



Innovative Conservation Approaches Policy

PREPARED BY:	Community Sustainability	COUNCIL APPROVAL DATE:	JUN 10, 2025
EFFECTIVE DATE:	JUN 10, 2025		
REFERENCES:	Nature Policy Framework Environmental Conservation Master Plan Alberta Wetland Policy Alberta Land Stewardship Act – Sections 47-50 MGA – Sec 661	PREVIOUS REVISION DATE:	NEW
FUNCTION:	Planning and Development	LS REVIEW DATE:	April 16, 2025

PURPOSE

The County is committed to protecting important natural systems and features that provide water, food, habitat, and other important functions, and also to managing growth strategically to respond to local conditions and balance priorities for long-term sustainability.

The purpose of this policy is to enable and articulate voluntary, innovative options for Nature Positive development which the County has deemed to be acceptable mechanisms for securing approval for subdivision or development proposals that might otherwise be deemed unacceptable by the County.

POLICY STATEMENT

The County will provide opportunities for project proponents to secure, on a case-by-case basis, approvals within the subdivision, planning, development, and permitting process, in exchange for changes in the proposal that contribute to maintenance of the community's Natural Features, Functions, and associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms as defined in the Nature Policy Framework apply in this policy:

1. Beneficial Ecosystem Services
2. Conservation Design
3. Conservation Easement
4. Conservation Offset
5. Conservation Reserve
6. Environmentally Significant Area
7. Innovative Conservation Approach
8. Local Conservation Fund

9. Mitigation Hierarchy
10. Natural Feature
11. Natural Functions
12. Nature-Positive
13. Protected Natural Area
14. Transfer of Development Credits
15. Wetland

SCOPE

This policy applies to all planning, development, subdivision, and capital projects carried out on private or County-managed lands.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Director of Agriculture and Environment Services is responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of this policy. Responsibility of departments include:

1. The Director of Planning and Development is responsible for ensuring implementation throughout the planning and development process.
2. The Director of Growth and Strategy is responsible for ensuring implementation through acquisition of County lands.
3. The Director of Engineering Services is responsible for ensuring implementation during capital projects.

STANDARDS

Proposals

1. The proponent of a development or activity subject to approval by the Subdivision or Development Authority, may propose an Innovative Conservation Approach.
2. The proponent must demonstrate how the proposed Innovative Conservation Approach maintains Nature-positive design.
3. The proponent must provide the Innovative Conservation Approach proposal in a form which allows for the County to effectively assess the proposed enhancement to the area's Natural Features, their Functions, and Associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services.
4. A proposed Innovative Conservation Approach shall not contravene nor conflict with any federal or provincial statute.

Decisions

5. The Subdivision or Development Authority shall decide on the acceptability of an Innovative Conservation Approach proposal. The proposal of an Innovative Conservation Approach does not provide a guarantee of approval.
6. Innovative Conservation Approach proposals used to garner planning, subdivision, or development approvals shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
 - a. If a proposed Innovative Conservation Approach is not deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, the original decision will apply.
7. If a proponent chooses not to use an Innovative Conservation Approach, the original bylaw, plan, policy, and/or decision will apply.

8. Proposals for an Innovative Conservation Approach may include activities beyond the site of the proposed plan or activity, but preference will be given to proposals where the advantage accrues primarily to the site of the proposed plan or activity.

Proponent Opportunities

9. Elements of the planning, subdivision, and/or development process which proponents may include in an Innovative Conservation Approach include but are not limited to, proposals for variations in:
 - a. Required density;
 - b. Development types;
 - c. Districting;
 - d. Avoidance of Natural Features;
 - e. Size of Natural Buffers;
 - f. Approval process (refined/shortened); and/or
 - g. Reserve dedication requirements.

Nature Conservation Opportunities

10. Conservation Tools which may be deemed appropriate for use in an Innovative Conservation Approach by the Subdivision or Development Authorities include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Conservation Easements, as outlined in the Protected Natural Areas Policy;
 - b. Conservation Reserves, as outlined in the Protected Natural Areas Policy;
 - c. High-ratio Wetland Replacement, as per Schedule 1;
 - d. Payment to a Local Conservation Fund, as per Schedule 2;
 - e. Conservation Design, as per Schedule 3;
 - f. Transfer of Development Credits Programs, as per Schedule 4; and/or
 - g. Conservation Offsets, as per Schedule 5.
 - h. Transfer of Lands, as per Schedule 6.

ATTACHMENTS

Schedule 1: High-ratio Wetland Replacement

Schedule 2: Payment to the Local Conservation Fund

Schedule 3: Conservation Design

Schedule 4: Transfer of Development Credits Programs

Schedule 5: Conservation Offsets

Schedule 6: Conservation Land Transfer

Schedule 1: High-ratio Wetland Replacement

A High-ratio Wetland Replacement means the creation or restoration of Wetland hectares at a ratio to the hectares disturbed and/or removed that is above and beyond the regulatory requirement or accepted best practice, or a replacement or increase in Wetland Function that is above and beyond the regulatory requirements or accepted best practices.

General Standards

1. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for the provision of a permittee-responsible High-ratio Wetland Replacement.
2. To be deemed acceptable, such a High-ratio Wetland Replacement shall:
 - a. Provide either:
 - i. An increase of Wetland hectares at a ratio greater than that contemplated by the Wetland Replacement Matrix in Alberta's Wetland Policy; or
 - ii. A demonstrable high-ratio net increase in the on-site Wetland Function such as stormwater retention, provision of habitat, groundwater recharge, filtration of pollution, and/or soil wetness.
 - b. Constitute Restorative Replacement as defined by the Alberta Wetland Policy or Wetland securement for the purposes of long term conservation;
 - c. Be a permittee-responsible Wetland replacement, meaning the proponent will be responsible for guaranteeing the wetland replacement occurs; and
 - d. Be assessed and approved by an Authenticating Wetland Professional.

Schedule 2: Payment to the Local Conservation Fund

A Payment to the Local Conservation Fund means a cash payment to the County's Local Conservation Fund.

General Standards

1. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for the provision of a payment to the Local Conservation Fund.
2. To be deemed acceptable, such a payment to the Local Conservation Fund shall represent a financial value equal to or greater than the financial value of the natural features being degraded or lost and shall be calculated using a methodology acceptable to the Subdivision or Development Authority.

PROPOSED

Schedule 3: Conservation Design

Conservation Design in this policy means the arrangement of a planning area that clusters the built elements in one part of the planning area so as to conserve the Natural Features and their associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services in another part of the planning area through a perpetual conservation device.

General Standards

1. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for a Conservation Design approach.
2. An acceptable Conservation Design proposal under this policy must:
 - a. Enable conservation, protection, restoration, and/or enhancement on at least 50% of the developable land in the proposed development area;
 - b. Ensure at least 50% of the conserved area is identified as an Environmentally Significant Area; and
 - c. Protect the conserved area in perpetuity through a Protected Natural Area mechanism acceptable to the Subdivision or Development Authority.
3. Such a Conservation Design proposal may apply to a parcel, Area Structure Plan, Area Redevelopment Plan, Conceptual Scheme, proposed subdivision, or Master Site Development Plan.

Schedule 4: Transfer of Development Credits Programs

A Transfer of Development Credits (TDC) Program means a Transfer of Development Credit Scheme as defined in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, Sec 48-50. A Transfer of Development Credits Program allows for a municipality to reconcile its development and conservation goals by designating TDC Development Areas which can acquire bonus development through the purchase of credits from TDC Conservation Areas where natural features are perpetually conserved.

General Standards

1. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for participation in a Transfer of Development Credits program.
 - a. Participation in a Transfer of Development Credits Program may involve creation of a new program or partaking in an existing program.
2. The County may, at its discretion, establish a Transfer of Development Credits Program for an area of the County that has both development demand and Environmentally Significant Areas.
3. A Transfer of Development Credits Program must provide a benefit to the county's Natural Features that is commensurate with the impact of the development being approved.
2. Participation in a Transfer of Development Credits Program shall be voluntary for any landowner within the program area.

Schedule 5: Conservation Offsets

A Conservation Offset means an effort to counterbalance the effect of an activity as defined under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act Sec 47(2) as amended.

Conservation Offsets allow for a municipality to approve proposed developments and activities that will demonstrably degrade or impair the community's Natural Features, Functions, and associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services by ensuring a commensurate or greater contribution to the protection, conservation, restoration, or enhancement of the community's Natural Features, Functions, and associated Beneficial Ecosystem Services is provided for elsewhere in the municipality.

General Standards

1. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for a Conservation Offset initiative which supports the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the County's natural features, functions, and associated beneficial services.

Conservation Offset Requirements

2. An acceptable Conservation Offset under this policy shall:
 - a. Provide at least a 2:1 ratio of improvement over the pre-development scenario;
3. Prioritize 'avoid' in the Mitigation Hierarchy over 'minimize' or 'replace';
 - b. Occur within the boundaries of the County.
3. A proposed Conservation Offset or Conservation Offset program shall address the following to the satisfaction of the County:
 - c. Equivalency;
 - d. Additionality;
 - e. Timing and duration;
 - f. Uncertainty and risk management; and
 - g. Oversight.

Schedule 6: Conservation Land Transfer

A Conservation Land Transfer means the provision to the County of a parcel of land that contains valued Natural Features, or supports their Functions, with the intent that the parcel will be maintained in its natural state in perpetuity.

General Standards

4. Where a development or activity proposal would otherwise not be deemed acceptable by the Subdivision or Development Authority, they may at their discretion provide that approval in exchange for the Conservation Land Transfer.
1. To be deemed acceptable, lands proposed for transfer must:
 - a. Hold environmental significance such as being within an Environmentally Significant Area, being within an important wildlife corridor, containing High-value Natural Assets, or as deemed by a Biophysical Assessment; and
 - b. Protect the conserved area in perpetuity through a Protected Natural Area mechanism acceptable to the Subdivision or Development Authority.
2. A transfer of land required to satisfy a subdivision or development application, or as part of an Innovative Conservation Approach is not eligible for additional compensation or charitable tax receipt.