



# Natural Resources Conservation Board

## Business Plan 2022-25



*Vision*

To be a respected decision maker, exemplifying integrity and foresight in the best interests of Alberta.

*Mission*

As a quasi-judicial and regulatory agency, the NRCB makes impartial and knowledge-based decisions across two distinct mandates:

- Under the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, the NRCB decides if natural resource projects are in the public interest, considering social, environmental, and economic effects, and
- Under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act*, the NRCB fulfills application and compliance responsibilities, administers and advances policies, and conducts board reviews for confined feeding operations

*Values*

In achieving our mission, we honour the NRCB's core values of integrity, fairness, respect, excellence, and service.

## ABOUT US

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 and employees continued to work remotely throughout the pandemic. Plans are in place for NRCB employees to return to working from the office in spring 2022 with an option to participate in a hybrid workplace model.***

The NRCBA is the responsibility of Environment and Parks. AOPA is the responsibility of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development. 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, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, 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, Forestry and Rural Economic Development the outcomes include: Alberta's economic growth and recovery are supported by increased investments, expanded trade in Alberta's agriculture and forest sectors, and by maximizing economic opportunities across Alberta; Alberta's competitive business environment provides a strong foundation for resilient agriculture and forest sectors and rural communities; and robust assurance systems and effective resource management practices support agriculture and forest sectors success and protect public safety in communities across Alberta.

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.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Natural Resources Conservation Board has identified the following strategic priorities for 2022-25:

1. Improve the coordination of project review processes with other provincial and federal review agencies for project applications under the NRCBA to ensure reviews are as efficient and effective as possible.
2. Continue to contribute as required to Government of Alberta red tape reduction targets in collaboration with Environment and Parks and Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development as applied to AOPA, and NRCB operational policies that assist in the delivery of AOPA.
3. Continue to review the permit application, compliance, and review processes to identify opportunities to improve efficiencies in the delivery of AOPA.
4. Fulfill the NRCB's commitment to provide staff with continuous learning opportunities for the cultural awareness and understanding of Indigenous peoples.

## 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, 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, virtually, 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 NRCBA and AOPA:
  - Renew the processes for NRCBA natural resource project reviews with relevant provincial and federal review agencies to ensure reviews are coordinated, with goals of improving efficiency, effectiveness, and communication. The NRCB will continue to maintain 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 explore and satisfy its consultation obligations with Indigenous peoples whose Aboriginal and treaty 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 process	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
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 (CFOs) and management of livestock manure.

### What it means

The NRCB regulates Alberta's 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.

The NRCB uses a risk-based approach to ensure that CFOs are compliant with their AOPA 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 land use 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 Continue to contribute to reducing red tape as applied to AOPA and to NRCB operational policies that are intended to clarify AOPA requirements.
- 2.b Continue to enhance efficiencies and 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 Reinforce efforts to educate CFO operators and other stakeholders about compliance requirements, especially for 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 CFOs that have annual permit condition requirements to ensure any potential risks to the environment are being effectively monitored and remediated to the satisfaction of the NRCB.
- 2.g Explore the need and opportunity for a program to assess the continued maintenance of liners in accordance with AOPA permit requirements at operations with early NRCB-issued permits.
- 2.h Continue to collaborate with government departments and educational institutions on applied research to better understand new technologies and techniques to reduce the environmental risks and impacts of CFOs.
- 2.i Participate in producer meetings, Rural Municipalities of Alberta conferences, and other relevant events to better understand opportunities, challenges, and concerns related to the regulation of CFOs.
- 2.j Explore opportunities for using AOPA to regulate solid organic wastes generated from greenhouses.

### Performance measures

Efficiency of permitting process	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of decisions issued within 65 working days from the date the application is determined to be complete	85%	85%	85%
Efficiency of complaint resolution	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
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 staff training to maintain a high level of expertise and to providing 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 a COVID-19 pandemic business continuity plan, reinforcing current risk management systems and strategy, until it is no longer required.
2. Implement an optional hybrid workplace policy.
3. Continue to provide in-house training and support external training opportunities in areas of required professional development, including education and training on Indigenous issues as outlined in call to action 57 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report<sup>1</sup> and endorsed by the Government of Alberta for all Alberta public servants.
4. Continue to enhance the NRCB occupational health and safety policy and program to maintain a safe, healthy, and productive workplace.
5. Develop the appropriate systems and procedures to implement the approved NRCB records retention and disposition schedule.
6. Maintain and continuously improve essential infrastructure including:
  - a. improving the functionality of the confined feeding operation database
  - b. updating computers and other electronic devices issued to staff in accordance with the NRCB's commitment to information technology evergreening, and
  - c. updating the efficiency and security of NRCB IT systems.



Photos appear courtesy of Peter Woloshyn

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1. Call to action 57 of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* reads: "We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism."

## BUDGET INFORMATION

The 2022-25 budget is based on the strategic priorities and strategies identified in the business plan.

### EXPENSE BY CORE BUSINESS

	Comparable			2022-23 Estimate	2023-24 Target	2024-25 Target
	2020-21 Actual	2021-22 Budget	2021-22 Forecast			
<b>AOPA and NRCBA Mandates</b>						
Board Reviews & Hearings	\$1,183,820	\$1,154,000	\$1,154,000	\$1,032,000	\$1,032,000	\$1,032,000
Regulating Confined Feeding Operations	4,387,719	4,270,000	4,270,000	4,392,000	4,392,000	4,392,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$5,571,539<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>

### STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Comparable			2022-23 Estimate	2023-24 Target	2024-25 Target
	2020-21 Actual	2021-22 Budget	2021-22 Forecast			
<b>Revenues</b>						
Transfer from Environment & Parks	\$2,700,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000
Miscellaneous Investment & Other Revenue	18,528	71,000	71,000	6,000	6,000	6,000
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$2,718,528</b>	<b>\$5,468,000</b>	<b>\$5,468,000</b>	<b>\$5,403,000</b>	<b>\$5,403,000</b>	<b>\$5,403,000</b>
<b>Expenses</b>						
Salaries, Wages & Employee Benefits	4,452,290	4,522,076	4,522,076	4,487,266	4,487,266	4,487,266
Supplies and Services	660,542	871,924	891,984	924,478	901,068	899,273
Amortization	16,973	30,000	9,940	12,256	35,666	37,461
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$5,129,805</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>	<b>\$5,424,000</b>
<b>Annual Operating Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>\$(2,411,277)</b>	<b>\$44,000</b>	<b>\$44,000</b>	<b>\$(21,000)</b>	<b>\$(21,000)</b>	<b>\$(21,000)</b>

1. Includes \$441,734 leased cost for office space paid by Alberta Infrastructure. This amount is not included in the Statement of Operations.