



Natural Resources Conservation Board

Business Plan 2023-26



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 Protected Areas 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).

The NRCBA is the responsibility of Environment and Protected Areas. AOPA is the responsibility of Agriculture and Irrigation. A 2022 Mandate and Roles document describes the roles and responsibilities of the NRCB, of Environment and Parks, and of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development in delivering the NRCBA and AOPA. The names of these ministries changed as of October 21, 2022 to Environment and Protected Areas and Agriculture and Irrigation respectively.

In working closely with the ministries of Environment and Protected Areas and Agriculture and Irrigation, the NRCB also supports and prioritizes those ministries' desired outcomes as defined in their respective business plans.

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 2023-26:

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 Protected Areas and Agriculture and Irrigation 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. Provide ongoing opportunities for increased cultural awareness and understanding of Indigenous peoples as part of the journey toward reconciliation.

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 described in municipal planning documents, 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	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
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, composting materials, and compost.

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 statutory 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, including explanation of how the NRCB assesses municipal land use planning provisions when making permitting decisions and of the NRCB's compliance and enforcement processes.
- 2.d Initiate dialogue with Indigenous communities as appropriate, related to specific CFO applications and compliance actions and the NRCB's role as it relates to AOPA.
- 2.e Promote consistent understanding of regulatory requirements under AOPA for operators, consultants, and other stakeholders.
- 2.f 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.g Communicate to CFO operators the importance of self-identifying operations that existed, or were municipally permitted, prior to 2002.
- 2.h 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.i 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.j 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.k 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.l Explore opportunities for using AOPA to regulate solid organic wastes generated from greenhouses.

Performance measures

Efficiency of permitting process	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
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	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Percentage of complaint files resolved or requiring no further action, within 60 days	95%	95%	95%

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The NRCB is committed to fostering a culture of excellence and an exceptional employee experience. Staff and Board members share an understanding of the organization's values and mandate and are trained and motivated to deliver a high standard of service. The NRCB provides ongoing opportunities for staff training to maintain a high level of expertise and provides 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. Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the NRCB optional hybrid workplace policy.
2. 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 report¹ and endorsed by the Government of Alberta for all Alberta public servants.
3. Continue to enhance the NRCB occupational health and safety policy and program to maintain a safe, healthy, and productive workplace.
4. Develop the appropriate systems and procedures to implement the NRCB records management strategy.
5. 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.

Photo appears courtesy of Sylvia Kaminski

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 2023-26 budget is based on the strategic priorities and strategies identified in the business plan.

EXPENSE BY CORE BUSINESS

	Comparable			2023-24 Estimate	2024-25 Target	2025-26 Target
	2021-22 Actual	2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Forecast			
AOPA and NRCBA Mandates						
Board Reviews & Hearings	\$1,209,055	\$1,032,000	\$1,032,000	\$1,175,000	\$1,175,000	\$1,175,000
Regulating Confined Feeding Operations	4,210,155	4,392,000	4,392,000	4,861,000	4,861,000	4,861,000
Total Expenses	\$5,419,210¹	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Comparable			2023-24 Estimate	2024-25 Target	2025-26 Target
	2021-22 Actual	2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Forecast			
Revenues						
Transfer from Environment & Protected Areas	\$5,147,000	\$5,397,000	\$5,397,000	\$6,009,000	\$6,009,000	\$6,009,000
Miscellaneous Investment & Other Revenue	6,665	6,000	6,000	51,000	51,000	51,000
Total Revenues	\$5,153,665	\$5,403,000	\$5,403,000	\$6,060,000	\$6,060,000	\$6,060,000
Expenses						
Salaries, Wages & Employee Benefits	4,322,266	4,487,266	4,487,266	4,872,340	4,872,340	4,872,340
Supplies and Services	658,368	906,734	924,478	1,142,042	1,135,988	1,134,297
Amortization	9,724	30,000	12,256	21,618	27,672	29,363
Total Expenses	\$4,990,358	\$5,424,000	\$5,424,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000
Annual Operating Surplus (Deficit)	\$163,307	\$(21,000)	\$(21,000)	\$24,000	\$24,000	\$24,000

1. Includes \$428,852 leased cost for office space paid by Alberta Infrastructure. This amount is not included in the Statement of Operations.