservation, and active participation in international treaties, conventions and forums.

Strategies

The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation outlines seven strategies to provide for the use and management of wetlands so that they can continue to provide a broad range of functions on a sustainable basis. These strategies are aimed at working in concert with other ongoing initiatives for wetland conservation. They are aimed at providing practical direction, support, and tools to program managers. They set out direction to put the federal house in order, to manage federal wetlands, and to ensure effective wetlands science and public awareness actions both nationally and internationally. All seven strategies are deemed to be critical to the success of the Policy.

1. Developing Public Awareness

The Federal Government will:

- promote public awareness and understanding of the wetland resource in Canada and actively encourage participation of the Canadian public, including
 - landowners,
 - non-government organizations,
 - aboriginal governments and institutions,
 - and the private sector in wetland conservation.
- Design and deliver a national public awareness program on wetlands in cooperation with other governments, non-government organizations and the private sector. This should be targeted at all levels including political.
- Inform Canadians of the health of the wetland resource on a regular basis through State of the Environment Reporting. Ensure that results of wetland research are available in formats suitable for public use and education.
- Promote the use of National Parks, National Wildlife Areas, other federal lands and waters secured for conservation purposes, and a proposed network of wetlands of significance to Canadians to communicate the values of wetlands.

- Continue to provide information and expertise concerning sustainable land use management and conservation practices, particularly as they affect soil, water and wetland conservation and management.
- Provide suitable opportunities for public review and evaluation of the Federal Government's performance relative to its wetland conservation goals.
- Promote development of targeted wetland education and outreach materials.

2. Managing Wetlands on Federal Lands and Waters and in other Federal Programs The Federal Government will

- develop exemplary practices in support of wetland conservation and sustainable wetland use to be incorporated in the design and implementation of federal programs and in the management of federal lands and waters.
- Encourage actions to enhance wetland functions on federal lands and waters through the on-going implementation of all federal programs, especially in those areas of Canada where the continuing loss or degradation of wetlands has reached critical levels, or where wetlands are important ecologically or socio-economically to a region.
- Commit all federal departments to the goal of no net loss of wetland functions on **(i) federal lands and waters, (ii) in areas affected by the implementation of federal programs where the continuing loss or degradation of wetlands has reached critical levels, and (iii) where federal activities affect wetlands designated as ecologically or socio-economically important to a region. Due to local circumstances where wetland losses have been severe, in some areas no further loss of any remaining wetland area may be deemed essential.**
- Develop guidelines to ensure the mitigation of the impacts of Federal Government activities affecting wetland functions, and where appropriate, develop compensatory measures.
- Promote a cooperative approach to wetland conservation initiatives for lands and waters held by the Federal Government for native peoples (such as Indian Reserves and lands and waters transferred to native peoples under comprehensive land claim settlements) in consultation and cooperation with native institutions and peoples.
- Pursue opportunities to expand or enhance federal policies, programs and regulations that have a positive effect on wetland conservation, and improve those that would otherwise result in wetland conversion or degradation when in the pursuit of other objectives.
- Demonstrate and clarify links with other federal policy initiatives including the Federal Water Policy, Federal Policy on Land Use, the Fisheries and Oceans Canada Policy for the Management of Fish Habitat, the Federal Environmental Quality Policy Framework, the Arctic Marine Conservation Strategy, and the wetland conservation objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan that serve to advance wetland conservation

objectives. This may involve agreements and memoranda of understanding between federal departments or agencies to clarify respective federal roles and responsibilities with regard to wetland conservation.

- Encourage recognition of wetland functions in natural resource conservation and development strategies such as those for forests, minerals, agricultural lands, and water.
- Support protection of critical wetlands of significance to Canadians by federal or other mechanisms wherever feasible.
- Ensure that the hydrological functions of wetlands, such as groundwater recharge, water flow regulation and water purification, are adequately reflected in federal water management activities.
- Encourage the use of watersheds as appropriate spatial units for implementation of integrated water management policy and programs.

3. Promoting Wetland Conservation in Federal Protected Areas

The Federal Government will

- continue to manage the use of National Parks, National Wildlife Areas, Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, National Capital Commission lands and other federal areas established for ecosystem conservation purposes so as to sustain their wetland functions and natural processes.
- Require the creation of management plans which adequately reflect the special role of the wetland resource on federal lands secured for ecosystem conservation purposes, and the periodic review and update of these plans. Management of such wetlands should only support those activities which are compatible with sustaining wetland functions.
- Commit federal land managers to the goal of no net loss of wetland functions in all federal areas secured for conservation purposes.
- Protect these wetlands from impacts resulting from land or water use and environmental quality changes, both internal and external to the federal area boundaries, by applying the Federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process, enforcing compliance with federal regulations, by working cooperatively with other levels of government, non-government organizations and the private sector and, if required, by intervening in legal or decision-making processes.
- Encourage recreational, scientific, and educational uses of wetlands as long as these uses are not detrimental to wetland functions and do not conflict with the purposes of the area.
- Develop and amend, where necessary, new and existing federal policies and legislation so as to enhance wetland conservation within federal areas established for ecosystem conservation purposes.

4. Enhancing Cooperation

The Federal Government will

- continue to be a partner in cooperative activities and agreements with the provinces and territories and non-government agencies to advance wetland conservation.
- Continue to participate in joint federal, provincial and territorial wetland inventory, evaluation, and monitoring programs in support of: the identification of geographic areas within which the continuing loss or degradation of wetlands has reached critical levels; the identification of significant wetlands requiring protection; and the identification of management strategies for the sustainable use of wetland resources.
- Encourage and support provincial and territorial policies that promote wetland conservation, and promote the development of other related strategies. Encourage recognition of wetlands in the development and implementation of provincial, territorial and regional conservation strategies.
- Encourage consultation with interested provinces and territories and other parties whereby senior levels of government ensure that their wetland conservation policies and programs are supportive of each other.
- Enhance and, where necessary, develop new mechanisms for the resolution of interjurisdictional wetland problems.

5. Conserving Wetlands of Significance to Canadians

The Federal Government will

- participate in and promote the establishment of a systematic and coordinated national network of secured wetlands to be achieved in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders. Such an approach will lead to a comprehensive network of secured sites or complexes of exemplary and strategically important wetlands of significance to Canadians, together representing the full range of wetland functions and types.
- Establish and assist in maintenance of inventories of wetlands that have been secured for conservation purposes in each of the 20 wetland regions of Canada.
- Develop national and regional criteria for identification and promote listing of wetlands of significance to Canadians in all regions using a standardized approach primarily on the basis of existing information.
- In those cases where wetlands of significance to Canadians are found to be unprotected, encourage use of all suitable mechanisms to secure these wetlands on a priority basis.
- Encourage management of all secured wetlands of significance to Canadians to promote long-term protection of their wetland functions.
- Promote use of a national network of secured wetlands as benchmark sites for environmental monitoring, scientific research, education, and public awareness.

6. Ensuring a Sound Scientific Basis for Policy

The Federal Government will

- support and promote the development of expertise for a sound technical and scientific basis for wetland conservation, ensuring that the information necessary for making decisions regarding wetlands is accessible to planners, managers, regulators, and other decision-makers at all levels.
- Encourage research that is directed toward advancing wetland conservation and sustainable use of wetland resources and ensure that the results of such research are effectively integrated into decision-making.
- Encourage the establishment of wetland centres of research and expertise in Canadian and foreign educational institutions.
- Support and promote a nationally standardized approach to consistent and comparable wetland inventories, monitoring, and evaluations to guide the use, management and conservation of wetlands across Canada and to recognize the full range of wetland functions.
- Undertake, support and promote the development of guidelines and standards aimed at establishing regional target levels for the quantity and quality of wetlands required to safeguard the range of wetland functions across Canada. Such standards must refer to the level at which wetland loss or degradation threatens the health of regional ecosystems and species survival.
- Promote the use of wetland benchmark sites for long-term ecosystem monitoring, scientific research, education, and public awareness.
- Support research and demonstration projects on mitigating the impacts of inappropriate development on wetlands, and on the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded wetlands.
- Monitor wetlands trends from national and regional perspectives so as to establish wetland baselines and statistics, for use in targeting of conservation efforts in priority areas. Monitor wetland quality in support of the development and application of standards and guidelines for wetland conservation.
- Encourage the development of techniques for the integration of wetland functions into natural resource allocation decisions, reflecting the full range of wetland functions and values in such techniques, and demonstrate the appropriate roles of wetland conservation in solving land use problems.
- Promote research to better define the role of wetlands in the hydrologic cycle (groundwater recharge, water purification, flood control, and the maintenance of flow regimes), and the effects on wetlands of global atmospheric cycles, shoreline erosion, renewable resource production, management of exotic species such as purple loosestrife, and the provision of fish and wildlife habitat.
- Promote research on the impact of climate change on Canada's wetlands, and the implications of such change for federal policies and programs.
- Promote research on wetland restoration, minimum operating standards, and codes of ethics for peatland resource harvesting and peatland forestry industries.

7. Promoting International Actions

The Federal Government will

- promote conservation and sustainable use of wetlands internationally, and encourage the involvement of other nations and international organizations in wetland conservation efforts.
- Ensure that Canadian international assistance programs such as those administered by the Canadian International Development Agency and the International Development and Research Centre, are based on sustainable development principles and promote the maintenance and enhancement of wetland functions. Promote pro-active strategies such as that emphasized in the Canadian International Development Agency's Environmental Policy.
- Provide technical and advisory assistance to wetland conservation efforts in other countries, particularly for those wetlands used by wildlife populations shared with Canada.
- Continue to support and implement Canada's commitments under international conventions and agreements that contribute to the global conservation of wetlands and their functions and encourage other nations to become signatories to such conventions and agreements.
- Strengthen Canada's role in international wetland conservation, by requiring regular review of Canadian progress on international conventions with relevance to wetlands, and by identification of gaps or weaknesses in honouring international commitments and responsibilities.
- Promote wetland conservation through continued strong commitments to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the World Heritage Convention and international agreements and treaties.
- Continue to support and implement bilateral and multilateral agreements and similar arrangements that promote conservation and sustainable use of wetlands such as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserves Network, the International Biosphere Reserves Program, and new or existing agreements on marine and estuarine environmental quality, and emerging issues such as biodiversity and climate change.
- Provide leadership in global wetland conservation through development and transfer of models, tools, information and expertise to other nations.
- Ensure that Canadian representatives on international inquiries and commissions have an adequate understanding of wetland issues so as to promote wetland conservation in their consideration of the implications of transboundary management issues and opportunities for the sustainable use of wetland resources.