



Natural Resources Conservation Board

Business Plan 2024-27



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.

All strategies identified in this business plan will be reported against in the NRCB's 2024-25 annual report.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Natural Resources Conservation Board has identified the following strategic priorities for 2024-27:

1. Enable Albertans to understand and effectively participate in the review processes under the NRCBA and AOPA.
2. 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.
3. Continue to identify opportunities to improve efficiencies and clarity in the delivery of AOPA, through assessment of the permit application, compliance, and review processes, and with ongoing engagement with industry, municipalities, and other stakeholders.
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:
 - Enhance 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.
 - Continue to maintain a strong role in developing the terms of reference and technical reviews of environmental impact assessments to ensure that all relevant information is included in the project review process. The NRCB will also explore ways to streamline the terms of reference and technical review processes.
 - As the Board has always done, investigate further opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce red tape in the review process under AOPA, from requests for review through to review decisions.
- 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 videos; guides; public information sessions; and prompt, accurate responses to direct inquiries.
- 1.d Continue to promote transparency by evaluating and refining access to the complete public record for public interest determinations under the NRCBA and reviews under AOPA.

Performance measures

Efficiency of review process	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
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 ensures that CFOs are compliant with their AOPA permits, investigates and responds to complaints, initiates enforcement action where required, and prioritizes responses based on the level of risk to the environment. Permitting decisions consider the consistency of 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 Engage the Policy Advisory Group in relevant policy discussions and the Technical Advisory Group in the development of guidelines that clarify AOPA requirements.
- 2.b 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, and to promote consistent understanding of AOPA requirements.
- 2.c Continue to enhance efficiencies and business processes to support AOPA delivery, including the development of new web-based systems for both applications and complaints, increasing accessibility, and streamlining the role of referral agencies in decision processes.
- 2.d 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.e Build 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.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, short-term solid manure storage, and record keeping for manure application.
- 2.g Develop new and continue with ongoing proactive compliance programs:
 - Communicate to CFO operators the importance of self-identifying operations that existed, or were municipally permitted, prior to 2002.
 - Assess the maintenance of liners in accordance with AOPA permit requirements at operations with early NRCB-issued permits.
 - Implement and refine an initiative to verify livestock population numbers.
- 2.h Initiate digital methods for reporting on annual permit condition requirements to realize internal efficiencies, reduce reporting burden, and improve the management of annual reporting data.
- 2.i Pursue further collaboration with government departments and educational institutions on applied research to better understand new technologies and techniques to assess and address environmental risks and impacts relevant to CFOs.
- 2.j Invest in new technologies and proven analytical methods to monitor the impacts of CFOs and to support evidence-based decision making.

Performance measures

Efficiency of permitting process	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Percentage of decisions issued within 65 working days from the date the application is determined to be complete	85%	85%	85%
Efficiency of complaint response	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Percentage of complaints responded to within one business day	85%	85%	85%

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 and Board member training to maintain a high level of expertise, and provides the technical resources required to support the work of the organization.

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. Create a more resilient organization through leadership development and succession planning.
2. Continue to provide in-house training and support external training opportunities in areas of required professional development, including leadership and technical capacity, as well as 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, including implementing a working alone policy and the use of a monitoring app to ensure staff safety.
4. Finalize and implement the appropriate systems and procedures to execute 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. streamlining the use of telecommunication methods/devices for NRCB employees.

Photo appears courtesy of Peter Woloshyn

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 2024-25 budget is based on the strategic priorities and strategies identified in the business plan.

EXPENSE BY CORE BUSINESS

	Comparable			2024-25 Estimate
	2022-23 Actual	2023-24 Budget	2023-24 Forecast	
AOPA and NRCBA Mandates				
Board Reviews & Hearings	\$1,100,448	\$1,175,000	\$1,175,000	\$1,194,000
Regulating Confined Feeding Operations	4,598,366	4,861,000	4,861,000	4,909,000
Total Expenses	\$5,698,814¹	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,103,000

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

	Comparable			2024-25 Estimate
	2022-23 Actual	2023-24 Budget	2023-24 Forecast	
Revenues				
Transfer from Environment & Protected Areas	\$5,397,000	\$6,009,000	\$6,009,000	\$6,076,000
Miscellaneous Investment & Other Revenue	74,391	51,000	51,000	91,000
Total Revenues	\$5,471,391	\$6,060,000	\$6,060,000	\$6,167,000
Expenses				
Salaries, Wages & Employee Benefits	4,373,083	4,872,340	4,872,340	5,228,657
Supplies and Services	859,207	1,133,660	1,142,042	838,823
Amortization	7,785	30,000	21,618	35,520
Total Expenses	\$5,240,075	\$6,036,000	\$6,036,000	\$6,103,000
Annual Surplus	\$231,316	\$24,000	\$24,000	\$64,000

1. Includes \$458,739 leased cost for office space paid by Alberta Infrastructure. This amount is not included in the Statement of Operations.