



Draft Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) Land Use Plan Rocky View County Response Letter

Electoral Division: Division 2

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Date:	March 26, 2024		
Presenter:	Devin LaFleche, Senior Planner		
Department:	Planning		
Approved by:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive Director / Director	and/or	<input type="checkbox"/> Chief Administrative Officer

REPORT SUMMARY

As part of the Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) project, the Government of Alberta (the Province) is in the process of developing a SR1 Land Use Plan, which describes a variety of access scenarios, suitable land uses, and related policy direction.

On July 26, 2022, Council directed Administration to undertake a full internal review of the draft SR1 Land Use Plan, and to provide feedback directly to the Province. Council also directed Administration to invite feedback from local landowners, residents, and community groups, and then collate this feedback to provide an overall County and community position to the Province.

On February 12, 2024, the Province released the draft SR1 Land Use Plan (Attachment A), and the public was given until March 17, 2024, to provide their feedback through the Province’s online survey.

Following Council’s direction, Administration conducted an internal review of the draft SR1 Land Use Plan, and engaged local landowners, residents, and community groups to determine the County’s areas of concern with the draft SR1 Land Use Plan. Based on internal and external feedback, Administration has drafted the County’s Response Letter (Attachment B). The letter also includes an engagement summary report, as well as responses from the County-based Joint Land Use Advisory Committee members.

The County’s Response Letter identifies several areas of concern within and around the SR1 Lands. These concerns principally cover public access and operational items, including:

- Clearer policies to support the greatest amount of safe public access.
- Clarification on the connections into the SR1 lands.
- Details on the plans for the ‘South Lands’ and Kamp Kiwanis Lands.
- Explore seasonal grazing permits as the primary method for vegetation control.
- Include Rocky View County in the development of the SR1 Operations Plan.
- Include Rocky View County in the ongoing monitoring and adaptive management of SR1.

This report has been brought forward as information for Council, prior to submitting the County’s Response Letter to the Province by March 29, 2024.

ADMINISTRATION’S RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive the Draft Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) Land Use Plan Rocky View County Response Letter Report as information.

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BACKGROUND

SR1 Land Use Plan Project Overview

The Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) is a provincial flood mitigation project located within Rocky View County, approximately 15 kilometres west of Calgary, at the junction of Highway 22 and Springbank Road. The project lands cover an area of approximately 1,566 hectares (3,870 acres). SR1 is currently under construction, and the project's completion is scheduled for 2025.

During flood events, the SR1 diversion infrastructure will divert Elbow River floodwater flows through the diversion channel into the dry reservoir and the earthen dam structure will hold the water. The dry reservoir will only contain water during flood emergencies. After the floodwater flows decrease, a gated outlet will control the release of the floodwaters back to the Elbow River, connecting through an existing unnamed creek channel.

As part of the SR1 project, the Government of Alberta (the Province) is in the process of developing a SR1 Land Use Plan, which describes a variety of access scenarios, suitable land uses, and related policy direction. The land use plan will apply to the dry reservoir, diversion infrastructure, diversion channel and dam structure. The SR1 Land Use Plan is scheduled to be finalized in spring of 2024.

One of the conditions attached to the approval of the SR1 project was the requirement that when the project lands are not being used for flood mitigation or operational activities, First Nations will have priority access for the exercise of treaty rights and traditional uses. Public access and other uses, such as non-motorized recreational activities, will also be permitted.

Rocky View County's Participation

On July 26, 2022, Council directed Administration to participate in the SR1 Land Use Plan project in two distinct capacities:

1. As an invited member of the Joint Land Use Advisory Committee (Apr. 2022 - Jan. 2023).
2. As an independent reviewer of the draft SR1 Land Use Plan (Feb. 2024 - Mar. 2024).

In January 2023, the Joint Land Use Advisory Committee successfully submitted the Springbank Off-stream Reservoir: Land Use Plan Recommendations Report (Attachment C) to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas (EPA). The report highlights seventeen (17) recommendations centered around four (4) major themes:

- Water Management
- Ecological Values
- Vision for Recreation Management, Public Access and Human Connectivity
- Natural and Cultural History and Public Education

Administration fulfilled its responsibilities as a member of the Advisory Committee and awaited the release of the draft SR1 Land Use Plan, which was released by the Province on February 12, 2024. The public was given 30 days (March 17, 2024) to provide their feedback through the Province's online survey, and Rocky View County was given until March 29, 2024, to provide a Response Letter.

ANALYSIS

Following the direction from Council on July 26, 2022, Administration undertook a full internal review of the draft Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) Land Use Plan, and gathered feedback from local landowners, residents, and community groups. The internal review from Administration and the collated feedback from the community was used to create the Rocky View County Response Letter, which provides an overall County and community position to the Province.

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The areas of concern identified in the County's Response Letter are based around public access and operations within and around the SR1 Lands. Below is a high-level overview of each area of concern.

Public Access Concerns

1. The SR1 Land Use Plan needs clearer policies allowing for the greatest amount of safe public access, especially across the pathway on the dam structure (i.e. berm) during low-risk flood periods. Policy 3.2 needs to clarify public access to the dam structure pathways during the following closure scenarios in:
 - a. Policy 3.3.2 – Annual Flood Season (May 1 - July 31) when forecasts are low-risk (e.g. snowpack, upstream water levels, etc.).
 - b. Policy 3.3.4 – Reclamation Post Flood (minimum of two years post flood) when public access does not interfere with land reclamation.

89% of respondents agreed with this statement.

2. Although outside of SR1 Lands, the Province needs to provide more clarity on the road and pathway connections into SR1, specifically:
 - a. North connection into SR1 Lands, which ideally would be off Range Road 35.
 - b. Safe active transportation corridor from the southwest pathway connection across Highway 22 and connecting toward Bragg Creek.
 - c. Parking location and design details that provide community access without creating a major tourist destination.

92% of respondents agreed with this statement.

3. Although outside of SR1 Lands, clarification is needed from the Province on their plans for the 'South Lands' and 'Kamp Kiwanis Lands'. Rocky View County advocates for the Joint Land Use Advisory Committee's:
 - a. Recommendation #8 – to retain the "South Lands" as Public Crown Lands, which would provide the community with public access to the Elbow River.
 - b. Recommendation #10 – to retain the Kamp Kiwanis Lands as Crown lands due to their environmental value and exploring opportunities for regional active transportation networks, and public infrastructure such as parking lots, staging areas, camping, and other public access.

South Lands recommendation 95% and Kamp Kiwanis recommendation 88% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Operation Concerns

4. The SR1 Land Use Plan should explore seasonal grazing leases as the primary method for vegetation control for Policy 5.4.2, which currently prefers mowing and haying over livestock grazing for the management of vegetation.

88% of respondents agreed with this statement.

5. Rocky View County should be consulted in the development of the SR1 Operations Plan.

99% of respondents agreed with this statement.

6. Rocky View County should be included in the ongoing monitoring and adaptive management process for SR1. Furthermore, the County should have the ability to bring forward concerns arising from the County's Administration, residents, and landowners.

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97% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Additional Comments

Rocky View County's engagement survey also received 37 comments for the final survey question: "Do you have any concerns relating to the draft SR1 Land Use Plan that would not be included in the areas of concern listed above?". Of these comments, the most common areas of concerns not already listed in the survey were:

- a. Public safety with hunting permitted in SR1, especially with high-powered firearms permitted through treaty rights.
- b. The lack of policy support for horseback riding in the dry reservoir area.
- c. Environmental impacts resulting from public access and the SR1 operations.

Rocky View County has provided this feedback to the Province in the County's Response Letter to help inform their SR1 Land Use Plan, SR1 Operations Plan, as well as future plans for lands around the SR1 project.

COMMUNICATIONS / ENGAGEMENT

Rocky View County conducted a full internal review of the draft Springbank Off-stream Reservoir (SR1) Land Use Plan and identified several areas of concern. Administration then met with the County-based Joint Land Use Advisory Committee members, which consisted of local landowners, as well as representatives from the Springbank Community Association (SCA), Springbank Community Planning Association (SCPA), and Springbank Trails and Pathways Association (STAPA). At the meeting, Administration reviewed the draft SR1 Land Use Plan and discussed the County's areas of concern.

Based on these initial areas of concern, Administration launched an online survey to validate and seek additional feedback from the public. The County's online survey was open from March 1st to March 15th. Furthermore, to ensure the public was also completing the Province's online survey before the March 18th deadline, the County's survey also included a direct link to the Province's survey website.

In addition, Administration held two in-person coffee chats at the Springbank Park for All Seasons facility on March 7th and 8th. At these coffee chats, residents and interested parties were able to review physical copies of the draft SR1 Land Use Plan, and then using County provided tablets, they could provide their feedback through both the County's and Province's online surveys. The coffee chats had approximately 45 attendees.

A total of 75 survey responses were received through the County's online survey. Overall, there was strong support for the area of concern statements in the online survey with 99% to 88% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the area of concern statements. The survey results have been consolidated into an engagement summary report, which will be shared with the Province as an appendix to the Rocky View County Response Letter (Attachment B).

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

There are no financial implications.

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STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Key Performance Indicators		Strategic Alignment
Effective Service Delivery	SD3: Citizens are satisfied with Public Engagement opportunities and availability of information	SD3.2: Percent of citizens satisfied with the public engagement opportunities provided by the County
		Rocky View County is providing an additional opportunity for residents, landowners, and community groups to provide their feedback on the draft SR1 Land Use Plan as part of an overall County and community position to the Province.

ALTERNATE DIRECTION

No alternative options have been identified for Council’s consideration.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Draft SR1 Land Use Plan
- Attachment B: Rocky View County Response Letter
- Attachment C: SR1 Land Use Plan Recommendations Report

