

**Calgary Foundation
Policy Brief**

June 2017

**Vital Priority:
Environment**

Pursuing a Sustainable Future

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Overview

Environment: Pursuing a Sustainable Future is the second brief in a series intended to provide background and context for the policy landscape relative to the Calgary Foundation's Vital Priorities. Environmental policy is well defined and there is considerable activity in shaping it by governments, the public sector, businesses, and nonprofits. Even so, there are tensions and gaps, as outlined in this document.

Environmental issues have taken a prominent role not only in Alberta, but also in Canada and the world.

There has been a behavioural shift over the last few decades where, for example, recycling is now common and options to do so are readily available in public and commercial spaces. Actions taken locally have ripple effects on the local, regional, national, and international environment. So, while individual efforts to reduce environmental impacts are important, so too are the considerations for major policies and programs that link to national and international efforts. The provincial government, for example, creates regional plans using a cumulative effects management approach.¹

Environmental policy often evokes the concept of **natural environment**, which encompasses naturally occurring phenomena in the world around us as well as the interaction among living species. Also important is our **built environment**, which includes human-made infrastructure ranging from buildings and roadways to parks and other green spaces. Increasingly, city planning is considering the impacts of the built environment on the natural landscape so as to minimize environmental impact. For example, the City of Calgary approved a biodiversity plan and policy framework in 2015.²

The importance of environmental **sustainability**—setting long-term goals and objectives—is now being considered alongside the idea of **resilience**—anticipating and withstanding shocks and stressors.³ These concepts relate to **mitigation**—stopping environmental impact before it occurs—and **adaptation**—managing the environmental impact already occurring.⁴

Indicators are used to gauge the state of the environment.

Indicators are used to measure environmental health and progress towards environmental goals.⁵ There is no one measure to indicate environmental health and it is a complex system that requires tracking multiple indicators to assess overall progress. For example, greenhouse gas emissions are tracked as one way to assess progress in reducing rising global temperatures.⁶

Environmental policy in Alberta falls under the Ministry of Environment and Parks,⁷ which groups its activities into seven categories:

- Air⁸
- Climate Change⁹
- Fish and Wildlife¹⁰
- Land¹¹
- Recreation and Public Use¹²
- Waste¹³
- Water¹⁴

Federally, environmental policy lies with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Canada.¹⁵ The City of Calgary's Environmental and Safety Management business unit considers and plans for the environmental impacts of the city's operations on the environment, and personnel in other departments show community leadership with external agencies.

Perspectives on the Environment

Several parties have an interest in environmental policy:

- Federal, provincial, and municipal governments
- Think tanks¹⁶
- Academics¹⁷
- Environmental advocacy organizations¹⁸
- Businesses¹⁹
- Other nonprofits²⁰
- Activists

It is important to recognize that there always exists a tension between groups pushing for more regulation, those pushing for less, and the extent to which they produce or rely on valid and reliable scientific evidence to support their respective position.

Environmental policies are highly regulated.

The provincial and federal governments have well-developed environmental policy frameworks, which are implemented through legislation and regulation. Existing regulations are well enforced, but there is continual tension between increased regulation and maintaining competitive markets.

The economic cost of environmental action is balanced against reward.

Governments cannot rely on voluntary actions alone to mitigate environmental impacts so must balance between economic cost and regulation. Regulation, however, does not always imply that there will be a negative result on economic cost; in fact, it can sometimes increase competitiveness by encouraging innovation or parity with global markets.²¹ The provincial government²² conducts monitoring and compliance as does the federal government.²³ Regulatory bodies should be aware of industry needs without being influenced to the point of **regulatory capture**—the point at which regulatory bodies are serving the needs of industry rather than the public good.

Jurisdictional tension exists among different levels of government.

As with most policy, jurisdiction can be complex. Generally, the provinces are responsible for environmental stewardship, while anything that crosses provincial boundaries is federal jurisdiction. Tension exists in the enforcement and creation of regulations; for example, the federal government may use the threat of regulation to cause the provinces to act.²⁴

The City of Calgary bases its environmental plans on the Municipal Development Plan²⁵ but must follow the regulations and guidelines as identified by the province. Changes to the *Municipal Government Act* are anticipated in June 2017 and the City of Calgary is expecting some changes that will give them more control over their own environmental initiatives. The City sets internal priorities but works in collaboration with the Province.²⁶ The City will be starting the 10-year review of the Municipal Development Plan later in 2017, where climate change will be considered a priority.

Policy Context

Environmental policy is well defined and the field is well occupied.

The provincial and federal governments have ministries dedicated to the environment; they conduct policy work internally and also rely on expert analysis.

Environmental policies affect individuals and organizations.

Individuals feel the impact of changes with increased environmental policies and regulations; so too do businesses and nonprofits. Just as there are differences among the kinds of businesses and therefore the kinds of impacts they may encounter, so too are there differences among nonprofit organizations. They vary greatly in size and in mission, serving environmental, health, and/or social causes, sports and recreation, arts and culture, and more. So, environmental policy change may not impact these organizations equally. It leaves some open questions about how environmental policies should apply to nonprofits: should the same regulations and responsibilities apply to all nonprofits equally?

Nonprofits have an opportunity to engage, but face capacity challenges.

Governments set and enforce environmental policies, so there is considerable internal policy expertise within governments. As with all policies set and enforced by governments, they also rely on input from interested parties to contribute to:

- identification of policy priorities;
- development and analysis of policies;
- implementation of policies; and
- monitoring of policies.

Environmental nonprofits have some capacity to contribute in all four areas; however, funding to do so is very limited,²⁷ and the sector lacks a coordinated approach.

Even though the policy field is well occupied, the lack of coordination means that environmental nonprofits have less influence in identifying policy priorities or in responding quickly to timely issues.

Other nonprofits have very little capacity to contribute in any of the four areas.

Lack of participation and input from the full range of nonprofits means that governments lack policy analysis on two fronts: the effect of environmental policies on nonprofit organizations²⁸ and the effect of environmental policies on the people served by the nonprofit sector.²⁹

A just transition to renewable energy becomes more difficult to achieve without full participation from the nonprofit sector.

A just transition³⁰ refers to the importance of ensuring that there is a net positive transition for workers and vulnerable populations as societies transition to renewable sources of energy. To highlight a few examples in the Calgary Foundation's priority populations:

- **Seniors** may not access cost saving, energy efficient programs and services without targeted marketing. Additionally, any new energy efficient programs should consider protection for seniors from fraudulent representations since they are at higher risk of schemes.
- **Children and Youth** need education and training opportunities that reflect current and future demands; these opportunities should meet the transition to renewable energy sources, so that they develop skills in demand.
- **Indigenous Populations** have been historically unjustly treated and must be consulted in meaningful ways to reach reconciliation,³¹ which is important for overcoming social and cultural disadvantages still evident for many indigenous peoples. There are legal frameworks for consultation;³² however, true reconciliation is a joint path. The Government of Alberta has recently announced an Indigenous Wisdom Advisory Panel to advise on environmental monitoring.³³
- **Newcomers** often experience challenges in transitioning to a new culture, language, and society. Opportunities to explore the advantages of energy efficiency savings may not be high priority and special consideration for encouraging uptake may be necessary.

While there is some reason for nonprofits to be tentative in participating in policy initiatives,³⁴ in the current political climate there is an open invitation from government to participate.³⁵

Nonprofits need some assurance to mitigate the perceived risk, confirmation that their charitable status and/or funding will not be jeopardized, and the capacity to participate.

The nonprofit sector may also be suited to playing a greater role in public education regarding the impacts of environmental policy.³⁶ The public needs access to independent, reliable, and digestible information about how policy changes will affect people and why those policies are important.

Alberta currently has four particularly relevant policy areas:

1. Climate Change

In 2017, the Government of Alberta introduced a Climate Leadership Plan.³⁷ There is notable corporate support for the Plan,³⁸ while industry continues to lobby for extended timelines on federal regulations.³⁹ Major tensions exist around the Climate Leadership Plan, particularly the carbon tax, in unknown costs compared to actual results in reduced emissions. While there are moderately robust estimates for the cost of the carbon tax on households⁴⁰ and big oil and gas companies,⁴¹ the impacts on small businesses⁴² and nonprofits remain to be seen. Until the Climate Leadership Plan has been in effect for some time and Alberta can gather data on costs versus reduction in emissions, we do not have a clear understanding of the outcomes.

2. Water

The Government of Alberta⁴³ and City of Calgary⁴⁴ both have water strategies that remain relevant priorities. In the years following the flood of 2013, flood mitigation has remained a serious issue, with major tension in communities over these plans.⁴⁵

3. Conservation

The Government of Alberta has made conservation efforts a priority.⁴⁶ For example, in 2017 it introduced new regulations for off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on public land,⁴⁷ which is creating discontent among recreational users.⁴⁸

4. Waste

The City of Calgary has undertaken major initiatives in the last several years on waste, particularly with the introduction of green bins for all residential homes, including multi-family, and all public spaces.⁴⁹ In 2016, the City of Calgary also introduced a waste diversion strategy for businesses and organizations, requiring recycling and waste diversion.⁵⁰

Considerations

Where are the Gaps?

Priority Identification

There is a lack of coordination among environmental nonprofits, which means that they are less influential in helping the government set the policy agenda.

Impact of Environmental Policies on Nonprofits

There is lack of analysis on the impact of environmental policies to the nonprofit sector. Nonprofits lack the funding, capacity, and support to conduct or contract this analysis.

Impact of Environmental Policies on Vulnerable Populations

Without analysis of how environmental policies impact vulnerable populations, these groups may be further disadvantaged as societies transition to renewable energy.

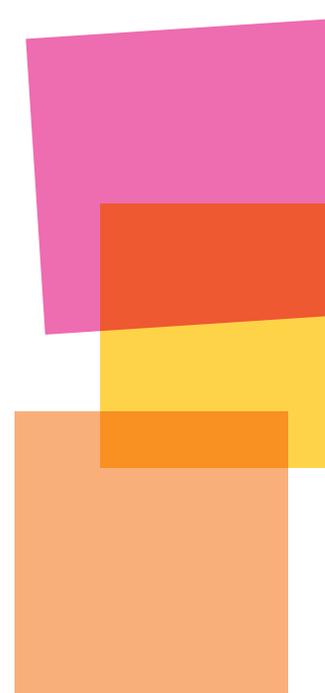
Public Education

There is a lack of public education about environmental policies, on the relevance of these policies, the financial impact that they may have on households, and the positive environment effects they hope to achieve.

Challenges for Funders

Funders may encounter challenges in:

- considering not only the merit of policy ideas but also the likelihood of achieving the policy goals.
- identifying and recruiting experts in the environmental field.
- creating incentive for organizations to collaborate in ways that lead to working on joint solutions.





References

- ¹ See the following for more information on cumulative effects management: <https://landuse.alberta.ca/CumulativeEffects/CumulativeEffectsManagement/Pages/default.aspx> See Cumulative Environmental Management Association in Wood Buffalo (CEMA) for an example: <http://cemaonline.ca/index.php/about-us>
- ² Find more information and the full plan here: <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Planning-and-Operations/Biodiversity.aspx?redirect=/biodiversity>
- ³ More detail on the distinction between sustainability and resilience: <http://www.sustainabilitydegrees.com/blog/sustainability-vs-resilience-why-bouncing-back-is-the-way-of-the-future/>
- ⁴ More detail on the distinction between mitigation and adaptation: <http://www.global-greenhouse-warming.com/climate-mitigation-and-adaptation.html>
- ⁵ Sustainable Calgary produces “State of Our City” to gauge Calgary’s progress environmentally, socially, and economically: <http://sustainablecalgary.org/home/state-of-our-city-reports/>
- ⁶ See the following for more detail on measuring greenhouse gas emissions: <https://www.ec.gc.ca/indicateurs-indicators/?lang=en&n=FBF8455E-1>
- ⁷ See here for an overview of the Ministry: <http://aep.alberta.ca>
- ⁸ This area includes both air quality and emissions. Alberta monitors Air Quality Health, conducts Air Quality Modelling, and employs an Air Quality Management System, which includes national and provincial systems. Relevant legislation includes the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Alberta’s air quality and emissions are regulated through: the Air Monitoring Directive; Ambient Air Quality Objectives; Emissions Policies; and Regulations and Codes. The governments uses several management frameworks to achieve air quality goals: Acid Deposition; Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards; Electricity Emissions Management. For more detail on the Alberta government’s approach to air: <http://aep.alberta.ca/air/default.aspx>
- ⁹ Relevant legislation in this area includes the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act (passed in 2003, the first in Canada) and there are several regulations. In 2015, Alberta took steps to develop a Climate Leadership Plan. Find more detail the provincial government’s approach to climate change here: <http://aep.alberta.ca/climate-change/default.aspx>
- ¹⁰ This area includes: Environmental Flows; Fisheries Management; Fishing, Hunting and Trapping; Wildlife; Wild Species; Invasive Species; Species at Risk; Wildlife Damage Control, Diseases, Land Use, Research, and Management; and Zoo Management. For more detail on regulations and guidelines see: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/default.aspx>
- ¹¹ This area includes: Grazing and Range Management; Integrated Land Management; Land Management; Land Use Planning; Industrial Land Regulation. Relevant Legislation includes: Land Use Framework; Alberta Land Steward Act; Public Lands Act; Alberta Land Trust Grant Program; Municipal Government Act (Land Use Policies); and Surveys Act. For more details see: <http://aep.alberta.ca/land/default.aspx>
- ¹² Recreation on Public Land including, camping, boating, off highway vehicles (OHV). See here for more: <http://aep.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/default.aspx>
- ¹³ Includes: Hazardous Waste Management: governed by the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act; Pollution and Prevention: mostly regulated in other areas; Waste Management: regulated by Waste Control Regulation (which is currently under review); and Recycling: regulated by Recycling Regulatory Framework. For more details: <http://aep.alberta.ca/waste/default.aspx>
- ¹⁴ Includes: safe drinking water, healthy aquatic systems, water management. Relevant Legislation: Water Act. For details see: <http://aep.alberta.ca/waste/default.aspx>
- ¹⁵ See here for full details on the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Canada: <https://www.ec.gc.ca/?lang=En>
- ¹⁶ For example: Pembina, Miistakis Institute, CD Howe Institute, Clean Energy Canada, Canada West Foundation.
- ¹⁷ The University of Calgary has an active Energy and Environment policy area in the School of Public Policy as well as the Canadian Institute of Resources and Law in the Faculty of Law. The University of Alberta has Centre for Applied Business Research in Energy and the Environment. The Prairie Climate Change Centre is based at the University of Winnipeg.
- ¹⁸ For example: Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area, The David Suzuki Foundation, The World Wildlife Fund.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers on responsible development: <http://www.capp.ca/responsible-development> and the Canadian Oil Sands Innovation Alliance on improving environmental performance: <https://www.cosia.ca>

²⁰ For example: Green Calgary, Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, REAP.

²¹ For example, the provincial government is increasing support for diversification and renewable energy companies: <https://www.alberta.ca/energy-diversification-advisory-committee.aspx#toc-1?platform=hootsuite>. Additionally, oil and gas companies decrease costs by reducing the steam used in production, thereby reducing emissions so it is in their best interest to find ways to lower emissions, particularly with the current low cost of oil.

²² See the Compliance Assurance Program: <http://aep.alberta.ca/about-us/compliance-assurance-program/default.aspx>
See also the Monitoring and Science Division: <http://environmentalmonitoring.alberta.ca/about/environmental-monitoring-and-science/>

²³ See here for Federal Environmental Enforcement: <https://www.ec.gc.ca/alef-ewe/default.asp?lang=En&n=C3039403-1>
See here for Wildlife Enforcement: <https://www.ec.gc.ca/alef-ewe/default.asp?lang=En&n=CB2565FA-1>

²⁴ For example, Alberta took action on a Caribou conservation plan after threat of federal regulation: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-management/caribou-management/caribou-action-range-planning/default.aspx>

²⁵ Find the full plan here: <http://www.calgary.ca/PDA/pd/Pages/Municipal-Development-Plan/Municipal-Development-Plan-MDP.aspx>

²⁶ For example, the province provides support to municipalities through the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre: <http://mccac.ca/about-us>

²⁷ Funding is limited for nonprofits to conduct policy work. While Institutes/Think Tanks have more capacity to conduct policy work, they are primarily funded by grants on a project basis or by fee-for-service, which lacks the flexibility needed to engage in policy work.

²⁸ For example, the Calgary Food Bank identified an unintended consequence of the carbon tax on their operating costs: <http://www.metronews.ca/news/calgary/2016/06/07/ndp-carbon-tax-will-cause-calgary-food-bank-spend-extra-31k.html>. The provincial government has since introduced a grant program for nonprofits to help offset costs but it is a reactionary measure: <http://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/ndp-announces-grant-program-to-help-charities-deal-with-carbon-tax>. At the core, the provincial government needs assistance in considering whether or not environmental policies should apply equally to nonprofits and how to consider their specific needs.

²⁹ Public policy can be driver of behaviour change. New initiatives in Alberta are pushing us to transition: how will that transition affect nonprofits and the people they serve? The government needs to be informed and design plans with this in mind or the most vulnerable will be left behind.

³⁰ See here for more on just transition: <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/post/a-just-transition/>

³¹ See call to action #82 in the Truth and Reconciliation report for specific examples: <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>

³² See the Government of Canada's duty to consult here: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1331832510888/1331832636303>

³³ Details on the panel here: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=47018B800EE55-E91B-85D6-7FF70DD3E9AE4552>

³⁴ In 2012, we saw the beginning of a significant advocacy 'chill' with several Canada Revenue Agency audits of charities, particularly environmental charities. See here: <https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/study-cites-chill-from-tax-agency-audits-of-charities-political-activities/article19551584/?ref=https://www.theglobeandmail.com&>

³⁵ For example, recently, the federal government has suspended the CRA reviews on recommendation from a government appointed panel. Additionally, the panel called for changes to legislation that would allow charities more freedom to participate in public policy dialogue. See here: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/05/04/ottawa-urged-to-give-charities-more-freedom-to-speak-out.html>

³⁶ There would need to be funding available for organizations to deliver programming. Some of this gap may be filled with the establishment of 'Energy Efficiency Alberta': <https://www.energycanada.ca/about/>

³⁷ See the full plan here: <https://www.alberta.ca/climate-leadership-plan.aspx>

³⁸ For example: See this report from Suncor on how the company is addressing climate change: <http://www.suncor.com/~media/Files/PDF/Investor%20Centre/Annual%20Reports/2016%20AR/English/Climate-Report-EN.ashx?la=en-CA>
See this article noting support for Alberta's carbon tax plan from several energy company CEOs: <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/calgary/energy-ceos-carbon-tax-alberta-calgary-chamber-1.4076358>

See this release from Transalta announcing their transition to clean power: <http://www.transalta.com/newsroom/transalta-board-approves-plan-for-accelerating-transition-to-clean-power-in-alberta/>

³⁹ See, for example: <http://www.nationalobserver.com/2017/04/21/news/trudeau-government-delays-climate-action-after-oil-patch-lobbying>

⁴⁰ See here for cost estimates to households: <https://www.alberta.ca/climate-carbon-pricing.aspx#p184s5> and here for estimates on rebates: <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/carbon-tax-rebate-winter-dobson1.pdf>

⁴¹ There has been a carbon tax in effect for oil and gas companies for some time and many belong to Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition: <http://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/rempe-slams-big-oilpatch-players-for-carbon-tax-support>

⁴² While costs remain unknown, a small business tax reduction was introduced in January 2017 to offset costs: <https://www.alberta.ca/climate-carbon-pricing.aspx#p184s5>

⁴³ See Alberta's 'Water for Life' strategy here: <http://aep.alberta.ca/water/programs-and-services/water-for-life/default.aspx>

⁴⁴ See the City of Calgary's '30-in-30' water conservation plan here: <http://www.calgary.ca/UEP/Water/Pages/Water-conservation/Water-efficiency.aspx>

⁴⁵ For example, there is major tension over plans for the proposed Springbank dam from the Calgary River Communities Action Group: <http://globalnews.ca/news/3405851/contentious-springbank-dam-stirs-up-debate-at-calgary-flood-mitigation-meeting/> and Tsuut'ina First Nation: <http://globalnews.ca/news/3296272/tsuutina-first-nation-objects-to-springbank-dam-flood-mitigation-proposal/>

⁴⁶ For example, the provincial government has recently announced major funding for conservation in southern Alberta: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=46547A737BEBD-9C9D-5F9B-87CE12A068C3A81D>

⁴⁷ The provincial government announced new regulations, phasing out the use of OHVs on public lands: <http://globalnews.ca/news/3195077/alberta-to-expand-castle-area-parks-phase-out-off-highway-vehicles/> as well as a new requirement for helmets when riding on public lands: <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/helmet-law-for-off-highway-vehicles-takes-effect-monday>

⁴⁸ For example, see this article: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-quad-offroad-castle-mountain-1.3961416>

⁴⁹ See more information here: <http://www.calgary.ca/UEP/WRS/Pages/Waste-and-Recycling-Services.aspx>

⁵⁰ See more information here: <http://www.calgary.ca/UEP/WRS/Pages/Commercial-Services/ICI-Project.aspx>



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