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November 19, 2008

Alberta government ensures future of water quality, quantity

Water for Life strategy renewed to reflect changes in province

Edmonton... The Alberta government has renewed its *Water for Life* strategy to ensure the water quality and quantity needed to support population and economic growth in the province.

“Continuing to support *Water for Life* is critical to making the right choices for Alberta’s water resources,” said Rob Renner, Minister of Environment. “There’s a new reality in Alberta and this renewed strategy reflects it.”

The renewed strategy accelerates action to safeguard Alberta’s water sources, ensuring integration of watershed planning with regional planning under the proposed Land-use Framework, and sets clear direction and action for improved watershed management in Alberta. It outlines the need to take action on a number of fronts, including:

- regional drinking water and wastewater solutions;
- aquatic ecosystem health;
- viable governance system that supports sustainable management of surface and groundwater; and
- water monitoring, evaluation and public reporting.

The Alberta government asked the Alberta Water Council, appointed in 2004 to provide independent oversight and advice on *Water for Life* implementation, provide government with renewal recommendations, which they submitted in January 2008. Those recommendations were accepted by government and guided the renewal process.

“By renewing *Water for Life*, we are making a good plan even better,” said Renner. “*Water for Life* is among the most comprehensive water management plans in North America, and we plan to keep it that way.”

Implementation of Alberta’s original *Water for Life* strategy, released in November 2003, has involved the efforts of many partners from a number of sectors including non-government organizations, industry, provincial and other governments. To successfully move the renewed strategy forward, a detailed action plan will be released in 2009.

For more information about the renewed strategy, visit www.waterforlife.alberta.ca.

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Attachments

Backgrounders: *Water for Life* achievements and *Water for Life* renewal highlights

Media inquiries may be directed to:

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To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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Looking back - Water for Life 2003-2008 achievements

After five years of implementation, there is much to celebrate. A number of key achievements are outlined below. Please visit the *Water for Life* website (www.waterforlife.alberta.ca) for further information on each of the goals and key directions.

Safe, secure drinking water

- Key action: Complete an assessment of all drinking water facilities in Alberta.
 - A comprehensive review of Alberta's [water treatment facilities](#) (2004) identified infrastructure funding priorities to ensure the health and safety of drinking water.
- Key action: Establish a public awareness and education program to ensure Albertans have easy access to water resource information and services.
 - [Drinking water information](#) is now online.
- Key action: Establish an independent, on-going review process, on a five-year cycle, for Alberta's drinking water program.
 - An independent [technical review of the province's drinking water program](#) is done every five years.
- Key action: Establish emergency protocols, including support staff and laboratory capacity, to protect Albertans from contaminants in drinking water.
 - [Emergency response protocols](#) reduce the risk from incidents that can arise from unforeseen circumstances, like equipment failure or extreme weather events.
- Key action: Provide Albertans with access to online reporting of all drinking water facility test sample results.
 - [Drinking water facility test sample results](#) are now available online (2007).

Reliable, quality water supplies

- Key action: Establish water conservation objectives for the South Saskatchewan River Basin.
 - Government approved the [South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan](#) (2007).
- Key action: Monitor, evaluate and report on the water allocation transfer system.
 - Alberta Environment enhanced its internal Environmental Management System to include water transfer records, to facilitate a water transfer system in the South Saskatchewan River Basin.
- Key action: Evaluate, as part of the watershed planning process, water management infrastructure needs.
 - Government assessed current infrastructure needs to ensure water management structures are maintained properly.
 - Government completed a [2005 inventory](#) and [2008 assessment](#) of potential water storage sites that will inform future basin planning.

Healthy, aquatic ecosystems

- Key action: Complete an initial assessment of the status of aquatic ecosystem, including lakes, wetlands, streams and rivers. Complete an assessment of Alberta's surface water quality.
 - In a status assessment of Alberta's aquatic ecosystems, these two actions were combined.
 - The [Scope of Work for the Initial Assessment of Aquatic Ecosystem Health in Alberta](#) and [Information synthesis and initial assessment of the status and health of aquatic ecosystems in Alberta: surface water quality, sediment quality and non-fish biota Report](#) helped lay the foundation for healthy aquatic ecosystem work.
 - The [Aquatic Ecosystems - Review of Issues and Monitoring Techniques](#) helped define healthy aquatic

ecosystems.

Research and knowledge

- Key action: Establish a public awareness and education program.
 - The Water Education Framework was established in 2006 and initiated water awareness campaigns.
- Key action: Develop a provincial water research plan.
 - The Alberta Science Research Authority released its report on [priority areas for water research needs](#) (2006).
- Key action: Establish a provincial, multi-disciplinary water research centre.
 - Alberta Ingenuity's [Alberta Water Research Institute](#) (2007) coordinates world class and leading-edge research to support *Water for Life*.
- Key action: Establish a provincial water information centre.
 - The Alberta [water information centre](#) consolidates and delivers specific water information to users.
- Key action: Update water quality programs to support watershed protection and planning.
 - All water quality data is now available through the [Water Database System](#) (2006).

Partnerships

- Key action: Establish a provincial water advisory council.
 - The [Alberta Water Council](#) (2004) monitors and stewards implementation of *Water for Life* and champions achievement of the strategy's three goals.
- Key action: Complete a partnership framework, outlining the roles, responsibilities and relationships between government and its partners.
 - A [partnership framework](#) (2005) outlines roles and responsibilities to help implement *Water for Life* goals.
- Key action: Establish watershed planning and advisory councils.
 - [Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils](#) (WPACs) assess their watershed's state and develop a plan to address issues. Nine watersheds have organizations formally recognized as WPACs.
- Key action: Support watershed stewardship groups to improve the condition of local watersheds.
 - Government supports watershed stewardship groups through the [Alberta Stewardship Network](#) stewardship grant program.

Conservation

- Key action: Establish a public awareness and education program on water conservation in Alberta.
- To improve Albertans' knowledge of water conservation, several education projects have been undertaken including online [conservation information](#) (2005).
- Key action: Prepare water conservation and productivity plans for all water using sectors.
- The Alberta Water Council released [Water Conservation, Efficiency and Productivity: Principles, Definitions, Performance Measures and Environmental Indicators Report](#) (2007).
- Two reports on water use in the oil and gas sector were released, providing [policy](#) and [guidelines](#) (2007) for oilfield injection.
- Key action: Establish a system to monitor and report actual water use by all sectors on an on-going basis.
 - Government established a voluntary [water use reporting system](#) (2006) for licence holders to submit water use data.

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Backgrounder

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Looking forward - highlights of the renewed Water for Life strategy

Safe, secure drinking water actions

- Review and improve the management of small drinking water systems that are currently unregulated;
- Develop innovative approaches to build and assure long-term operational capacity in smaller Alberta communities;
- Design and implement regional drinking water and waste water solutions; and
- Continue to work cooperatively with First Nations, Métis communities and federal government to ensure safe drinking water in Aboriginal communities in Alberta.

Reliable, quality water supplies actions

- Develop and implement an enhanced surface water rights transfer system that supports sustainable economic development; and
- Develop and implement a viable governance system that supports sustainable management of water.

Healthy, aquatic ecosystems actions

- Develop a provincial action plan to improve the health of significantly impacted aquatic ecosystems;
- Set water conservation objectives on all major basins; and
- Finalize and implement a new wetland policy for Alberta.

Research and knowledge actions

- Enhance the provincial water monitoring and evaluation program including information on wetlands, groundwater, aquatic health, water quality, drinking water and water supply; and
- Enhance the Alberta water information centre to provide a web-based public information centre to report on the status of Alberta's water resources.

Partnerships actions

- Continue to resource and support *Water for Life* partnerships; and
- Continue to develop and improve watershed management knowledge, tools and programs.

Conservation actions

- Complete an evaluation and make recommendations on the merit of economic instruments to meet water conservation and productivity objectives; and
- Encourage all sectors to develop and implement sector plans for water conservation, efficiency and productivity.

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