



Agriculture Water Management

Finding the Balance

Saskatchewan's Agricultural Water Stewardship Policy
Midwestern Legislative Conference | July 2025

Overview

● Introduction

● Drainage & Wetlands in Saskatchewan

● Developing the Ag Water Stewardship Policy

● Opportunities for Collaboration



- Brings together all government's core water management responsibilities
- Formed in 2012 to address water management responsibilities province-wide
- Agriculture Water Management is a core line of business

A combine harvester is shown in a field of tall, golden-brown crops. A person is walking through the field in the foreground. The background features a body of water and a clear sky. The entire image has a blue tint.

Water is an Economic Driver

Saskatchewan is home to more than 40% of Canada's farmland and 10% of Canada's wetlands

Drainage and Wetlands in Saskatchewan

The Prairie Pothole Region



The Prairie Pothole Region



Permanent Wetlands



Less Permanent Wetlands

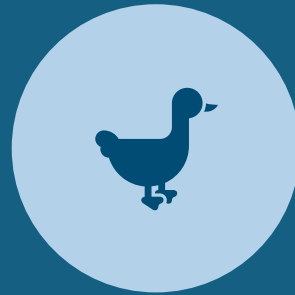
Wetlands are Important



Protect Water
Quality



Prevent Flooding
and Drought



Provide Habitat





Drainage is Important



Efficiency



Farm
Profitability



Resiliency



Economic
Growth

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A winding river flows through the center, surrounded by lush green wetlands and vegetation. To the left, there are large, flat agricultural fields, some of which appear to be recently harvested or plowed. In the background, rolling hills and more fields are visible under a clear sky. The overall scene depicts a healthy, integrated agricultural and natural environment.

Drainage AND Wetlands

Co-Exist in healthy agricultural landscapes.

Responsible Drainage



Planned &
coordinated
with
neighbours



Technically
sound design



Flow & erosion
controls



Nutrient
management



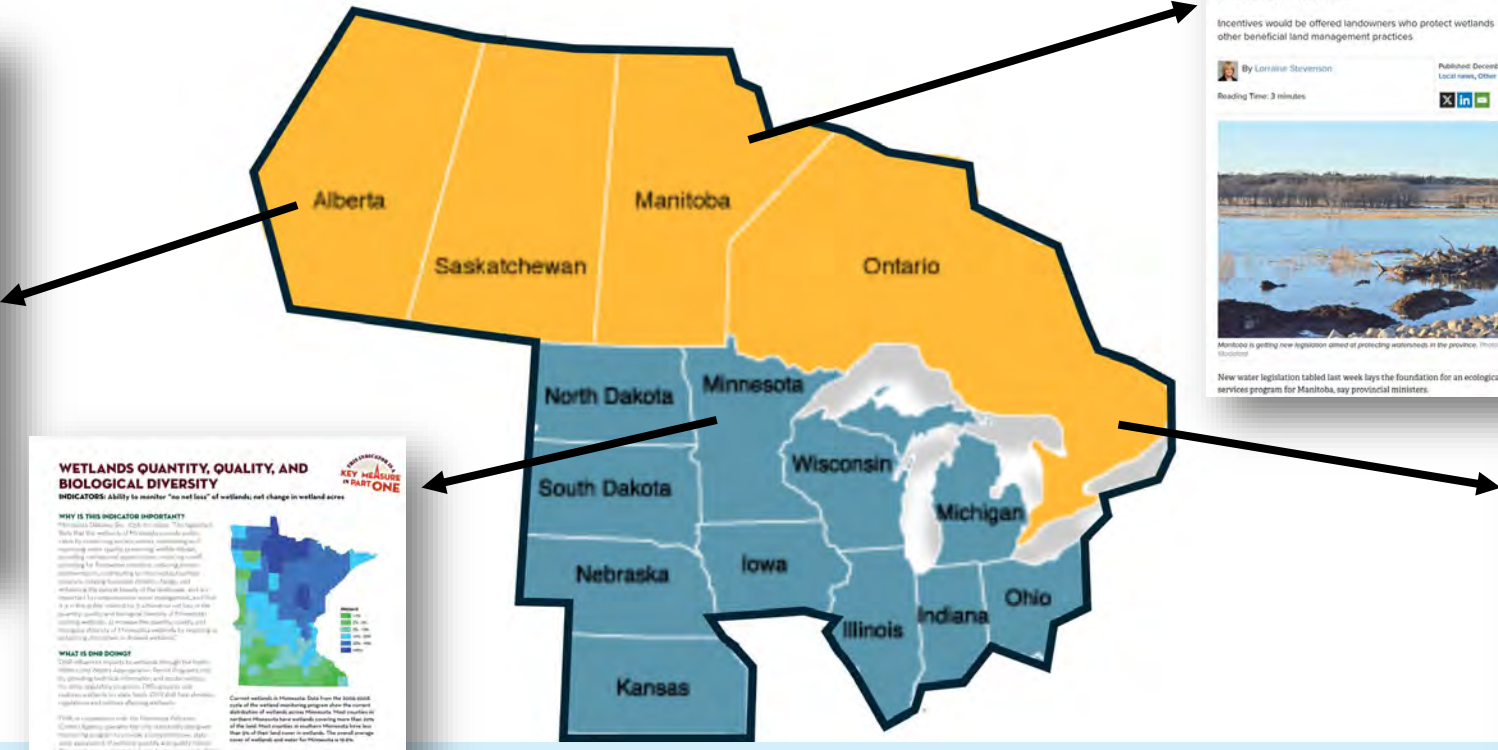
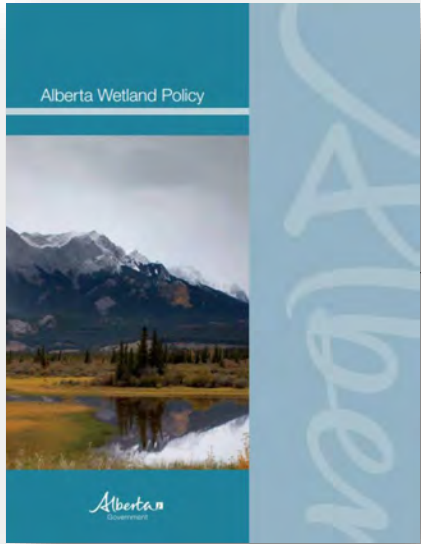
Healthy
wetlands



WSA Drainage
Approval



Standard Approach: No Net Loss Policy



Province tables Sustainable Watersheds Act

Incentives would be offered landowners who protect wetlands and adopt other beneficial land management practices.

By Loraine Stevenson | Published: December 7, 2017 | Local news, Other

Reading Time: 3 minutes

Manitoba is getting new legislation aimed at protecting watersheds in the province. Photo: iStock/Boomer

New water legislation tabled last week lays the foundation for an ecological goods and services program for Manitoba, say provincial ministers.

WETLANDS QUANTITY, QUALITY, AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY INDICATORS: Ability to monitor "no net loss" of wetlands, not change in wetland acres

INTRODUCTION: KEY MESSAGE IN PART ONE

WHY IS THIS INDICATOR IMPORTANT?

Minnesota's Wetlands Act (2017) is a landmark piece of legislation that recognizes the value of wetlands and the need to protect them. The act requires the state to monitor the quantity, quality, and biological diversity of wetlands to ensure that any loss is offset by the creation of new wetlands of equivalent or greater value.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is leading the effort to implement the act. This includes developing a wetlands monitoring strategy, creating a wetlands inventory, and establishing a wetlands offset program.

TARGET: Continue to monitor trends in wetland gains and losses to assess progress toward meeting Minnesota's no net loss goal.

LEARN MORE ABOUT:

Minnesota wetlands at www.dnr.state.mn.us/wetlands/
Wetland monitoring strategy www.dnr.state.mn.us/wetlands/strategy.html



Saskatchewan's Approach: Agriculture Water Stewardship Policy

- Made-in-Saskatchewan approach to wetland retention launched in Jan 2025
- Allows existing and incremental drainage
- Requires drainers to retain some wetlands as condition of approval



Contrasting a No Net Loss and Stewardship Approach

Criteria	Not Net Loss	Stewardship Approach
Landscape Outcome	Only addresses new development	Addresses all drainage

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Recognizing Good Stewardship	Does not reward landowners who have retained wetlands	Rewards landowners with wetlands



86%

of Saskatchewan's 4.6M acres
of wetlands are undrained

Why a Stewardship Policy?



Prevent flooding,
manage water quality,
protect habitat



Protect against Federal
Backstop Legislation



Gap identified by
Provincial Auditor



Stakeholder Pressure


New Canada Water Agency to tackle water pollution and protect natural resources

By [Miranda Leybourne](#)

Published: October 16, 2024
[News](#)

WATCH | Advocates call on Sask. government to create wetland policy:



 The Narwhal

Saskatchewan's farmland is caught between profit and habitat

As investors move in, big money is forcing Saskatchewan farmers to clear grasslands and fill in wetlands in order to keep up.

Jul 20, 2022



 Regina Leader Post

U of R study says south Sask. water toxicity rising due to algae, global warming, farm run-off

An 11-year study from the University of Regina says toxicity levels are rising in south Saskatchewan lakes.

Jun 23, 2020



 Country 600 CJWW

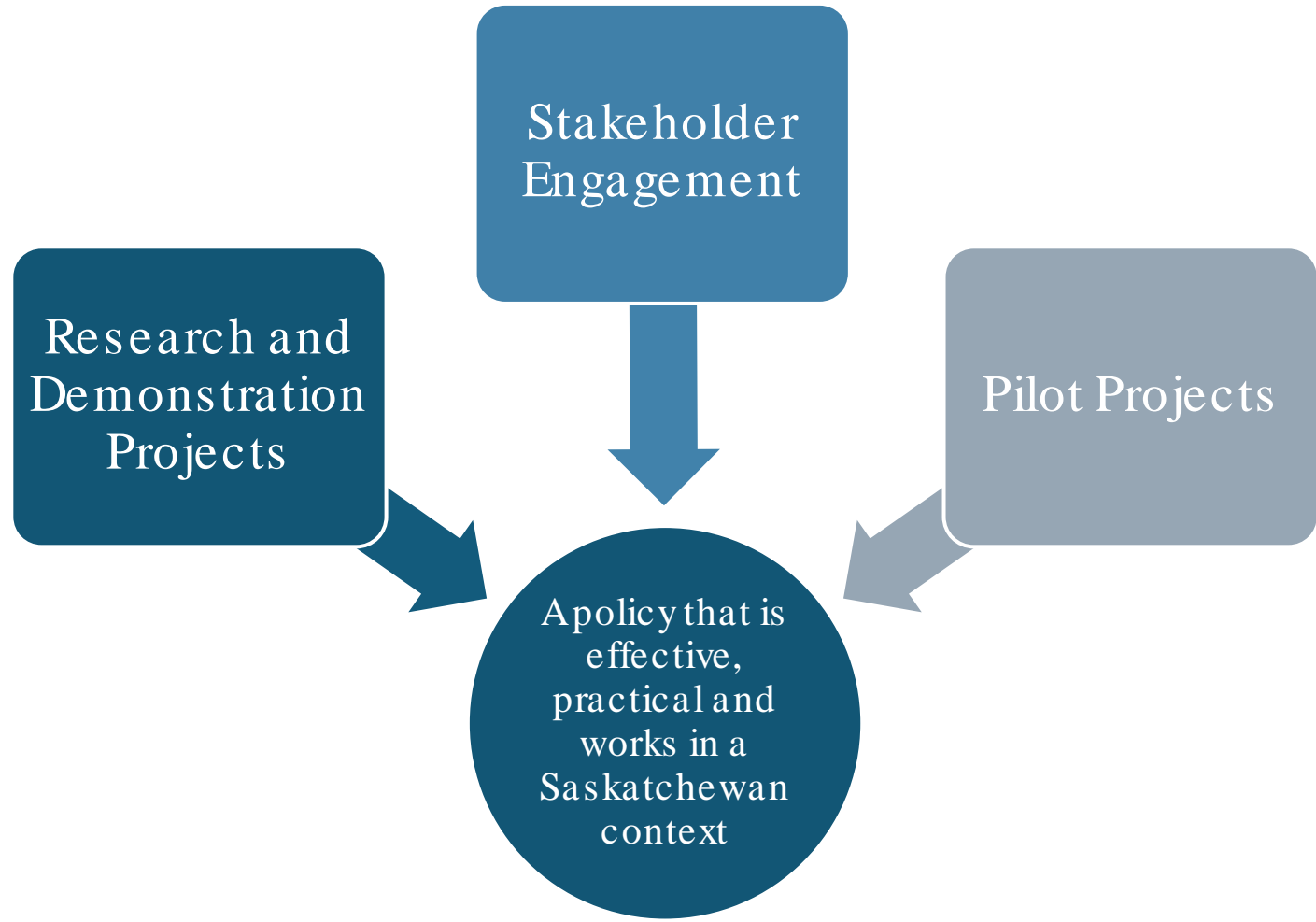
Researcher warns quality of the province's waterbodies will be hindered if we continue to drain wetlands for agricultural purposes

New research out of the University of Saskatchewan suggests wetland drainage is detrimental to the health of Saskatchewan's plants, animals and ecosystems.

1 month ago



Policy Development



Policy Development

Step 1: Research and Demonstration Projects



Saskatchewan
Soil Conservation
Association



College of Agriculture
and Bioresources



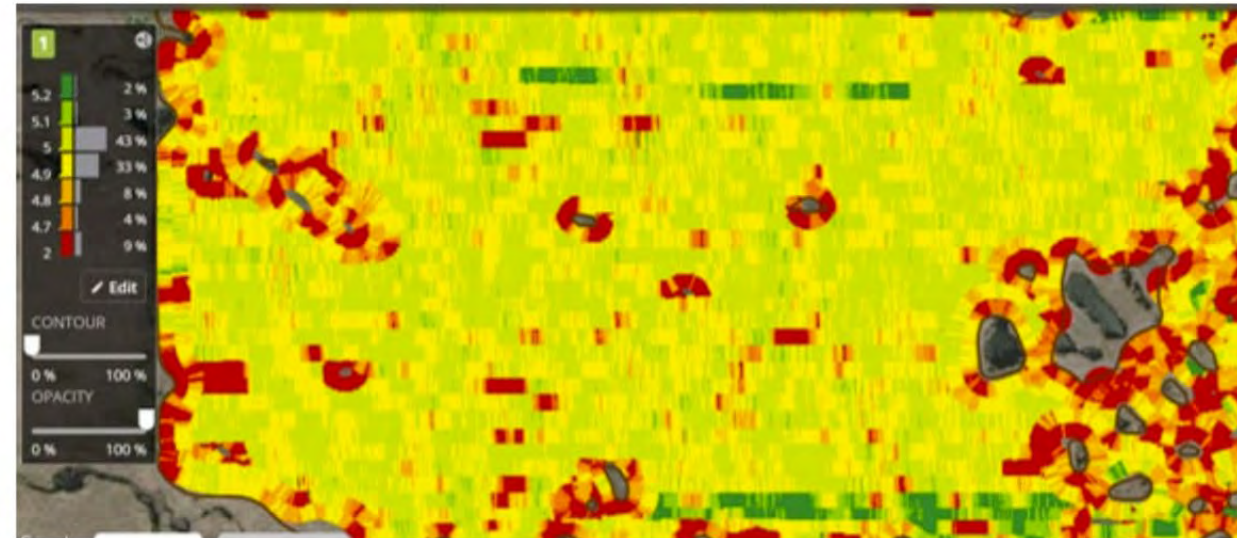
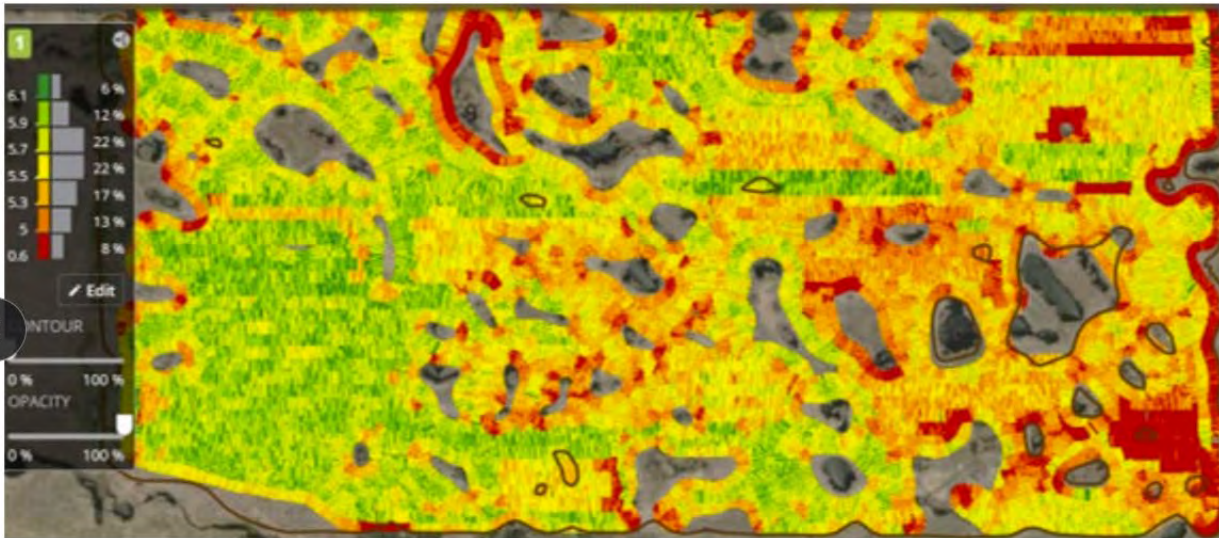
Invested more than
\$1M in research
projects with private,
public and non-profit
partners



Research: Economics of Drainage

2019 - Before Drainage

2023 - After Drainage

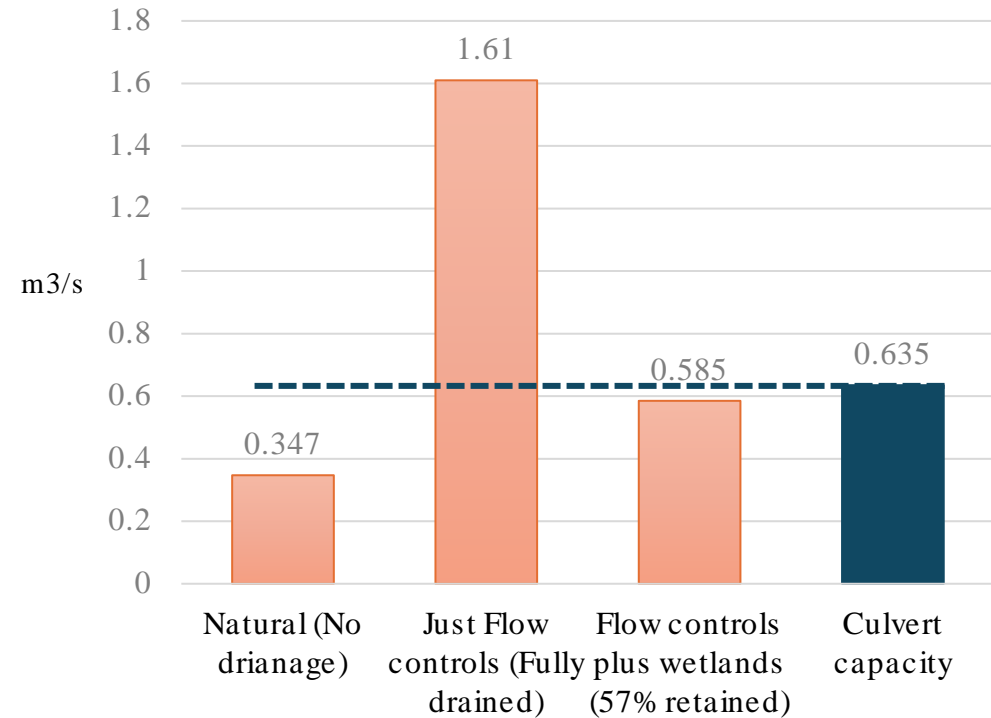


Found drainage increased efficiency
from 40 to 44 acres seeded per hour

Research: Drainage Best Management Practices



Found adoption of BMPs protected road infrastructure



The Trade Offs



Agricultural
Economy



Agricultural
Stewardship



Saskatchewan
Communities



Water Quantity



Water Quality



Biodiversity
and Habitat

Policy Development

Step 2: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder Engagement

- Engaged with 80 organizations and Indigenous communities over 2 years
- Four in-person plenary sessions with all stakeholders & many one-on-one meetings
- Developed guiding principles, then outcomes, then policy



Engagement led to
practical
approaches that
brought flexibility
into the policy.



Policy Development

Step 3: Pilot Projects

Worked with
landowners to
test the policy on
real projects

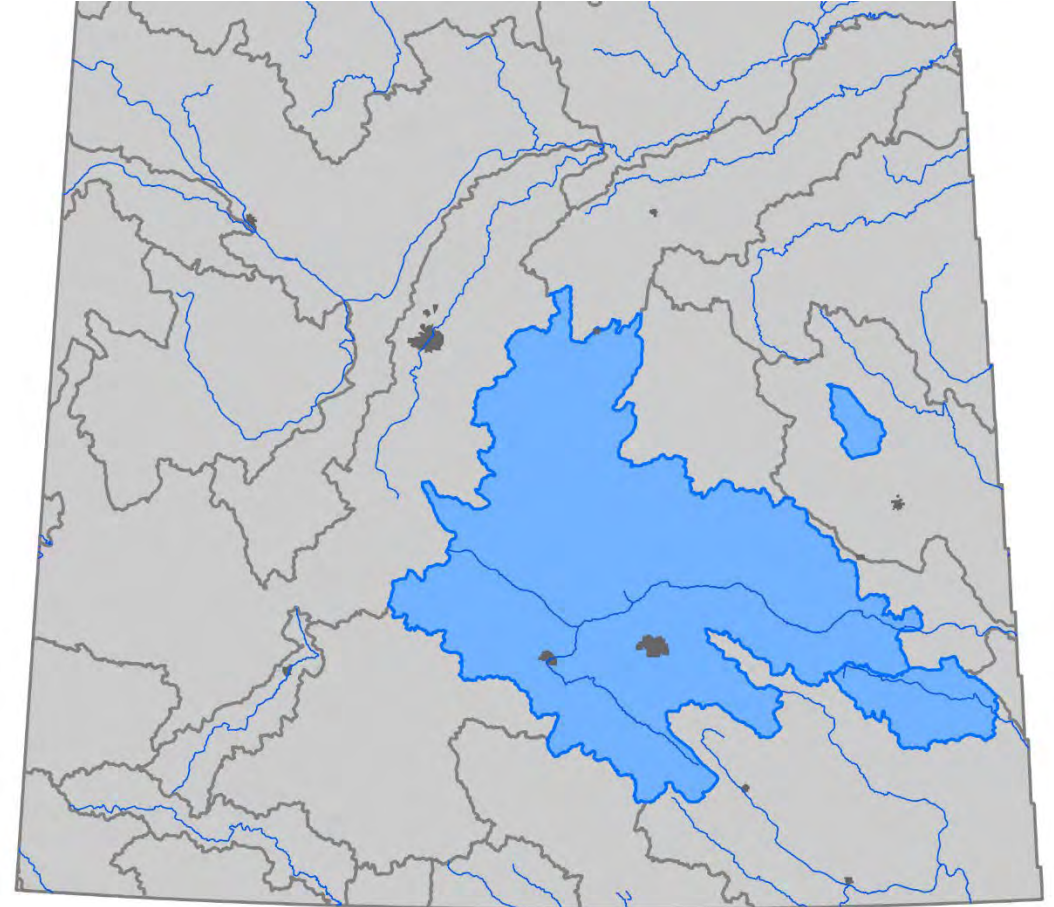


Wetland Retention Goal

Baseline retention goal (40%) for most watersheds.

Higher retention goal (60%) for important water sources:

- Good Spirit Lake (Assiniboine)
- Last Mountain Lake, Buffalo Pound Lake, Calling Lakes, Crooked Lake, Round Lake (Qu'Appelle)
- Moosomin Lake (Souris)





What is the impact?



Still room for
incremental new
drainage in all areas of
the province



Landowners will retain
~11% wetland acres



Policy will provide
protection and security
for landowners



Wetlands will continue
to be an important part
of our landscape

Opportunities for Collaboration



Ongoing Research & Monitoring

- \$1M research commitment over next three years
- Partner with industry, landowners, government and researchers
- Monitor policy effectiveness with ten indicators – public reporting



Opportunities for Collaboration

- Sharing research and information
- Exploring approaches to wetland conservation beyond no net loss
- Sharing success stories of agricultural industry stewardship
- Changing the narrative





 Water Security
Agency 

Thank You

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Water Security Agency

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