



AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

TO: ALUS Partnership Advisory Committee
DATE: March 31, 2021 **DIVISION:** All
FILE: N/A
SUBJECT: Project Priorities Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides an overview of the Partnership Advisory Committee project priorities document.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

Administration recommends that the Project Priorities Review be accepted as presented in accordance with Option #1.

BACKGROUND:

Rocky View County's Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC) guides the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program in Rocky View County. The Alternative Land Use Services program provides support to farmers and ranchers to enhance and maintain ecosystems. Committee members provide advice and community input into the decision-making process.

The PAC is responsible for reviewing and deciding on potential agricultural producer/landowner projects, establish appropriate payment structures/amounts beneficial to participants, monitor demonstration parcels to ensure continued conformance with landowner agreements and to promote ALUS within the County.

DISCUSSION:

The project priorities document is the main document which guides the PAC and outlines the goals, project priorities, priority targets, project selection guidelines, initial project establishment, annual payment rates, payments schedule and project evaluation. The PAC is required to review this document annually to ensure that it is up to date and properly reflects the objectives of the PAC.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:

No budget implications.

Administration Resources

Delaney McNaughton, Agricultural and Environmental Services



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

OPTIONS:

Option #1 THAT the project priorities review be approved as presented.

Option #2 THAT alternative direction be provided.

Respectfully submitted,

Concurrence,

“Delaney McNaughton”

“Jeff Fleischer”

Agricultural Services Officer

Manager Agricultural and Environmental Services

Attachment ‘A’ – Project Priorities Document

Rocky View County

ALUS Partnership Advisory Committee



Project Priorities

The Rocky View County Agricultural Service Board (ASB) is acting as the Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC). All members of the ASB/PAC are encouraged to promote and participate in ALUS projects.

Goals

Rocky View County is a community where agriculture is valued and respected. The agriculture industry is flourishing through innovation and diversification and is promoted and recognized as vital to the County's social, economic and ecological integrity. The administration and delivery of the ALUS program encourages and supports agriculture into the future, promoting beneficial management practices that are environmentally sustainable. Rocky View County's agricultural community implements projects on working landscapes to create, restore and enhance natural areas such as wetlands, grasslands, riparian areas and treed areas; resulting in cleaner air and water, healthy soils, sustainable food production and habitat for: fish and wildlife, species at risk and native pollinator insects.

Rocky View County identified areas of focus for ALUS program

1. Reclaiming marginal cropland for buffering around streams; preserving prairie potholes or wetlands
2. Preserving and establishing trees in areas of low concentration
3. Reclaiming alkali or marginal soils to native stands
4. Increasing and promoting pollinator establishment

ALUS Applicants

1. Farmers or ranchers with a registered or legally defined farming operation are eligible recipients of ALUS annual payments.
2. Land zoned for agriculture production is eligible for ALUS projects.
3. Land renters with a registered or legally defined farming operation are eligible recipients of ALUS payments (a letter of authorization from the landowner is required) or the owner of rented farm land may qualify if they are receiving less rent due to the establishment of a project.
4. Rural non-farm landowners are ineligible for payments under ALUS.

To compare the Canadian Agricultural Partnership definition to be eligible for funding is: Active producer: An individual or a registered corporation responsible for the day-to-day management and work on the farm, including responsibility for input costs for agricultural crops or livestock producing at least \$10,000 worth of farm commodities annually, but does not include a landlord whose only interest in the crop or livestock is that of ownership of the land.

ALUS Priority Targets

ALUS priority targets include:

1. Improvements to environmentally-sensitive, marginal or inefficient farm land.
2. Enhancing natural features contained within the farmed portion of the land.
3. Complexes of wetlands, riparian zones and grassed uplands on and adjacent to selected parcels of farmland.
4. Working lands and adjacent areas with special biodiversity features or ecological assets/opportunities.

ALUS does not want to retire productive farm land but there are exceptions. Rental rates for productive farm land are generally higher than the ALUS annual payments and thus there is increased risk of reversal of ALUS projects when commodity prices are high. However, there are a couple of examples where productive land might be retired to conservation – i.e. on productive but environmentally sensitive lands such as a floodplain beside a water body or where the productive lands are inefficient to farm. Additionally this could include odd areas, narrow corridors along shelterbelts, corners of fields, or where farm equipment is too large to efficiently work the ground.

Project Selection Guidelines

Things to consider when approving a New Project proposal

1. Is the project on marginal or environmentally sensitive lands that are currently under agricultural production?
2. Does the project meet current local environmental priorities?
3. Does the project provide new or complement existing “ecosystem services”?
4. Does the project improve diversity?
5. Does the project complement existing programs ie: EFP, Canadian Agricultural Partnership?
6. Has the participant shown interest in contributing to project establishment?
7. Are there opportunities for delivery partnerships, cost savings, non-duplication etc..?
8. Will this project likely remain if annual payments cease to continue?
9. Can this project be used as a demonstration site?
10. Does the landowner plan to retain the property for at least 10 years?
11. Does the project link existing natural features?
12. Is the project on less than 20% of the farmed portion of the land?

ALUS projects for review by the PAC's should make note of the local environmental priorities identified by locally driven environmental report cards, studies or environmental assessments.

Initial Project Establishment

Funding amount allocated will be prorated based on other funding received for the project. The maximum amount an applicant can receive per voluntary project will be evaluated case by case.

Material costs for project establishment are eligible for funding. Additional expenses may be eligible for funding in wetland restoration projects due to expertise required to ensure success ie: consultation, planting, monitoring and reporting costs. In the event of poor initial vegetation establishment, reseeding will not be considered for funding.

Project Annual Payments (November or December)

PAC's should consider:

1. Land rental rate base
2. Cropland vs pasture vs marginal land – link to opportunity costs
3. Extent of continued agricultural use/benefits
4. Existing vs new services; recognition for existing services

ALUS Rocky View County Payment Schedule:

Should be reviewed regularly

	Maximum Amount	Quality Adjustment	Use Adjustment
High Value Acres	\$200/acre	Case by case	n/a
Cropland	\$50/acre	Case by case	If grazed or Hay / 50% approved practice
Pasture	\$30/acre	Case by case	If grazed or Hay / 50% approved practice
Existing Native Upland (sm)*	\$10/acre	n/a	If grazed or Hay / 50% approved practice
Existing Native Upland (med)*	\$5/acre	n/a	If grazed or Hay / 50% approved practice
Existing Native Upland (lg)*	\$2/acre	n/a	If grazed or Hay / 50% approved practice
Permanent Wetland (sm)*	\$5/acre	n/a	n/a
Permanent Wetland (lg)*	\$2/acre	n/a	n/a
Ephemeral Wetland*	\$5/acre	n/a	n/a
Restored/ Created Wetland	\$50/acre	n/a	n/a

** Rates subject to change at any time

High Value Acres

These are areas which are 3 acres in size or less that provide a large amount of ecological services and may require a larger amount of producer upkeep.

Cropland

Restoration, enhancement or creation of habitats in marginal areas of cropped land receive the cropland payment. ALUS is not meant to compete for good cropland areas; rather it focuses on

marginal and odd areas that will complement adjacent natural areas. Cropland rates will also be paid for pasture/hayland areas if the soils are good.

Pasture

These are areas that are marginally productive that are either pasture or hayland. Should the pasture be hayed or grazed later season (after Aug 1) or during dormant season (Oct 15- March 15), the payment will be reduced accordingly (typically by 50%) unless this is deemed necessary for maintenance. Restoration, enhancement or creation of habitats in these areas receive pasture payments.

Existing Native Uplands

These are areas that have often been left unused/untouched on a farm. These include areas surrounding a wetland or riparian area, bush, forested area, grasslands, etc. Small native patches are areas up to 10 acres in size. Medium native upland are areas between 10 and 25 acres. Large native upland are areas over 25 acres in size. New or Existing Shelterbelts will be considered at similar payment rates.

Permanent Wetlands

This includes any waterbody, focuses on sloughs (potholes) but also includes creeks. Different sizes of wetlands are generally more or less vulnerable to being drained so payments are greater for smaller (up to 2 acres) versus larger wetlands. A payment may be considered for shallow, temporary, ephemeral wetlands (potholes) in annual cropland if they are not ditched or drained, farming through is acceptable if feasible; payments will continue in dry years.

* These areas will only be consolidated if new creation, enhancement or restoration has taken place on the property.

Ephemeral Wetland

Terrain affected by the water table near, at or above the ground surface for a short period of days, but not long enough to promote the formation of water altered soils within 30 cm of the ground surface or a dominance of water tolerant vegetation (Alberta Wetland Classification System).

Restored Wetland

Since the 1800's Alberta has been subject to degradation and loss of wetlands due to agriculture, urban expansion, forestry, oil and gas exploration and mining. Restorative activities are those that result in the revival of a removed wetland or the improvement of a wetland which has previously had its overall wetland function degraded. A restored wetland must have at least an equivalent wetland value that was present previously in the areas of habitat value, hydrologic function, soil and vegetation health in the wetland area itself and the areas surrounding.

Created Wetland

A wetland or water holding reservoir which is constructed in a location that did not historically have a wetland.

Use Adjustment

In some cases the PAC might allow the farmer/rancher to use the ALUS project for part of their farm operation. For instance the farmer may want to let their cows pasture on the prairie project, or even

bale those acres for winter feed. To encourage management practices that ensure the project still offer's the ecosystem services, the PAC may agree to a partial payment to the farmer. An example of this might be allowing a farmer/rancher to hay the prairie acres only once in August so the prairie can provide nesting habitat for grassland birds.

By your own hand

This refers to projects that have been completed in the past by a farmer now applying to ALUS. In some communities the PAC has recognized existing projects if they were done *since 1990 by the farmer's own hand* AND *that acreage is matched by a new project*. ie: If the participant had 8 acres of hedgerow already on the farm and they put in a new project of 8 acres of new prairie, the participant could receive annual payments for 16 acres. *Another example in Western Canada includes existing wetlands and bush that have not been drained or cleared whereby we can enroll such existing habitats into ALUS assuming some improvements are made on the same parcel of land.*

Annual payment agreement terms

ALUS payment agreement terms are suggested to be anywhere from 3-10 years. Each project can be different or it can be standard for all projects. Consideration should be given to allowing term renewals.

Project Monitoring

All projects will be monitored on an annual basis and the farmer will be responsible for maintenance, 10% of past projects will be verified by a third party annually.