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AEPA

- The second annual AEPA Agri-Environmental Forum was held March 10 in Nisku. Attendees heard speakers discuss a broad array of topics centered on the theme of the Land-use Framework (LUF). Speakers included ADM Morris Seiferling who discussed the LUF; Brent Patterson with Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) who talked about global and provincial water supply and demand; Alberta Environment's Ian Dyson who discussed the Cumulative Effects Management approach; Jason Cathcart with ARD who spoke on the development of the Fragmentation and Conversion of Agricultural Land policy; and Jurgen Preugschas who talked about the work of the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment (IAFE) on market-based instruments as a means to reward environmental stewardship. Janet Dietrich provided a progress report on AEPA activities over the past year.
- The speaker panel at the end of the presentations was particularly useful with a lively exchange of information between speakers and Forum participants. Hugh Lynch-Staunton, Pincher Creek rancher and agriculture industry representative on the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council, joined the speaker panel and provided valuable insight into the LUF process.
- AEPA has developed another key message document for the LUF process on **Landowners Providing Ecosystem Services**, which notes that there needs to be a fair, effective and equitable process in place for valuing and trading ecosystem services.
- Ag Forum presentations and key message documents are available on the AEPA website at www.agpartners.ca.

Land Use Framework

- The Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council has completed its work. A draft plan for the region is expected to be presented at stakeholder meetings this summer.
- The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council will be drafting recommendations in the next several months.

Wetlands Protocol

- A Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Protocol Development Workshop was held March 17-18 in Edmonton to continue work on development of a wetlands protocol for carbon credit offsets.

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- The Wetlands Conservation and Restoration of Wetlands Technical Working Group is basing its new protocol on the best available science on green-house gas (GHG) emission reductions from wetland management in the Prairie Pothole Region. The group includes representatives from Alberta Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited, Climate Change Central, Environment Canada, Prairie Habitat Joint Venture and ClimateCHECK.
- There are five classes of prairie wetlands – Class 1 ephemeral ponds, which are flooded for a few days in the spring, and Class 2 temporary ponds, flooded for a few weeks in the spring, are commonly farmed by producers and are not included in the protocol.
- Wetlands have the potential to be excellent stores of carbon and net GHG sinks with significantly higher CO² equivalent sequestered per hectare per year than the current tillage protocol. As a working example of an ecosystem service provided by landowners, many Alberta farmers are getting carbon offsets under the tillage protocol although it hasn't been particularly lucrative.

Migratory Birds

- The Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA) of 1918 was originally passed to prevent the **intentional** taking of migratory bird eggs and nests for food, feathers or natural history collections.
- Environment Canada has recently changed regulations to extend the application of the Act to **incidental take** so that now, even accidental damage to migratory bird nests and eggs as well as habitat, as can occur in during spring field work, is illegal.
- A permitting process has been proposed by Environment Canada that would apply to industrial activities including agricultural operations.
- Representatives from the conservation community, forestry, oil and gas, mining, and agricultural industries and associations attended an Environment Canada workshop in Ottawa on February 24-25 to discuss the proposed approach to incidental take.
- While all agreed that conservation of migratory birds and their habitat is an important goal, there was a lot of concern about the fairness and practicality of implementing a bureaucratic permit system.
- An onerous permit system could lead to perverse incentives that could discourage habitat protection on the part of landowners and managers – the “shoot, shovel and shut up” reaction to endangered species legislation that occurred because it was so troublesome to have endangered species on one’s land.
- In addition, it is unclear how Environment Canada rules would work with provincial jurisdiction over land use.
- Clearly, more thought needs to go into Environment Canada’s approach to incidental take. A group of agriculture interests has been discussing concerns with Environment Canada’s proposed actions on this issue. They are encouraging the government to explore options that would promote nesting habitat protection rather than punish unintentional damage.