

A Region of Watersheds: *Refreshing Inter-Municipal Planning*

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The Calgary region features a number of watersheds ranging across the jurisdictions of many urban and rural municipalities. The wise stewardship of the associated rivers, streams, and ground water is becoming increasingly important.

Before 1995, Alberta planning legislation prescribed mandatory regional planning by regional planning commissions, featuring a distinct separation of the urban and rural land that largely shaped the land-use pattern in the Calgary region. While decision-making incorporated a regional perspective, the legislation appeared to favour urban over rural municipalities.

Amendments to the Municipal Government Act (MGA) in 1995 were, in part, based on the principle that local decision-makers were best able to solve local problems, but there was also an emphasis on collaboration on regional issues. The regional planning commission system was replaced by legislation

requiring municipalities to adopt negotiated intermunicipal policies. The changes eliminated the distinction between urban and rural roles and functions, thus creating a level playing field. The province's Land Use Policies (1996) identify areas of provincial interest and are intended to harmonize these interests with municipal initiatives taken at the local level of land use planning.

The 1999 Water Act recognizes Alberta's finite water supply and requires responsible management of provincial water resources. Proposed uses must be viable in light of long-term water supply. The Act also establishes thresholds where licensing is required for various types of developments, and provides for the preparation of water management plans based on watersheds and drainage basins.

After 1995 the focus of planning shifted from a regional to a local approach, with local jurisdictions voluntarily adopting a more regional perspective when

addressing planning and servicing issues. This willingness to bring a broad, regional outlook to planning issues, coupled with the tone of the MGA and the Water Act, has led to some promising watershed management projects in the Calgary area. The focus is on the boundaries of natural systems rather than political ones.

The potential is great for a continuation of a collaborative approach to problem-solving. There is also a growing role for private-sector operators and non-government organizations in developing community-based solutions to local or regional issues. There appears to be a growing acceptance that systems such as watersheds are multi-jurisdictional and need to be planned on that basis.

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