

April 2023

To: The Honourable Danielle Smith, Premier of the Province of Alberta  
(premier@gov.ab.ca)  
Rachael Notley, Leader of the NDP Opposition of Alberta  
(edmonton.strathcona@assembly.ab.ca)  
Hon. Sonya Savage, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas  
(calgary.northwest@assembly.ab.ca)  
Marlin Schmidt, NDP Environment Critic  
(edmonton.goldbar@assembly.ab.ca)

From: Southern Alberta Group for the Environment

Re: Open Letter on Environmental Policy in Alberta

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The Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE) has been a leading voice for a healthy and environmentally sustainable community and has offered science-based outreach to inform public knowledge on environmental issues for 40 years. We have participated in public stakeholder processes including the South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan, South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and municipal planning. We advocate for policies that promote the long-term health of our waters, lands, air and biodiversity.

The future of Albertans will be based on a healthy and resilient environment: Water flowing in our rivers must meet instream flows and water quality levels necessary for long-term health of aquatic ecosystems and humans dependent upon them; biodiversity must be preserved to maintain the complex, interdependent ecosystem of which humans are a part; soil must be conserved to sustain food production for animals and humans; and polluting emissions to the atmosphere must be minimized, including greenhouse gases that contribute to the destabilization of climate. It is important to emphasize that these aren't simply aspirations or luxuries of an affluent society – they are fundamental to the sustainability of human civilization. As such, to relegate a healthy environment as a 'special interest' is to foreclose on our collective future.

The following issues represent important policy directions that reflect environmental priorities in Alberta and can be implemented in the immediate future:

1. Expand protection of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area as approved in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan.
2. Reject new, and phase out existing, coal extraction projects (both thermal and metallurgical). Design legislation to protect the headwaters on the Eastern Slopes from industrial development so as to preserve the quality and quantity of water, and to reduce GHG emissions from the export and burning of fossil fuels.

3. Expand efforts in regional and subregional land-use planning in the province to reduce environmental impacts, conserve native grasslands and wetlands and increase protection of biodiversity. Recognize limits to human use and implement measures to ensure those limits are not exceeded.
4. Alberta is the largest contributor to Canada's total NOx emissions, mainly generated by industrial processes, conventional gas and oil production, and transportation. Assessments for air quality indicate that most air zones in Alberta are in the 'orange' management level for both hourly and annual nitrogen dioxide according to the Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards. Policy is needed to increase air quality monitoring throughout the province and implement measures to meet CAAQ standards.
5. Require fulsome environmental impact assessment and public interest determination of proposed major expansion of irrigation agriculture in the South Saskatchewan River Basin, including comprehensive modelling of surface and groundwater availability under climate change scenarios and assessing cumulative effects on instream flows, native grasslands, species-at-risk, soil quality, greenhouse gas emissions, current and future water allocations, and apportionment obligations of interprovincial and international agreements. We do not want to experience the economic and social disruption caused by long-term drought and over-allocation of rivers in the American southwest.
6. Re-integrate the Fish and Wildlife branch for cohesive research and decision-making in the public interest (which is the health of the natural environment).

These represent an important, though not exhaustive, list of policies that would embody an actionable response to existential environmental challenges in Alberta. Simply, we must do better to protect our air and water resources and restore the land. SAGE will continue to offer its expertise and support to decision-making processes in the province.

Sincerely,



Braum Barber, Chair

cc: All Candidates in upcoming provincial election  
Media